



**Adoption Tees Valley**  
**Bi-Annual report 1.4.24 2024- 30.9.24**



## **1. Introduction**

This report will provide performance information on adoption activity for the period of 1.4.24 -30.9.24. 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 an overview of adoption activity and performance for the first half year of 2024-25 (Q1 and Q2). The full year progress in all areas of the Adoption Agency was last reported in the Annual Report for 2023-24, and will be reported on again, in the full year Annual Report for this current year- 2024-25.

The performance data is that which has been reported to the ASGLB by all 5 Local Authorities, and by Adoption Tees Valley, and is now published information. Where a different time period is reported on, this will be noted.

## **2. Governance**

The RAA is governed by a Board, which comprises the 5 Directors for Children's Services, or Assistant Directors of the 5 Local Authorities within the partnership. There is 1 non-Executive Director, who was recruited to the Board in 2023, and who is an adoptive parent who has adopted through ATV. There is a Virtual School Head who is now a member of the ATV Board. Plans are underway to recruit a strategic health partner representative on the Board.

The Service Manager for ATV attends all Board meetings and presents information to enable oversight of the performance of the RAA, strategic direction and operational practice. The Board has a role in being assured of the quality of adoption work in Adoption Tees Valley, and receives information on quality, outcomes, and proposed improvements.

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

The Chair of the Board during this period was Sally Robinson Director of Children's Services, Hartlepool BC.

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

## **Vision for ATV**

In April 2024 the ATV Board came together for a leadership Day, considering key strategic ambitions for the Regional Adoption Agency, and its partner Local Authorities, regarding permanence planning for adoption.

The outcome of this full day was a new Vision for ATV, to take the agency through the next 3 years, embracing national and local priorities, and reflective of learning from children's adoptive placements which had ended.

The Vision is shared as part of the circulation of this Bi Annual Report.

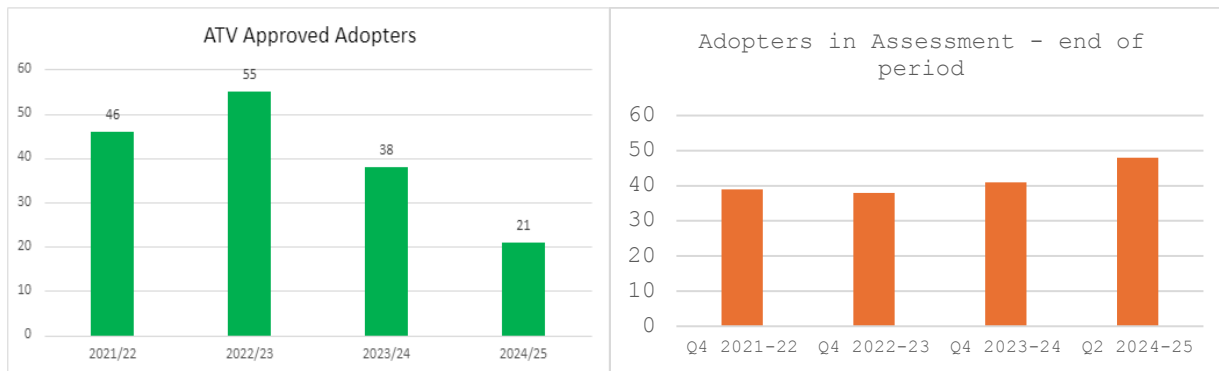
## **Adoption Activity and Performance**

### Adopter Approvals

Approvals have continued to remain stubbornly low for the first quarter of the year, however, are beginning to increase in the second quarter.

This low approval rate is reflective of wider national and regional decline in adopter approval numbers. In ATV there has been a review and restructure of the "front door" to provide a seamless response from initial enquiry to the conclusion of stage 1 checks for all applicants. Alongside this an improved marketing strategy has been implemented. Both measures have had the impact of increasing those people coming into the process and progressing through stage 1. At this stage it's unclear whether there is a national trend of more members of the public being in a state of readiness to consider adopting, or whether this is a localised impact.

At the end of the quarter there were 48 prospective adopters within the assessment process which is a record number for ATV, suggesting a change and upturn in the numbers, and a benefit of the new Enquiry team.

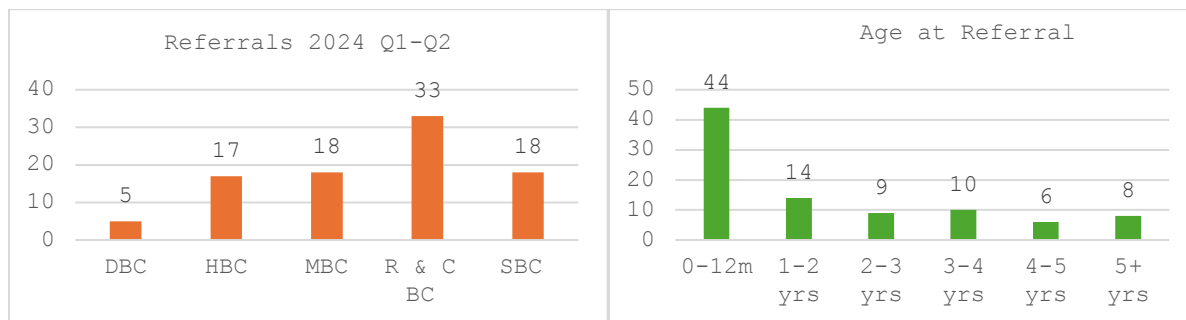


Referrals, matches and children placed for adoption

Each Local Authority will have a separate section for data later in this report.

The following is ATV overall data.

Referrals to ATV



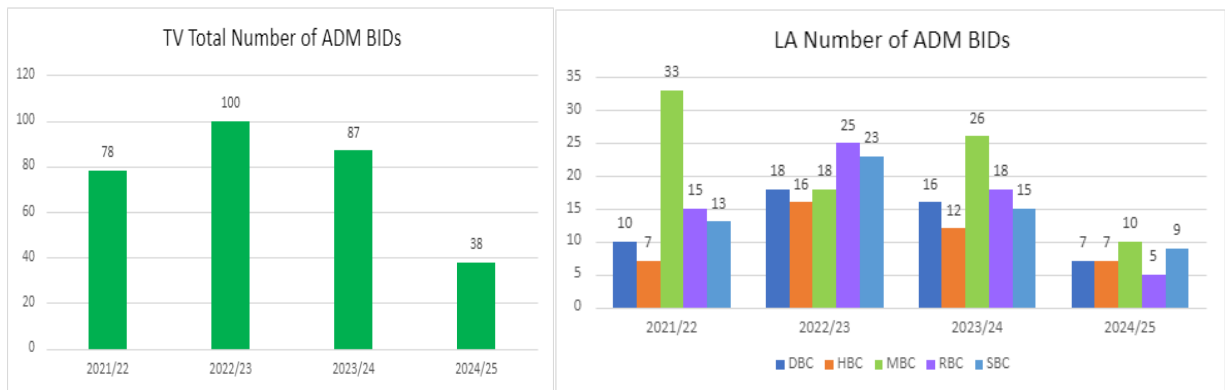
91 children were referred to ATV with a potential plan of adoption in Q1 and Q2, which is an increased rate of referral, with 138 being referred in total in 2023-24.

Of the children referred there were 10 sibling groups of 2, 1 sibling group of 3 and 1 sibling group of 4 referred.

At the time of writing 62 remain open to ATV with a potential adoption plan.

ADM Best Interests Decisions (ADM BID)

Over this period the rate of ADM best interests' decisions for children is lower than 2023-24 and is lower than in recent years. This means the Local Authorities are making fewer decisions that adoption is the permanence plan for the child.

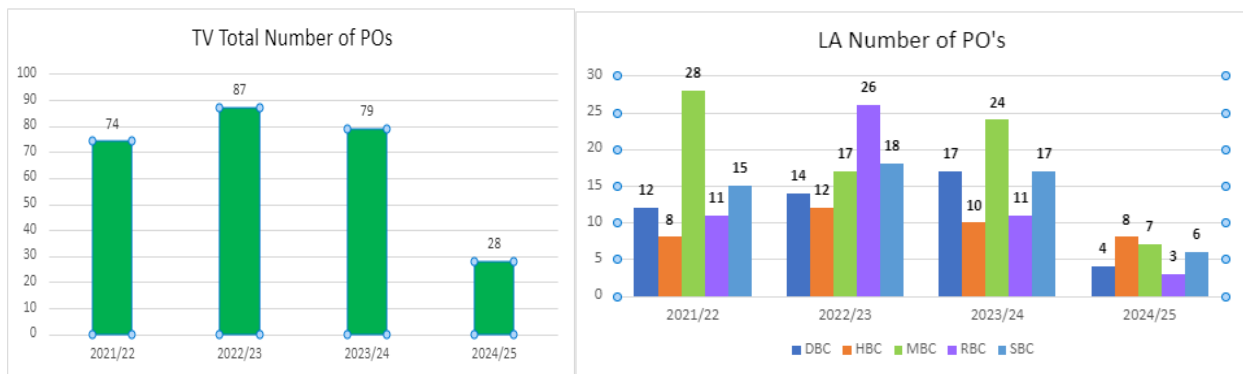


The charts show the numbers for previous full years and for the period Q1 and Q2 2024-25.

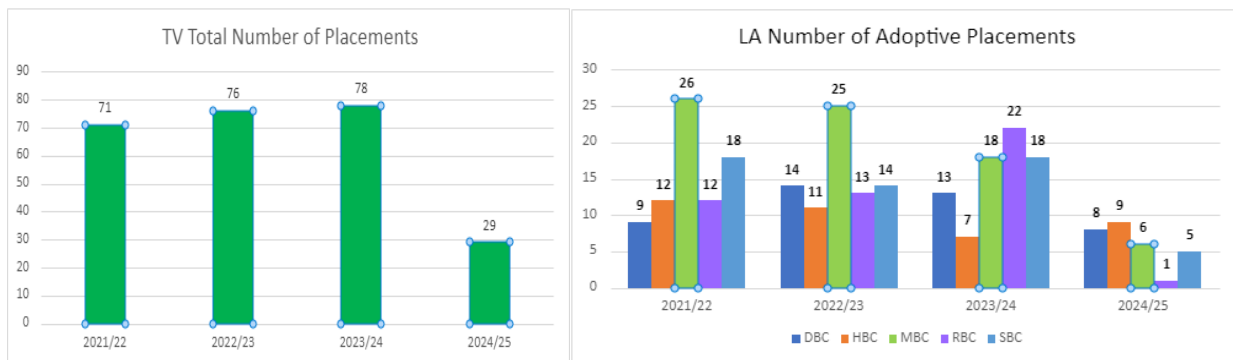
Darlington, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland show reduced numbers of ADM's compared with previous rates of ADM, in this period.

Placement Orders

The data shows an even greater drop in the numbers and rate of Placement Orders being granted. Hartlepool is the exception; however all of the 4 other Local Authorities are seeing a reduction in PO rates.



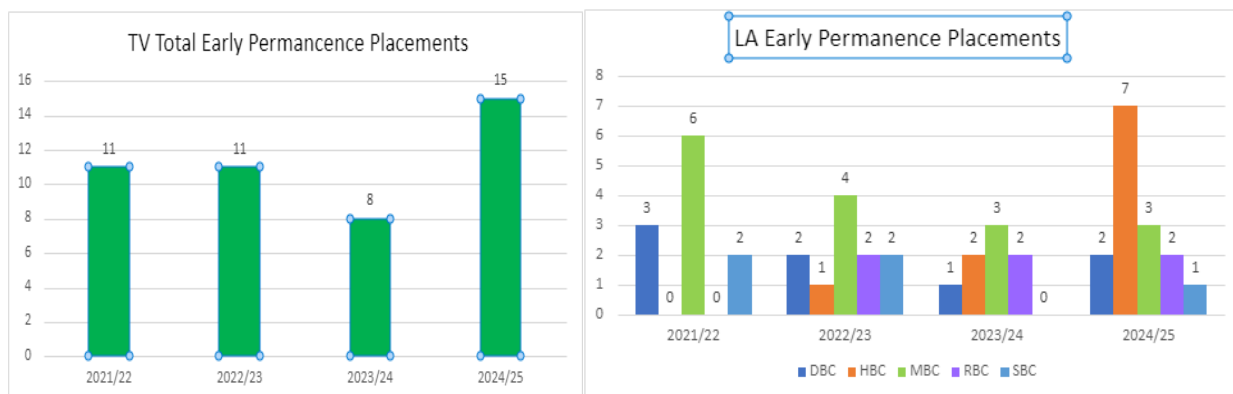
Placements of Children for Adoption



The numbers of children placed for adoption also shows a significant reduction, however, this is the number who are placed for adoption, under Adoption Agency Regulations (2005) which is a formal stage of the adoption plan for a child. Early permanence will be detailed below.

Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton show a significant drop in numbers of children placed for adoption in this period.

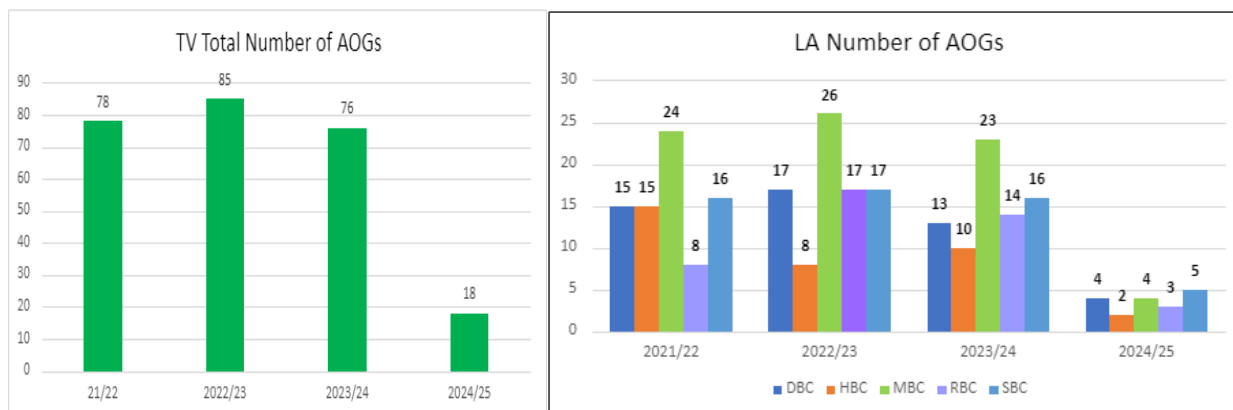
### Early Permanence



ATV has had a focus on developing greater use of early permanence for children. The impact of the RAA and pan regional EP development work is now demonstrating a greater consideration of EP within this region. Hartlepool have significantly increased the numbers of children who are placed via early permanence, however all 5 Local Authorities have shown increased use of EP in care planning for children, which is very positive.

No children have been reunified with birth parents in this period.

### Adoption Orders



The total number of children adopted in the period has reduced also within this period.

This is reflective of a reduction overall in numbers of children placed over the preceding years. Also, there were a high number of disrupted placements in 2023-24, and so not all children placed went on to have an adoption order.

### Timeliness of Adoption

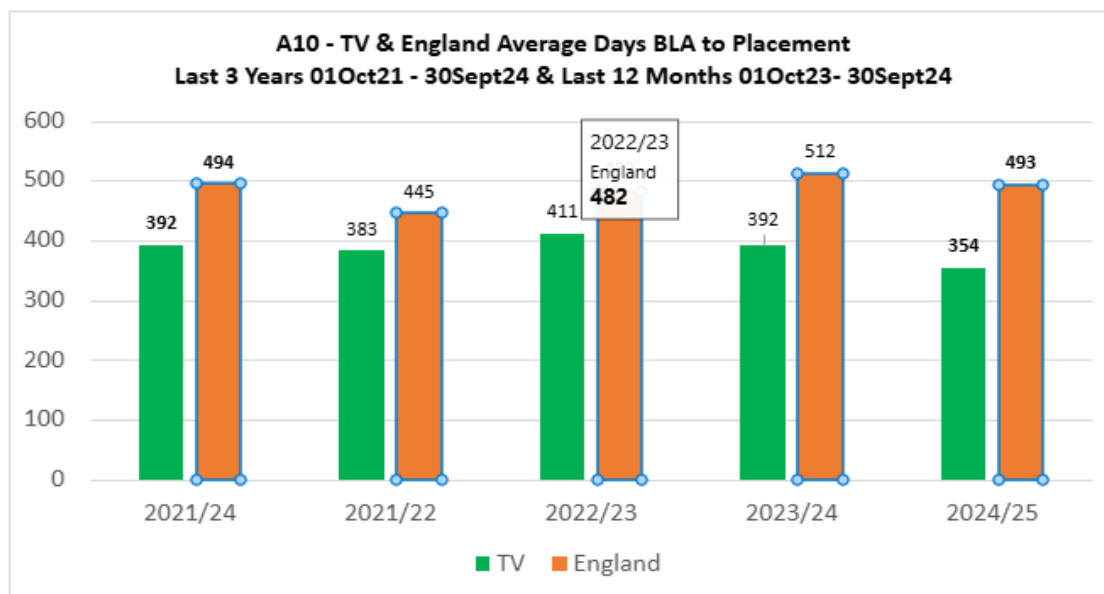
Timeliness is measured in 2 key ways- the date from which a child became a Child in Our care, to the date they moved in with their adoptive parents (A10) in days, and the time between the Court giving authority to place for adoption, the Placement Order (PO) to matching with adoptive parents (A2) in days.

A10- The time from a child becoming a child in our care to moving in with adopters. Govt target is 426 days

A2- the time from the Placement order to being matched with adoptive parents. Govt target is 121 days

Both figures are based on children from the LA adopted within the previous 12 months.

### A10



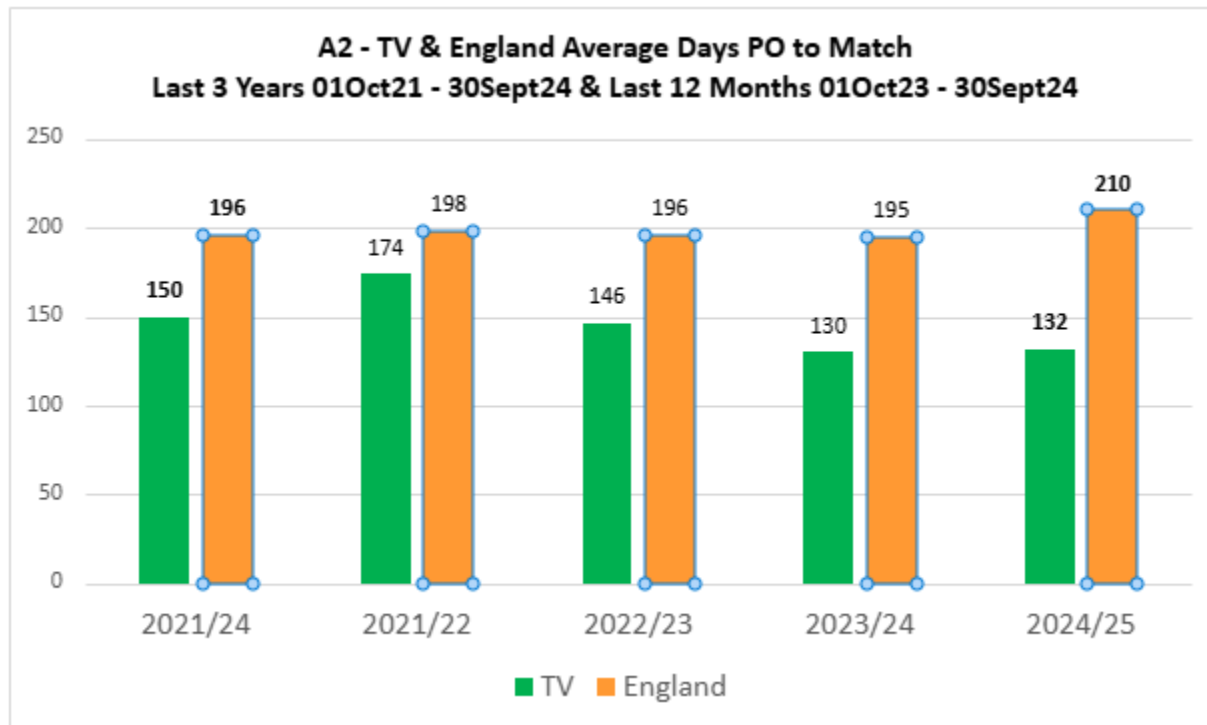
This graph shows the A10 timescales for Tees Valley as a whole over each of the past 3 years, and the 3-year average for 2021-24.

The graph gives the comparison with the England average timescales.

ATV is overall performing consistently well on timescales for children. The RAA is doing well compared with the Government expected timescales, and the England average. This indicates that overall, referrals to the RAA, care planning for adoption, timescales for PO, and family finding are effective.



## A2



This graph shows that Tees valley overall is performing well against England average for Placement Order to match, and the overall figure has improved over recent years, with a slight upturn in this period.

The RAA has average figures slightly above the Government target timescale, however, is performing well compared with England average.

The sufficiency and availability of adoptive parents is a factor impacting on timescales in this region and nationally.

Individual local Authority data is provided in the following section.

## Local Authority Performance

### **Darlington**

	Q1- Q2 2024-25 (YTD)	Full year 2023-24	Q1- Q2 2023-24
<b>AO's</b>	4	13	6
<b>Placements for Adoption</b>	8	13	9
<b>Early Permanence</b>	2	1	0
<b>PO</b>	4	17	10
<b>ADM</b>	7	16	6
<b>A10</b>	419	458	365
<b>A2</b>	125	128	133
<b>Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%</b>			15%
<b>Disruptions</b>	0	0	0

A10- The time from a child becoming a child in our care to moving in with adopters. Govt target is 426 days

A2- the time from the Placement order to being matched with adoptive parents. Govt target is 121 days

Both figures are based on children from the LA adopted within the previous 12 months.

- Darlington has a strong reduction in numbers of children with a Placement Order within this period, compared with previous years.
- Darlington has increased its use of early permanence
- Darlington is showing good timeliness of placement for children.

## Hartlepool

	Q1-Q2 2024-25	Full year 2023-24	Q1- Q2 2023-24
<b>AO's</b>	2	10	4
<b>Placements for Adoption</b>	9	7	4
<b>Early Permanence</b>	7	2	2
<b>PO</b>	8	10	4
<b>ADM</b>	7	12	4
<b>A10</b>	355	379	434
<b>A2</b>	76	110	171
<b>Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%</b>			11%
<b>Disruptions</b>	0	0	0

A10- The time from a child becoming a child in our care to moving in with adopters. Govt target is 426 days

A2- the time from the Placement order to being matched with adoptive parents. Govt target is 121 days

Both figures are based on children from the LA adopted within the previous 12 months.

- Adoption orders are comparatively low for this period, compared with previous years, however, reflect lower number of placements in 2023-24.
- Placements of children for adoption has increased significantly.
- Hartlepool has significantly increased its use of early permanence and care planning for early permanence for children. This is a positive practice development.
- The numbers of Placement Orders has increased.
- Timeliness for children is very good in Hartlepool, and well below the Government expected timescales.

## Middlesbrough

	Q1-Q2 2024-25	Full year 2023-24	Q1-Q2 2023-24
<b>AO's</b>	4	23	14
<b>Placements for Adoption</b>	6	18	8
<b>Early Permanence</b>	3	3	0
<b>PO</b>	7	24	11
<b>ADM</b>	10	26	14
<b>A10</b>	281	352	420
<b>A2</b>	104	130	201
<b>Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%</b>			9%
<b>Disruptions</b>	0		0

A10- The time from a child becoming a child in our care to moving in with adopters. Govt target is 426 days

A2- the time from the Placement order to being matched with adoptive parents. Govt target is 121 days

Both figures are based on children from the LA adopted within the previous 12 months.

- There is a significant drop in adoption activity for Middlesbrough in this period, compared with the previous year.
- ADM, PO and placement activity is reduced.
- Adoption orders are at a very low rate. The rate of placement had reduced in the previous year.
- Middlesbrough is making use of early permanence in care planning for children which is positive.
- Timeliness for children is very good and has improved.

### Redcar and Cleveland

	Q1-Q2 2024-25	Full year 2023-24	Q1-Q2 2023-24
<b>AO's</b>	3	14	5
<b>Placements for Adoption</b>	1	22	15
<b>Early Permanence</b>	2	2	1
<b>PO</b>	3	11	7
<b>ADM</b>	5	18	9
<b>A10</b>	369	354	319
<b>A2</b>	145	128	140
<b>Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%</b>			6%
<b>Disruptions</b>	0		6 + 2 interruptions

A10- The time from a child becoming a child in our care to moving in with adopters. Govt target is 426 days

A2- the time from the Placement order to being matched with adoptive parents. Govt target is 121 days

Both figures are based on children from the LA adopted within the previous 12 months.

- There has been a significant reduction in placements for adoption, with just one placement in the first 2 quarters of this year. This compared with 15 in the previous year.
- Placement orders and ADM decisions have also dropped significantly.
- Timeliness for children is good, however numbers are very low on which these figures are based. PO to match timescales are higher, however, again, the numbers are low, and therefore figures are less reliable.
- Redcar and Cleveland had an unusual and high numbers of placements which disrupted in the previous year. There have been no disruptions in this period.

## Stockton

	Q1-Q2 2024-25	Full year 2023-24	Q1- Q2 2023-24
<b>AO's</b>	5	16	6
<b>Placements for Adoption</b>	5	18	9
<b>Early Permanence</b>	1	0	0
<b>PO</b>	6	17	9
<b>ADM</b>	9	15	6
<b>A10</b>	360	434	459
<b>A2</b>	175	148	540
<b>Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%</b>			9%
<b>Disruptions</b>	0	1	1

A10- The time from a child becoming a child in our care to moving in with adopters. Govt target is 426 days

A2- the time from the Placement order to being matched with adoptive parents. Govt target is 121 days

Both figures are based on children from the LA adopted within the previous 12 months.

- The numbers of children placed for adoption is at a lower rate, and PO are numbers are also at a lower rate. However, ADM decisions that adoption is the child's plan have increased on the previous year.
- Stockton continues to have a low use of early permanence, when care planning for children.
- Timeliness for children moving in to their adoptive placement has improved, which is positive. The timescales between the granting of a PO and matching a child with adopters is higher than government average.

### Key Regional RAA Development in this period:

- The RAA has worked on a Vision, along with partners. See attached. The Vision reflects deep analysis of the previous year's disruptions, and also the modernizing adoption agenda, outlined through the Publication of the Public Law Working Group report into adoption (November 2024).
- Children's Voice is being heard in ATV and wider partners. The Young People's Voice and Influence Group have produced a film, called **Its My Voice**, which reflects their views about identity as adopted young people, and the wish to have control over their "story" within their school, community, and friendship groups. The group have been supported by ATV and by Blue cabin, a local Charity, to create the film. They have travelled to Leeds to share this within a network across Adoption England and are planning next steps for its wider sharing.
- The RAA has worked on developing and implementing a national data set for Adoption Support, which will be included in ILACS data sets moving forward. This has been considerable work, and we now have an embedded reporting mechanism in the CHARMS system. This means ATV can demonstrate the level of work with children and families to support them and will enable measuring and reporting on impact of that work in the future.
- The Adoption Support Workers are continuing to promote and develop their responsiveness to families where their child has an adoption plan. Direct support to help with Keeping In Touch correspondence is provided to many birth families, and the RAA is preparing for more direct Keep In Touch arrangements. The RAA is also planning towards safe digital exchange of correspondence without intervention, in line with national development.
- The RAA has implemented an Enquiry Team to manage all new contacts with people who may be interested in adoption. The "front door" is now managed by a small team of experienced social workers, who have capacity to dedicate follow up in shorter timescales, and are discussed the modernized approach to adoption, and early permanence from the outset. We believe that the evidence of increased enquiries, Registrations of interest and increased early permanence is reflective of significant work to embed this approach from the outset with all enquirers.

- The RAA is progressing an Adopter Pathway which will more clearly set out the supports, training and access to services which will be available for all adoptive parents.

## **Pan Regional Working**

There has been a continued increase in pan regional working together in the North East and Cumbria, enabled through opportunity for additional funding to test out improvement projects in key areas of the development strategy, which is linked to the Adoption England Strategy 2024-27.

Adoption Tees Valley has benefited from pan regional working, which has strengthened practice, and brought positive impact to children and families.

The key development projects in place, or underway, at the end of this period are:

- ***Pan Regional early Permanence Project***

The project has been of 3 years duration and has been funded through £330,000 investment funding across the region to strengthen practice and increase the numbers of children who have access to an early permanence placement. The project as a whole has increased the numbers of children accessing EP by 44% across the region, with ATV seeing a significant rise within this year. The structure and process for early permanence is better understood across all stakeholders, and there is now one unified set of procedures, and processes. Additionally, preparation training across the region is harmonized and within the ATV region the fees for EP carers have also been harmonized as part of a national pilot. The project will conclude in March 2025, however, it is planned to continue the networking across the region, in order to sustain the improvements, and continue to address sufficiency of carers.

It is also planned to include a new Hope Box © pilot for children and birth parents as part of the next phase of working together. Early discussions have taken place with Adoption England and the University of Lancaster.

- ***Multi-Disciplinary Adoption Support Service***

MDASS is now fully staffed and is a pan regional specialist adoption support service for adopted children and adoptive parents in the region. It is a 2-year



project, with funding extending into July 2025. Its unique strategic and operational delivery model incorporates a partnership between the 3 Regional Adoption Agencies, including ATV, and the Integrated Care Board (NHS). The funding achieved was £960,000 and the ambition is to enable the delivery of this specialist adoption support service, fully from within ASF funding as a long-term goal.

The service includes 2 dedicated clinical psychologists; speech and language therapist; occupational therapist; consultant social workers; service manager; business support.

The service has now started to deliver on specialist assessments, and therapeutic consultations and therapy, for children and families referred. The partnership with health is enabling more focus on how adopted children can access the adoption support assessments and services they need, within a shorter timescale, to help meet needs and support families. It is early days for the service, however, there is already planning to develop and secure more funding to enable a realistic timescale to get the service embedded and achieving its objectives.

- ***Commissioning Support Project***

Adoption England has invited RAA's to develop commissioning expertise and outcomes, through dedicated support to small commissioning projects.

ATV has partnered with Adopt Coast to Coast and Adopt North East to identify shared gaps and needs in relation to adoption support services. The identified gap is in peer support, and a small project is in process to develop a peer support model for adoptive families, which will be funded in the long term through the Adoption Support Fund, as it will meet criteria. The plan is to use learning from Adoption East Partnership to develop an Adopter Hub, which will have a central experienced "Support Adopter" to facilitate exchange of support through the peer to peer Hub.



