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# ANNUAL REPORT

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2022/2023



By  
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# 1 – Key Headline Summary

## Adoption Partnership South East Regional Adoption Agency

- April 2022-March 2023 saw an increase in the number of children with an adoption plan agreed across the 3-partner local authorities.
- The average timeliness for matching children with their adoptive parents in 2022/23 is close to the DfE target and exceeds the national average across the region.
- Quality Life Story Books are provided for children and their adoptive parents in a timely manner.
- The early permanence scheme continues to develop, and a significant proportion of children live with early permanence foster carers, reducing unnecessary moves should the court grant a Placement Order.
- Most children are placed with APSE adopters enabling greater support post placement and beyond the granting of an adoption order.
- The number and proportions of disruptions remains extremely low.
- Enquiries from prospective adopters saw a significant increase during 2022/23, which is not necessarily mirrored in other areas of the country and completion of the Stage 2 process is very close to the national target and compares favourably with the national average.
- The adoption support teams offer a support and advice line appointment within 5 working days.
- Effective development of the mentoring service saw a 500% increase in the number of mentors since July 2022.
- The voice of the child and adoptive parents is actively sought, and compliments are high, with low numbers of formal complaints.
- Independent feedback from Ofsted on adoption via the local authority ILACs inspections were positive.
- The RAA secured significant grant funding from the DfE to develop 3 key areas to support early performance, enhanced family finding and multi-disciplinary adoption support.
- 2023/24 will see the departure of the existing Head of Service and the appointment of a permanent replacement. The current Head of Service will be leaving in June 2023, her replacement will take over on 1st July 2023, so there will be no gap in leadership and management.

- Staff within the service are positive with a 'can do' approach. They are committed to supporting children and their families, both birth families and families by adoption.

## 2 – Introduction

In 2015 the Government set out its vision and commitment to deliver a regional adoption system where adoption agencies would come together to deliver adoption services on a larger scale. Adoption Partnership South East (APSE) is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) comprising of the London Borough of Bexley, Kent County Council and Medway Council. It launched on 1st November 2020 and delivers adoption services on behalf of the three local authorities.

The regional adoption agency is operated under the terms of a Partnership Agreement, which confirms the legal and governance arrangements; the budget; staffing and funding contributions for the three local authorities.

### Legislation & Regulations

- The work of the RAA is governed by:
- Education and Adoption Act 2016
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Adoption: Statutory Guidance 2013
- Care Planning, placement and Case Review and fostering services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- Care Planning Regulations 2010
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011)
- Local Authority Regulations 2005
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Standards Act 2000



## 3 – Principles and Values

The requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 underpin the principles and values of our service:

### Principles & Core Values

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond and where possible this should be within their own family.
- The Child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process.
- The Child's wishes and feelings will be considered at all stages.
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- The child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, and sexuality will be fully recognised, positively valued, and promoted when decisions are made.
- The needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and considered when decisions are made.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many organisations, professionals and individuals who must work together to deliver to meet the needs of the services.
- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and offered a support service.

### Equal Opportunities

The adoption service abides by equal opportunities legislation and the policies of each Partner. The service works positively and respectfully with all service users and partner agencies regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or age.

Every attempt will be made to secure an adoptive family which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs considering their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability considering the need to avoid undue delay.

## 4 – The Aims and Objectives of the Agency

The agency is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 by:

1. Ensuring the provision of a high-quality adoption service which guarantees the best possible standards of care, safety and protection for children or young people who are looked after and who need adoptive placements.
2. Ensuring all those whose lives are affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services.
3. Working in partnership with adoptive families and other agencies ensuring the service is based on statutory requirements and good practice within the principles of value for money for the agency.

### Three Year Plan (2023-2026)

Adoption Partnership South East has created a 3-year plan, which outlines its vision, mission, outcomes, priorities.

Our Vision - *is to be a supportive and active adoption community within our region, working with our partners to innovate and improve local and national adoption standards for children, adoptive families and those affected by adoption.*

Our mission – *we put children at the heart of our decisions; our children come first, and we are dedicated to finding loving, secure, and permanent homes that are right for them, whilst also providing a range of tailored support to children and families who have come together via adoption, and adults affected by adoption.*

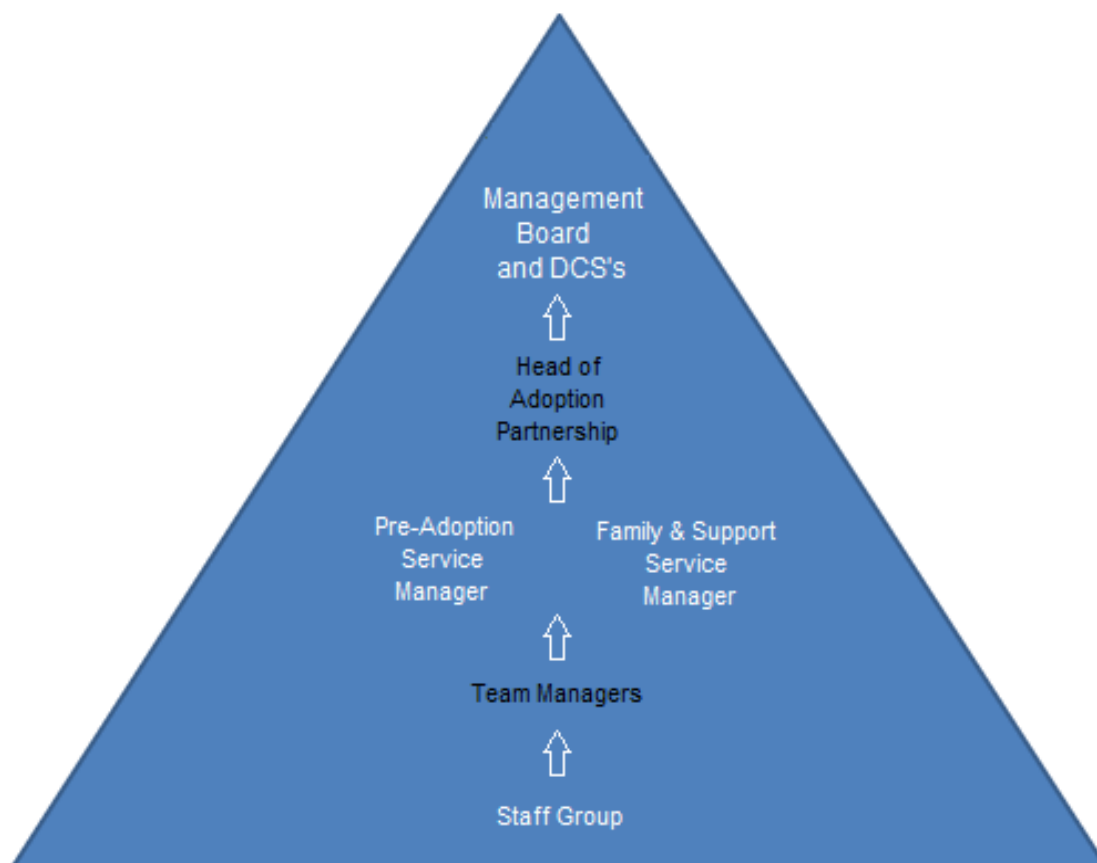
The plan and how it will be achieved is available on the APSE website:

<https://www.adoptionpartnershipsoutheast.org.uk/about-us/about-the-partnership>

APSE produce an annual business plan outlining the detail of the work to be undertaken and this is attached as Appendix 1.

## 5 – Governance and Service Structure

- The Head of Service reports quarterly to a Partnership Management Board, which is comprised of Director of Children’s Services and Senior Officers from each partner local authority with representation drawn from the wider professional network. The Chair is rotated on an annual basis and for a 12-month period.
- An Operational Managers group meets quarterly which includes the Head of APSE, Service Managers (APSE), Head of Service and Service Managers for Children in Care teams from Bexley, Kent & Medway, lead Finance Officer and lead Performance Officer for each partner local authority.



### Service Structure

Adoption Partnership South East is managed by a Head of Service, two Service Managers, one of whom is responsible for the pre-adoption order work streams and one who is responsible for overseeing family finding and adoption support.

There are nine teams within the Service structured as follows: (Structure chart attached appendix 2)



- One Advisory Team
- One Panel Team
- One Early Permanence team
- Two Recruitment, Assessment and Support teams
- One Family Finding Team
- Three Adoption Support teams
- Each Team is supported by Business Support Officers who are line managed centrally.

### Service Delivery

The RAA provides detailed information in its Statement of Purpose (SOP) (appendix 3). This explains our values and principles, the services we provide and the way we provide them. The information provided meets the requirement of National Minimum Standards for Adoption and the related regulations (Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Agencies (Misc. Amendments) Regulations 2003). It is available on the APSE website: [Adoption Partnership South East website](#).

### Advisory Team

An Advisory Team is managed by the Adoption Advisory Officer, whose roles stretches across the service. It includes Initial Enquiries Advisors, and the Mentoring Support Advisor.

The Initial Enquiries Advisors act as the front door for the service and receive enquiries from people interested in finding out more about adoption and from adoptive parents seeking support.

The Mentoring Adviser actively recruits and supports adopter volunteers, willing to support others going through the assessment process and adopters who are matched and placed with a child, but not yet adopted. APSE currently has 45 mentors. During 2022/23, the service actively recruited mentors to support early permanence carers and foster carers who adopted children and adopters with birth children.

### Adoption Panel Team

A Panel Team supports the Agency's approval process for adopters and the Local Authority Partners when pursuing adoption as the care plan for children. The team has a quality assurance role and supports the four adoption panels covering the region.

Weekly adoption panels are held virtually and each panel has a designated Independent Chair and Vice Chair and is supported by a Panel Advisor (Senior Social Worker) from within the Panel Team.

The panels are comprised of a range of representatives, including:

- People with lived experience of adoption (adult adoptees and adopters)
- Local Authority Members
- Independent Panel Chair
- Independent/Vice Chair
- Adoption Social Workers
- Children's Social Workers
- Medical Advisers

The Agency has a diverse panel membership reflective of the community within Bexley, Kent, and Medway, including minority ethnic members and members from the LGBTQI+ community. We continue to have more females than male panel members and continue to seek to recruit more single adopters to join the panels.

The Panel Chairs provide a six-monthly report to the Agency; reports relating to 2022/2023 are attached (appendix 4).

### Early Permanence Team

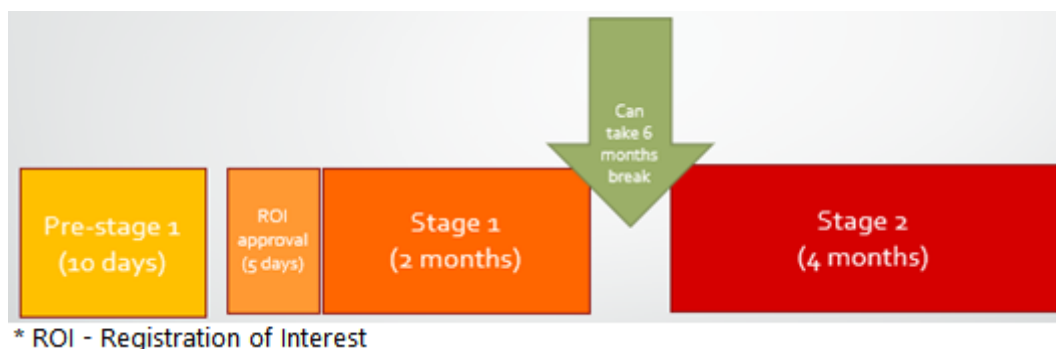
Adoption Partnership South East has an Early Permanence Team which provides early permanence foster placements to young children with a potential adoption plan and are either subject to care proceedings or are placed for adoption by consent (relinquished) by their parents. These placements may go onto become an adoptive placement via matching and a 'Decision' by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), should the court agree the adoption plan and grant a Placement Order, or the parents sign adoption consent for a relinquished child. These placements avoid additional foster placement moves for children and provide the opportunity for children to attach to the carers and receive consistent and secure care whilst decisions are made.

A dedicated Early Permanence Team within the regional adoption agency consists of permanency planning lead social workers, who support local authority children social work teams with their care planning and aims to identify children for whom adoption might need to be the care plan. This includes children who would benefit for an early permanence placement. The team also has recruitment and assessment social workers within it, who recruit, assess, train and support early permanence carers.

## Recruitment, Assessment and Support Team (RAS)

There are two Recruitment, Assessment and Support Teams in APSE and staff within these teams undertake the recruitment, assessment, training and support of potential adopters, wishing to adopt children in care, and are known as 'Agency Adopters'.

The adopter assessment process is a two-stage approach, prescribed by government regulations.



A range of training is provided for prospective adopters including Stage 1 prep groups, Stage 2 prep groups, early permanence prep training, post approval training, related by adoption - for support network, early permanence support groups and stay and play support groups. 94 households attended Stage 1 prep groups and 62 households attended Stage 2 prep groups.

These teams also undertake assessments of extended members of a family wishing to adopt, i.e., step parents and these are known as 'non-agency' adopters. A recruitment strategy is in place and is reviewed regularly (appendix 5).

## Family Finding

The Regional Adoption Agency has a dedicated Family Finding Team consisting of one Team Manager, senior social workers and social workers. The family finding social worker works closely with the child's social worker to identify their needs and proactively seek to find adopters who can meet them. This includes liaising with the internal recruitment & assessment team and if necessary, with external adoption agencies.

The family finding team is child focused and seeks to ensure children's adoption plans are progressed in a timely way.

## Adoption Support Teams

Adoption Partnership South East has a comprehensive adoption support service for those affected by adoption.

The RAA will ensure adopters have access to local support networks and specialist organisations, through a variety of subscriptions to other agencies, including Coram BAAF, National Association for Therapeutic Parenting (NATP), New Family Social and We Are Family. The service has an adopter mailing list with whom information is shared including a newsletter, training, social events and other resources.

The agency has two specialist adoption social work teams and one therapy team comprising of clinicians who are qualified in a range of clinical interventions. The agency will also 'spot purchase' external provisions when the internal clinical team are not able to provide the service needed.

The adoption support service provides adoption support services in line with the "Adoption Passport" according to individual circumstances.

#### Access to a support and advice line service

Parents can request support easily by contacting the RAA's Advisory Team and they will be offered a support & advice line call with a social worker in the adoption support service within 5 working days. This is a scheduled call in which they can discuss their concerns and the appropriate follow up action can be identified. Sometime this results in the issue being resolved on the call, or signposting to another service, or agreement that an adoption support assessment is required, which will be completed by a social worker in the adoption support team.

#### Service for adoptive families

- Access to an assessment of need, resulting in a support package based on the family's identified needs, including consideration of making an application to the Adoption Support Fund.
- Access to support groups, both internal and external
- Access to a learning and development programme and workshops
- Access to therapeutic support groups
- Access to therapists and a range of therapeutic interventions
- Access to support with education via Virtual Schools in each local authority
- Assistance and review of contact arrangements between adopters and birth relatives

#### Service for adopted children and young people

- Social groups and activities, delivered by Virtual School Kent's Participation & Engagement Team
- Training and advice for schools to help teachers understand adopted children's needs.
- Working with children in their adoptive families around understanding their identity and life story.

### Service for those with lived experience of adoption

The RAA commissions independent services from Barnardo's to support those with lived experience of adoption. The Service is a bespoke service to families eligible to receive support from Adoption Partnership South East. The Service is called Connecting Adoptive Families Independent Service known as CAFIS. Services are provided to four groups of people affected by adoption:

1. Service for birth parents
2. Support for birth relatives
3. Access to information and intermediary services
4. Keeping in touch contact service



## 6 – The Child’s Journey

### Latest ASG (formerly ASGLB) Data

The ASG data return is completed by every local authority (LA), regional adoption agency (RAA) and voluntary adoption agency (VAA) in England on a quarterly basis.

The latest publicly available data covers the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 December 2022.

In Q3 2022/23, the response rate from local authorities for the child level section was 100% and the adopter level sections was 100%. The response rate for the adopter level section from Voluntary Adoption Agencies was 100%.

Analysis indicates that, as at Q3 2022/23 (31 December 2022), nationally there were a total of:

- 800 Agency Decision Maker decisions
- 670 Placement Orders granted
- 720 Adoption Orders granted and 950 Special Guardianship Orders granted, a total of 1670 permanence orders
- 1980 children with a PO waiting to be matched, 990 who had been waiting 18+ months since entering care and 240 children with a PO waiting to be matched 18+ months since grant of PO
- 660 Adopter Registrations and 560 Adopter Approvals
- 2330 Prospective adoptive families not yet approved
- 2340 Approved adoptive families waiting to be matched

<https://coram-i.org.uk/asglb/data/>

### Adoption Partnership South East Data

The table below shows the number of children within the Regional Adoption Agency with an adoption plan during the last three years and outlines their adoption journey.

Indicator	Authority	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Agency decision makers best interest decisions	Bexley	5	10	10	13
	Kent	92	80	58	80
	Medway	32	39	18	28
Placement Orders	Bexley	<5*	10	6	8
	Kent	65	54	49	58
	Medway	20	27	16	14
Matches approved	Bexley	<5*	6	7	7
	Kent	56	63	51	48
	Medway	23	23	26	14
Children placed	Bexley	<5*	6	5	8
	Kent	60	64	49	46
	Medway	23	21	27	13
Adoption Order granted	Bexley	5	7	7	<5*
	Kent	63	42	47	56
	Medway	19	14	22	21

\* <Data suppressed due to low number

### Agency Decision Maker Best Interest Decisions

The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is usually a Director of Children's Services or an Assistant Director who agrees adoption would be in a child's best interest and should be presented to a court as the local authority's care plan.

In 2020/2021, there was an increase in the number of adoption plans agreed by the Agency Decision Maker for Bexley children compared to the previous year; from 5 to 10. 2021/2022 remained the same as the previous year. In 2022/2023, this increased to 13. Kent agreed the plan for adoption for 58 Kent children in 2021/2022, 27.5% less than in the same period in previous year (80). 2020/2021 also saw a decrease compared to the previous year (92 in 2019/2020). In 2022/2023 this increased to 80 again. Medway saw an increase from 32 children to 39 between 2019/2020 and

2020/2021 followed by a decrease to 18 in 2021/2022. In 2022/2023, 28 children had an adoption plan agreed.

### Placement Orders

A Placement Order is the legal order granted when a court agrees adoption should be the care plan for a child. There were 10 Placement Orders granted for Bexley children in 2020/2021 compared to <5\* the previous year. This decreased to 6 children in 2021/2022 but increased to 8 in 2022/2023. 54 Placement Orders were granted for Kent children in 2020/2021 which was 11 fewer (17%) than in 2019/2020. This decreased again to 49 for 2021/2022. Numbers increased in 2022/2023 to 58. Medway saw a 35% increase in Placement Orders granted, from 20 to 27 in 2020/2021, which slipped down to 16 during 2021/2022. This decreased again in 2022/2023 to 14.

### Matches Approved

Bexley saw an increase to 6 children matched with adopters in 2020/2021 (from <5\* in 2019/2020) and this increased further to 7 children in 2021/2022. In 2022/2023 this remained at 7. 51 Kent children were matched with an adoptive family during 2021/2022, a decrease of 19% from the previous year when there were 63 children matched. 2020/2021 was an increase in comparison to 2019/2020 when there were 56 matches. In 2022/2023, there were 48 matches. Medway had the same number of matches approved, 23, in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 but this increased to 26 in 2021/2022. This decreased to 14 in 2022/2023.

### Children Placed for Adoption

During 2021/2022, 5 Bexley children were placed for adoption compared to 6 in 2020/2021. 6 was an increase on the previous year when <5\* were placed. In 2022/2023, there were 8 children placed. For Kent, in 2022/2023 there were 46 children placed. This was a decrease compared to the 49 Kent children who were placed with an adoptive family in 2021/2022, 23% fewer children than in the previous year (64 children). In 2019/2020, 60 children were placed for adoption. Medway had 2 fewer children placed for adoption in 2020/2021 (21) when compared to the previous year, but this increased to 27 in 2021/2022. In 2022/2023, 13 children were placed.

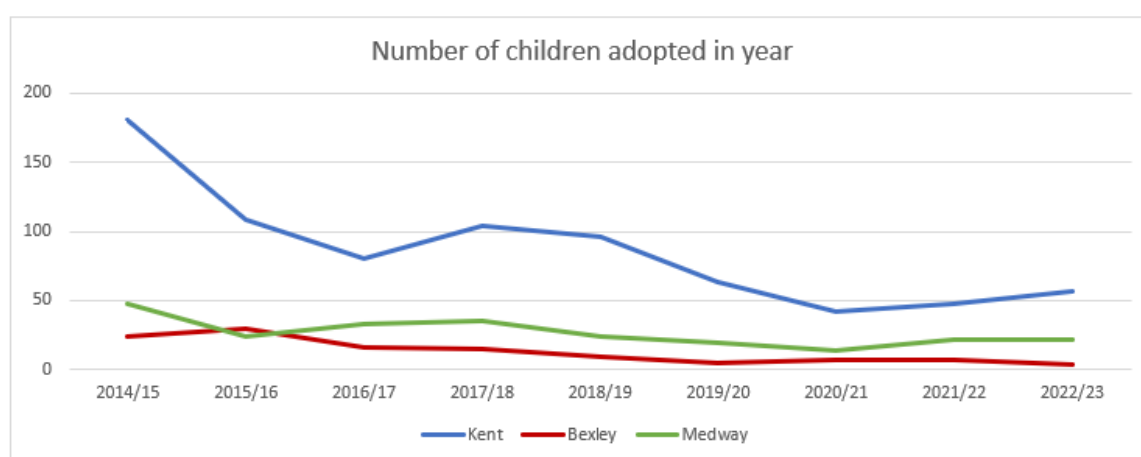
Sibling placements - Within the group of 67 children placed in 2022/2023, 17 were part of a sibling group placed together for adoption: Bexley: 4 siblings (2 pairs), Kent 13 siblings (5 pairs and 1 set of 3 siblings), Medway 0 siblings.



## Children Waiting

As of 31st March 2023, there were 47 children within the RAA with a Placement Order who were not placed with an adoptive family: 6 Bexley children, 30 Kent children and 11 Medway children. At the time of writing this report, 30th May 2023, of the 6 Bexley children 2 are subject to having their Placement Orders revoked and 4 children are linked or placed now with adopters. Of the 30 Kent children; all but 7 are now linked or placed with adopters, and the remaining 7 children have active family finding in place. Of the 11 Medway children, 5 are now linked or placed with adopters, 3 children have a change of plan from adoption and 3 children have active family finding in place.

## Adoption Orders Granted



Bexley saw a decrease to 3 Adoption Orders granted for children in 2022/2023 compared to previous year's figure published of 7. For 2020/2021, this was also at 7.

Medway encountered a reduction in Adoption Orders granted in 2020/2021 to 14, compared to 19 in 2019/2020 but saw an increase to 22 adoption orders granted in 2021/2022. 21 were granted during 2022/2023.

42 Adoption Orders were granted for Kent children during 2020/2021 which increased to 47 in 2021/2022 and increased again in 2022/2023 to 56. This is still a reduction compared to the 63 in 2019/2020.

## Timeliness of Children's Plans

Timescale indicator	National Comparison (Dec 2022)	Authority	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	From target 2022/23 (days)
Placement order to matching decision, children matched in year	-	Bexley	52	61	138	146	+25
		Kent	74	144	117	110	-11
		Medway	203	252	160	94	-27
Placement order to matching decision, children adopted in year	199	Bexley	57	49	67	135	+14
		Kent	96	80	132	129	+8
		Medway	218	237	209	152	+31
Became in care to placed for adoption, children placed in year	-	Bexley	216	410	333	481	+55
		Kent	271	385	309	476	+50
		Medway	428	388	469	340	-86
Became in care to placed for adoption, children adopted in year	478	Bexley	222	394	354	427	+1
		Kent	278	274	392	352	-74
		Medway	474	394	375	427	+1

## Placement Order to Matching Decision

The target time from the local authority receiving court authority (Placement Order) to place a child for adoption to the approval of a match with an adoptive family is 121 days, 4 months. Latest ASG return data shows that nationally the average timescale was 199 days in Q3 of 2022/2023.

For children who were adopted, the data shows that in 2022/2023, Bexley saw an increase in the average number of days it took to match children from 67 days in 2021/2022 to 135 days in 2022/2023. Kent saw a slight decrease in the average number of days from 132 in 2021/2022 to 129 days in 2022/2023. In 2020/2021 the

average was 80 days. Medway saw a decrease from an average of 237 days in 2020/2021 to 209 days in 2021/2022 and a reduction again to 152 for children adopted in 2022/2023.

When seeking to review more recent or current performance, the table above shows a slight increase in the timeliness between a Placement Order being granted and a match agreed with adopters in 2022/2023 in respect of Bexley children. It took on average 61 days for children to be matched in year 2020/2021. This increased to an average of 138 days for those whose Placement Order was granted in 2021/2022 and increased again to 146 days for Placement Orders granted in 2022/2023. This was due to the complex needs of the children concerned. Kent children saw a decrease from an average of 144 days for those matched in year in 2020/2021 to an average of 117 days for those whose Placement Order was granted during 2021/2022. The average improved again in 2022/2023 and dropped to 110 days. Medway saw the biggest improvement with children whose Placement Order was granted in 2021/2022, being matched on average in 160 days, as opposed to an average of 252 days in 2020/2021. For children matched in 2022/2023, the average was 94 days.

#### Became in Care to Placement Order

Timescale indicator	South East Benchmarking Comparison (Dec 2022)	Authority	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	From target 2022/23 (days)
Became in care to Placement Order, children with order granted in year	-	Bexley	258	403	430	300	+50
		Kent	226	355	336	446	+196
		Medway	304	295	375	470	+220
Became in care to Placement Order, children adopted in year	307	Bexley	216	354	364	300	+50
		Kent	233	233	326	327	+77
		Medway	262	284	202	326	+76

The current DfE threshold for children entering care to placement order is 250 days for children adopted in year. Regarding this measurement, the average days for Bexley's children decreased from 364 days in 2021/2022 to 300 days in 2022/2023.

Kent's average days for 2022/2023 was 327 and in 2021/2022 was 326 days. Medway's duration increased from 202 in 2021/2022 to 326 in 2022/2023. It is not possible to ascertain a national comparison, so data provided through the South East Benchmarking was used, showing an average of 307 days, but this does not include Bexley as this comes within the London data set.

The data shows that, during 2022/23, the length of time between entering care and the court authority to place for adoption who have not yet been adopted increased considerably compared to pre-pandemic timescales, particularly for children in Kent and Medway, and all three local authorities exceeded the target of 250 days. Across the region, the pandemic has had an impact on the timeliness of court proceedings concluding. However, there are other factors such as court decisions regarding further birth relative assessments and practical issues such as court availability.

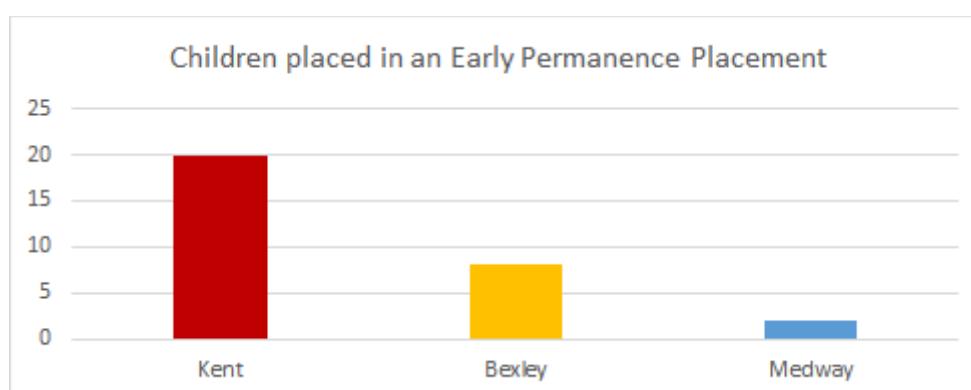
### Became in Care to Placed for Adoption

The current DfE threshold for children becoming in care to placement is 426 days, 14 months, for children adopted in 2022/2023. Regarding this measurement, the average days for Bexley's children increased in 2022/2023 to 481 days, compared to 333 the previous year. Kent's average days was 309 days in 2021/2022 and increased to 476 days in 2022/2023. Medway's duration decreased from 469 in 2021/2022 to 340 in 2022/2023.

### Life Story Books

Children's social workers are responsible for undertaking life story work with a child in care. Prior to the launch of the RAA, the adoption teams were assisting children's social workers to complete their life story books, although this varied in how it was undertaken. During April 2022 – March 2023, 54 life story books were completed.

### Early Permanence



Between 1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023, 30 children were placed in an Early Permanence placement (8 Bexley children, 20 Kent children and 2 Medway children).

Adoption Partnership South East exceeded the target to place 20% of the children placed for adoption in an Early Permanence placement.

### Disruptions

Between 1 March 2022 – 30 April 2023, 2 children experienced an adoption disruption, both within Medway. This refers to children who were placed with prospective adopters but returned to foster care and were not adopted by those adopters.

A disruption meeting was held in respect of each child, chaired by an independent consultant, for Coram BAAF. Comprehensive reports were produced and the lessons and recommendations were shared with the adoption panel that agreed the 'match' and the Agency Decision Maker who approved it. The reports were shared with the responsible children's service and the lessons learnt will also be shared with the adoption agency social workers and managers.

## 7 – The Adopter Journey – Adoption Data

Adopter activity (as households)	2021/22	2022/23
Information Packs Sent / Virtual	477	585
Consultation Events Attended	134	163
Enquiries in year	69	116
Stage 1 starts in year	59	113
Stage 2 starts in year	70	72
Stage 2 ends in year	74	69
Adoptive families matched in year	54	58
Adoptive families with placements in year	52	56

Adoption Partnership South East developed their process for those wanting to find out more information about adoption. A digital information pack was produced which can now be sent out to enquirers, this pack includes video clips, a presentation with a voice over and details written information for enquirers to read, watch and listen to in their own time. The packs were designed to be accessible to all; giving a range of methods to receive the information.

Timescale	Target	2022/23	England Avg
Enquiry to Stage 1 Start (days)	N/A	87	-
Stage 1 Start to Stage 1 End (days)	60	120	128
Stage 2 Starts to Stage 2 End (days)	121	131	152

During 2022/2023, Adoption Partnership South East was outside of the Stage 1 target of 60 days but exceeded the national average by 8 days.

Stage 1 is adopter led, during this stage the agency undertakes statutory checks and references. The prospective adopters also complete their own home learning and attend a 3-day preparation course.

On reviewing the applications which exceeded 61 days there were specific themes identified which caused these delays, which included applicants having difficulties getting appointments with their general practitioner for the adult health assessment to be completed and DBS checks. It is clear that the pandemic has impacted on health service availability and capacity, and these delays are also evident nationally.

Priority continues to be given to assessing prospective adopters who can provide early permanence placements and homes for children who have more complex needs i.e., have a known disability, hereditary/genetic illness in the birth family and slightly older children, plus some siblings. This is part of our sufficiency strategy to reduce the time children are waiting for adoptive families and to ensure we are approving families that match the needs of Bexley, Kent, and Medway children with adoption plans.

The target duration for Stage Two assessment is 4 months, 121 days. Adoption Partnership South East took on average 131 days to complete stage 2 assessments in 2022/2023, 10 days over the target timescale, but 21 days below the national average of 152 days.

During this period, 69 households were approved as adopters which ensured sufficiency of adopters for Bexley, Kent, and Medway children. In total, 67 children were placed with adopters during 2022/2023 and 60 of these children were placed with the Regional Adoption Agency assessed and approved adopters.

Of the 69 households approved during April 2022- March 2023, 63 were part of a couple and 6 were single applicants. 58 applicant households identified themselves as heterosexual, 11 identified as being from the LGBT community. 124 adopters identified as white British and white any other background and 8 identified as being from a black, or Asian or other ethnic group.

#### Adopter Gap – sufficiency

It is important to have a range of adoptive placements available to allow children to be matched with adopters who are most able to meet them. The adopter gap i.e., the number of adopters 'approved and waiting' was between 15-25 at any point in time during 2022-2023.





## 8 – Adoption Support Data

The table below shows the number of families who contacted the Initial Enquiries Team for support and were offered a support and advice line appointment between April 2022 – March 2023.

LA	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	TOTAL
Bexley	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	6	<b>15</b>
Kent	12	20	9	12	7	14	16	20	7	16	14	12	<b>159</b>
Medway	2	5	1	4	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	0	<b>22</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>196</b>

Data Source: Performance and Information, Adoption Partnership South East

Adoption support assessments (households) carried out between April 2021 – March 2023

Local Authority	Number of adoption support assessments April 2021 – March 2022	Number of adoption support assessments April 2022 – March 2023
Bexley	11	7
Kent	143	114
Medway	14	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>141</b>

Adoption Support Fund Applications Between April 2022 – March 2023 (includes pre-order applications)

Type of application	Number of applications
Internal provision	117
External provision	263
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>380</b>

### Supporting those affected by adoption - Barnardo's CAFIS Activity data

Independent birth parent support	75
Adopted adults access to records/intermediary	217
Birth relatives' access to records/intermediary	77
Indirect contact	1872 children
Direct contact	52 children

### Training

A range of opportunities for parents to access training are provided by the adoption support service, which include:

- Incredible years training, (12-week course)
- Non-violent resistance course (10-week course)
- Sensory integration (6-week course)
- Therapeutic parenting - understanding developmental trauma (12-week course)
- Life story workshops (2-day course)

### Support Groups

A range of opportunities are available to adoptive parents to meet and seek support. Some are from other adoptive parents, such as We Are Family; a charity support community for adopters, commissioned by APSE to provide free access to support, programmes and resources created exclusively for the adoptive parent community. This includes an on-line adopter community and meet up groups for parents across our region.

The Adoption Support Team and Virtual Schools Kent host a joint 'drop-in' session every month. It is a time for parents to meet informally, chat to other parents or ask an adoption/education related question. The sessions last for one hour. These sessions are advertised through our mailing list and is available to adopters from Bexley, Kent, and Medway.

### Partnership working with Virtual Schools in the Region

Each local authority within the partnership has its own virtual school. The Virtual Heads meet with the Head of Service and other managers from the RAA on a

## Adoption Partnership South East

quarterly basis. They continue to support the service development with training, advice and resources alongside contributions to newsletters.

Adoptive parents are advised about the virtual schools and signposted to their website by the adoption service when appropriate. Although their services cannot provide a one-to-one service for every adopted child, they do speak with adoptive parents and work with adoption social workers. Coffee sessions for adopters are supported by all three virtual schools and this includes sessions in the evening to enable more parents to attend. These were well received by parents.

The wider regional working sub group for the south east is well established and continues to meet. This means professionals can share practice and ideas quickly.



## 9 – Voice of the Child – Participation & Engagement

The RAA commissions the Participation & Engagement Team within KCC's Virtual School to provide a service to all adopted children and young people across the region.

The team facilitates and organises various events for adopted children and young people, including:

- i. Young Person's Council - The Participation Team continue to work to support the work of the Adoption Partnership Southeast and help ensure adopted children and young people living in Bexley, Kent and Medway have opportunities to take part in a wide range of participatory activities. We aim to support the Adoption Partnership so the voice of adopted young people is embedded in all working practices. Children and young people from all three areas can now attend the 'Adoptables' group as well as face to face and virtual activities and events.
- ii. The Adoptables group held 6 face-to-face meetings throughout the last year with a membership of 20.
- iii. Participation Activity Days and Virtual Sessions - The Participation Team organised a range of virtual and face to face participation activities for adopted young people living in Bexley, Kent, and Medway. In the period of April 2022 to March 2023, the team organised 23 activities with 350 spaces being taken up. These included activities in the school holidays as well as 4 'Try Something New Saturday' sessions.
- iv. Participation Events - The adoption summer picnic is an annual event where adopted children and their families are invited to a relaxed, fun day where they can meet other families as well as staff from the Adoption Service and Participation Team. In the summer of 2022, a total of 43 family groups with 63 young people attended. Plans for the Summer picnic for 2023 are underway. A Christmas Party was held in December 2022 which 61 families with 89 children attended and this brought families together with staff for a fun filled afternoon.
- v. Our current apprentice who supports the Adoption workstreams, along with a former apprentice, are working with Social Workers to provide advice from a young person's perspective to prospective adopters during stage one preparation session of the adoption process.
- vi. The apprentices supported young person's interview panels for the positions of the new Head of the RAA and Service Manager positions.

## Young Person Feedback

*"With the Adoptables, we do meetings for people who are adopted, and we sometimes do activities after the meetings too, like roller skating and bowling. I think it's important to go to the Adoptables because we get to see new people and meet new friends and we're all adopted together."*

*"I go to Fun Days and we do things like horse riding, baking, aquapark, cooking, climbing, Mama Mia and Arts and Crafts. My favourite activities are horse riding, the aquapark and baking because I'm really good at swimming and baking. I would recommend people come over and try them out because they're really fun."*

## Parental Feedback

*"Thank you so much for yet another great morning of activities for (my daughter) and the other young folk. It has truly rounded off a great summer of fun for them and forged stronger friendships as a result."*

*"It is days like this which need to be captured and bottled as a way of showing how much you guys' matter in the lives of our adopted children. They know that they are with people who 'get them' and what they've been through."*

*"Keep doing what you are doing and as a parent, I can't thank you enough for what you've given them in the past two years. It's so lovely that the children who first encountered each other in little square boxes via TEAMS in lockdown are now building strong friendships with the common bond that they are adopted and in this environment that's totally normal."*

*"(My daughter) is really benefitting from this time with you all and I am so grateful to you for giving your time to do it. It's so nice to see her excited by a project again and it's lovely that she is doing it with someone other than me."*

*"Thank you very much to you and the Participation Team for the Betteshanger activity day on Wednesday. (My daughter) had a brilliant time, thank you so much for the support and encouragement you gave her."*

*"A massive thanks on behalf of all of us for what you laid on over the Easter holidays. (My son) loved the sublime science event and has talked nonstop about it, and equally (my daughter) loved the pizza making activity."*

*"We so appreciate these opportunities for our children to do these activities over their holidays, it really does make a difference to our holidays, breaking them up with engaging opportunities. Thank you."*

## 10 – Adopter Voice

The Adopter Advisory Board met quarterly during 2022/2023. The number of adoptive parents attending was variable, so there will be a review undertaken with adoptive parents to think about how best to hear their voice in the coming year.

Compliments - There are several forums for receiving feedback outlined below and some comments which are used to inform and improve practice and service delivery:

- Adopters' views at the time they attend the adoption panel for approval and a match.
- The views of others who attend the adoption panel including social workers from Bexley, Kent, and Medway and other adoption agencies if placing the child via inter-agency route.
- Adopters' views after they adopted - an electronic form was recently designed to capture adoptive parents' feedback after the adoption order is granted.
- Panel members attending panel training.
- Adopters attending the preparation training.
- Adopters receiving adoption support services - an electronic form was recently designed and is sent to parents, seeking their feedback after they received a service.
- The service also gathers feedback from adopters through national surveys and research such as the Adoption UK, Adoption Barometer

### Examples of feedback received by the Adoption service

*"I want to thank you for all your support during an extremely challenging time – both emotionally and process...that was important to me."*

*"Thank you so much for the support you've given us over these last few months: you've been pivotal in helping us get back to a place of stability and hope. [Our son] is doing really well and we feel connected again where at times we had felt completely broken. Thank you for helping us to mend back together."*

*"Thank you for all you have done for our family over the last few years. You have provided wonderful support and guidance and managed to get us the essential services for us and the boys as we have needed."*

*"I'd like to personally thank you for all your hard work and for listening, you've made a huge difference to us all."*

*"Feels like talking to a friend who just gets it."*

*"Thanks for your brill support."*

*"You were a marvel."*

### Mentoring feedback

*"It was really helpful to have an independent opinion of someone who has been through the process themselves."*

*"It was nice to have someone other than the Social Worker to talk to. Also, it was a very good sounding board for ideas and questions."*

*"Helped me to reflect on the process and put feelings into words."*

*"[My mentor] listened to me when the adoption became a bit overwhelming, and she was very sensitive."*

*"It was nice to have someone to speak about my feelings when our little one came to live with us."*

### Complaints

The Partnership agreed Kent County Council will be the lead partner on all complaints which relate either wholly or in part to the Adoption Partnership South East. Most of the concerns or issues raised in relation to the service provided by the Regional Adoption Agency are resolved through a problem-solving approach within the service as the service aims to respond quickly and with sensitivity. Between 1st April 2022- 31st March 2023, four Stage 1 complaints were received. One was received from a family living in Medway and three from adoptive parents living in Kent.



## 11 – Independent Feedback on the Service

### Ofsted

Kent County Council underwent an Inspection of its children's services (ILAC) in May 2022 and was awarded 'Outstanding' and the London Borough of Bexley was inspected in February 2023 and was graded 'Outstanding'.

The regional adoption agency participated in both inspections and managers, social workers and adoptive parents were interviewed by Inspectors. This experience highlighted the RAA's progress in relation to bringing staff together from three different local authority adoption teams and integrating new members of staff into the service. Those interviewed spoke positively and with confidence about the service and during their meetings, were able to articulate clearly how they work productively within the RAA and with the local authority partners, within a partnership model to meet the needs of children and families.

The report published in relation to Kent stated:

*Adoption is appropriately considered if this is the right plan for children. Children are sensitively prepared and supported on their journey to adoption. Adopters are very positive about their training, preparation and support for them and their children.*

Feedback received from The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Director of children's Services in Bexley stated:

*"Inspectors fed back very positively on our Adoption work and the difference that this is making to children which we know is the result of having high aspirations for children and the associated skilled and hard work to achieve this."*

### Adoption Support Brief Service Review

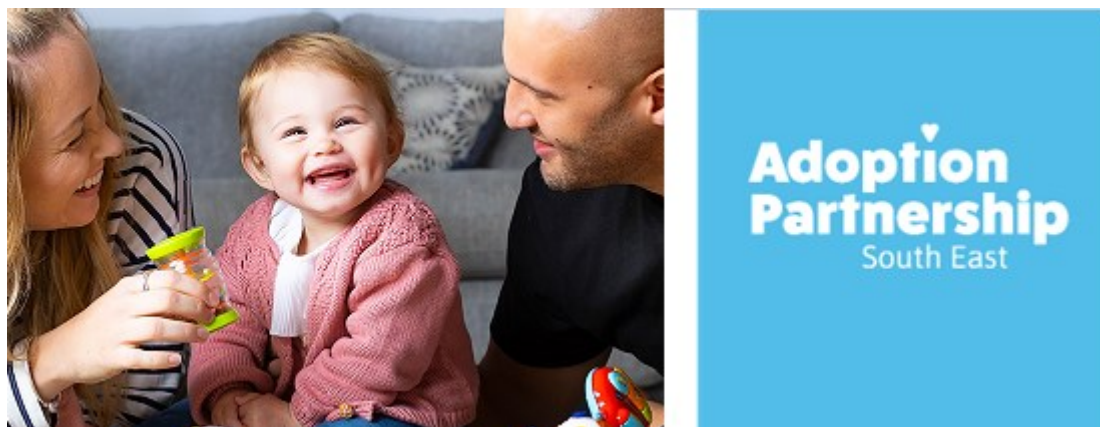
In 2022, RAA's were offered the opportunity of having an independent review of their adoption support services undertaken by an Independent Consultant commissioned by the National RAA Leadership group. This took place in August 2022 and a range of strengths were identified including positive comments about management and a commitment to ensuring staff are enabled to develop their practice and skills. It noted staff across the RAA are committed to providing a good service and are aspirational about continuous improvement.

The report was shared and discussed at the RAA governance board in March 2023.

## 12 – The National Workstream

There are now 32 RAAs across the country with only 3 local authorities not yet in the programme. A national project team was created with DfE funding which supports the work of RAA's and aims to deliver the government's national adoption strategy: Achieving excellence everywhere. RAA leaders work collaboratively on developing and improving practice and delivering improved outcomes for children and families nationally and they developed a 3-year plan with 3 key priorities: Recruitment, Child's Journey and Adoption Support. The Head of Adoption Partnership South East is engaged in the national forum of RAA Leaders and involved in several work streams with a view to delivering on the priority areas identified.

Managers from within Adoption Partnership South East are involved at several levels with the work of the national team. The Head of Service sits on the governance board and both she and the Service Managers are involved in several of the practice working groups in place to deliver on the national priorities.



## 13 – Developments using Grant Funding

Adoption Partnership South East is committed to building on the successful transition to a regional adoption agency, taking advantage of opportunities that arise to develop the service and work to continuously improve the services offered.

Adoption Partnership South East were successful in submitting three expressions of interest for DfE funding streams which run for between 2 – 3 years, up to March 2025. The funding secured is allowing 3 pilot developments:

- i. Early permanence 'wrap around support' - APSE developed an early permanence scheme now ready to be further developed. The grant funding enabled the development of a wraparound support service provided by therapeutically trained social workers who understand the complexities involved and are able to fully support our early permanence carers. This bid incorporates funding for staff development and training including the role out of Dyadic Developmental Practice, known as DDP training. DDP is a therapeutic parenting approach and model for practice using what is known about attachment and developmental trauma to help children and families with their relationships. This can be used to inform and strengthen adopter assessments, preparation, placement transitions and adoption support.
- ii. Enhanced family finding – the grant funding allowed for increased training and resources to support the care planning and family finding of siblings. This enabled resources within APSE to provide 'hands on' support to children's social workers to ensure there was a sibling assessment undertaken when considering adoption as the care plan. A good quality sibling assessment will determine what the local authority will propose to the court in relation to whether siblings should remain together, or if their individual needs are so great they would be best met by separating, with some level of contact put in place. The funding allowed for increased adoption social work resources to identify at an early-stage prospective adopters who can consider adopting siblings and ensuring they have the necessary training and enhanced support to feel equipped to support children in the early days of establishing their family.
- iii. Multi-disciplinary Centre of Excellence – this bid comprises of two components, firstly to scale up the existing therapy team within APSE, which consists of therapists funded by KCC, to support Kent families. This will allow for a consistent approach across the region and an evaluation of the impact for children and families, compared with always needing to outsource their

therapeutic intervention. The second part of our bid is to bring together a multi-agency group of professionals to help us have a better shared understanding of this group of children. It appears to be a common theme that, at times, multiple agencies struggle to support these families. The children's needs are complex, the family's needs are complex and the universal services may not fully understand the complexity in relation to adoption. The recently published Adoption UK Barometer 2023 details the views and analysis of the lived experience of adoption, from the creation of new adoptive families through to the experiences of adult adoptees. Their summary of recommendations is for "Free, accessible, high-quality support for adoptees of all ages, whenever they need it.

The summary and full report are available on their website: [Adoption Barometer | Adoption UK Charity](#).

## 14 – Conclusion

Children are at the heart of the RAA and staff and those supporting the service voluntarily work hard to hear and learn from those affected by adoption. Managers and staff within the service are committed to building on successes and ensuring quality, timely assessments are undertaken and active family finding to ensure children's adoption plans progress. April 2022 – March 2023 was a time of consolidation and development for the service and the creation of a three-year plan reinforces the direction of travel for the service. The vision of being a supportive and active adoption community within our region is the basis for all our work and the service is in an excellent place to develop and deliver on this in the coming years, under the capable leadership of a new Head of Service.

*Sarah Skinner*

**Sarah Skinner**

Head of Adoption Partnership South East

**June 2023**

## 15 – Appendices

**Appendix 1 Adoption Business Partnership**

**Appendix 2 APSE Structure Chart**

**Appendix 3 APSE SOP**

**Appendix 4 Panel Chairs Report**

**Appendix 5 Recruitment Strategy**



# Adoption Partnership

South East

Delivering adoption services for:



**Adoption Partnership South East vision: To achieve an outstanding adoption service by March 2023 that ensures legal permanence for children either within their birth/extended family or with non-related adults via Adoption.**

**In November 2020 Bexley, Kent and Medway Adoption Services became part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by joining in partnership. These agencies are building on the success of their pre-existing services to improve performance in meeting the needs of children who require permanence through adoption, by bringing together the best practice from each authority within the RAA.**

This document uses the National Minimum Standards (NMS) applicable to the provision of adoption services. The NMS together with the adoption regulations form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of adoption agencies and adoption support agencies.

## **Adoption Partnership Business Plan April 2023 – March 2024**

Adoption Partnership South East is committed to ensuring that children can remain in the care of their parents and birth families wherever possible. However, where it is not possible to achieve stability for the child within the birth family, we work to achieve alternative permanent arrangements for the child within a family setting and these include adoption. This Business Plan set out how Adoption Partnership intends to deliver its services to ensure timely progression for children whose care plan is adoption and the support that we aim to provide to them, their birth and adoptive families. It outlines Management and Leadership of the service to ensure the workforce is appropriately equipped to meet the requirements.

**Reviewed six monthly to ensure continuous development**

# Adoption Partnership

South East

Delivering adoption services for:



## Objective 1: Outcome / Value

The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the adoption process.

### NMS 1, 4,10,13,15,22

Aim	Action to be undertaken	Timescales	Lead	Performance Management	Outcome	Mid-Year Review
Securing permanence for children through a timely adoption process. Every stage of process child(ren)'s safeguarding needs are paramount and evidenced.	Ensure early permanence placements are used when it is assessed the right plan for the child.	Case-by-case	Early Permanence (EP) Team Manager	Weekly PPM tracking of unborn and children aged 0-7 subject to legal planning meetings and BLA.	20% of children placed for adoption will have been placed in an early permanence placement.	
	Continue to develop Early Permanence wraparound service	March 2025	Head of Service	Quarterly review with National Steering Group	Fully established wraparound service for all EP placements	



# Adoption Partnership

South East

Delivering adoption services for:



	Development of Enhanced Family Finding for sibling groups with an adoption plan	March 2025	Service Manager(s)	Quarterly review with National Steering Group	Informed decision making for sibling groups	
	Facilitate timely adoption plan decisions	Agreed within 42 days of initiation	Panel Team Manager	Weekly Tracking using PowerBI	Timely permanency plans agreed	
	Every child with an adoption plan decision is allocated a Family Finding Social Worker	Recommended match should be within 183 days (6 months) of the agency decision	Family Finding (FF) Team Manager; EP Team Manager	Weekly tracking using PowerBI; audits; supervision	At the point of placement order being granted, every child has a robust and detailed profile of their matching needs	
	Every child with a placement order will be matched and placed with best possible adoptive family.	A child should be matched within 121 days (4 months) from placement order date.  Every child will	FF Team Manager; EP Team Manager	Weekly tracking using PowerBI; audits; supervision.	Child(ren) matched and placed with adoptive family without delay. Where this is not achieved, there is a clear rationale and	

# Adoption Partnership

South East

Delivering adoption services for:



		<p>be placed within 14 months (426 days) of becoming a LAC.</p> <p>If no internal link at point of placement order, permission to seek inter-agency placement to be sought</p>		<p>Inter-agency tracking sheet</p>	<p>management oversight.</p>	
	<p>Matching rationale and support needs are reflected in adoption placement report. Safeguarding needs will be identified and addressed.</p>	<p>Two weeks prior to panel.</p>	<p>FF and Panel Team Managers; EP Team Manager</p>	<p>QA of cases presented to panel for match by Panel Adviser; Panel Members; LA ADM.</p>	<p>All matches reflect good/outstanding quality adoption placement report and meet national</p>	

# Adoption Partnership

South East

Delivering adoption services for:




					minimum standards.	
	<p>Children and adoptive parents are robustly supported pre-order/post placement</p> <p>Each child and family have a bespoke adoption support plan in place and Adoption Support Fund applications sought where required for early support</p>	Adoption Order applied for after ten weeks	Recruitment & Assessment Team Managers (RAS), EP Team Manager, Family Finding Team Manager	Weekly tracking using PowerBI; audits; supervision; ASF data	Legal permanence secured for child(ren)	
	All children placed for adoption will have a Life Story Book	Within 10 working days of adoption ceremony	FF, RAS & EP Team Managers	Monthly tracking using PowerBI; audits; supervision	All adopted children have a high-quality Life Story Book that their adoptive parents can use	

# Adoption Partnership

## South East

Delivering adoption services for:



Securing permanence for children through an effective recruitment strategy ensuring they are safeguarded	Have a clear recruitment strategy agreed by Partnership Board.	Annually	Head of RAA	Partnership Board governance	Recruitment Strategy implementation	Completed  Recruitment Strategy 2022.pdf
	Provide a welcoming and responsive approach to initial enquiries to set tone for service	Ongoing	Adoption Advisory Officer (AAO)	Service user feedback; supervision; audits; mystery shopper.	Applicants receive a responsive welcome and want to proceed with application	
	Provide a bespoke and dynamic Adoption Partnership website and social media presence.	Ongoing	AAO	Monitor website traffic and social media followers/interaction; People and Communications reports.	Raise profile of agency online	

# Adoption Partnership

South East

Delivering adoption services for:



	Recruit sufficient adopters for the children of the RAA	April 2023 – March 2024	RAS/EP Team Managers	Monitor BI Case audits Supervision	Sufficiency of 1.2 adoptive households per child; 90% of children are placed with APSE adopters	
	Recruitment is led by the needs of the child(ren) and prioritisation will be given to applicants able to consider early permanence, sibling groups and children with complex needs, specific matching requirements such as ethnicity and/or religion. Risks around safeguarding will also be assessed.	Stage One review	RAS/EP Team Managers	Weekly tracking using PowerBI; audits; supervision.	77 adopter households are approved.	

# Adoption Partnership

## South East

Delivering adoption services for:



	<p>Adopters in Stage Two are assessed and approved within DfE requirements. Safeguarding issues will need to be assessed as part of this.</p>	Four months	RAS/EP Team Managers	Weekly tracking using PowerBI; audits; supervision	<p>Stage Two assessments are completed within timescale. Where this is not achieved, there is a clear rationale and management oversight.</p>	
	<p>All assessing SWs are offered support and training to ensure that all applicants are assessed robustly</p>	Monthly & panel approvals	Panel Team Manager; RAS & EP TMs	Grading of cases presented to panel for approval by Panel Adviser; Panel Members; Head of RAA; monthly supervision.	<p>All approvals reflect good/outstanding quality assessments and meet national minimum standards.</p>	
	<p>Embed mentoring support for APSE families pre-order</p>	Ongoing	HoS; AAO	Monthly review meetings; supervision of MSA	<p>Strong team of mentors available to offer to adopters at point of approval.</p>	

# Adoption Partnership

## South East

Delivering adoption services for:



	<p>Once child(ren) placed with adopters, families will be supported by adoption Social Worker through visits and support calls in accordance with support plan. Any safeguarding concerns will be addressed and LA safeguarding procedures followed. Should adopters need additional support then an assessment will be carried out to identify appropriate additional provision</p>	<p>Frequency to be determined on needs of individual families and agreed with manager</p>	<p>RAS and EP Team Managers</p>	<p>Audits; supervision.</p>	<p>Legal permanence secured for child(ren)</p>	
	<p>Safeguarding and mandatory eLearning training completed and annually refreshed by staff</p>	<p>Annually</p>	<p>Team Managers</p>	<p>PDPs; LA reporting mechanisms.</p>	<p>All staff complete and refresh course</p>	

## Objective 2: Outcome / Value

- Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from appropriate parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life. Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- Children's wishes and feelings are important and will be actively sought and fully considered at all stages of the adoption process.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. To help children develop this, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, and sexuality need to be properly recognised and positively valued and promoted.

The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.

**NMS 1,2,5,6,7,10,11,12,13,14,15,17,18,27**

Aim	Action to be undertaken	Timescale	Lead	Performance Management	Outcome	Updates
Adopted children thrive in all aspects of their lives within their adoptive families and are supported through the transition into adulthood.	Matching needs for every child are considered at the earliest stage possible and reviewed regularly.	One month after ADM decision; reviewed monthly thereafter	EP & FF Team Managers	Supervision and matching meetings	All children placed for adoption have an individualised and robust support plan.	



# Adoption Partnership

South East

Delivering adoption services for:



	Adoptive parents can request that their support plan is reviewed.	Up to age of 21 (or 25 with EHCP)	Adoption Support Team Managers	Adoption Support assessment; Support & Advice line; Feedback from families	Families are well supported	
	Continued delivery of life story work to parents	Individual where identified in support plans:  Ongoing  Workshops: 2 x a year for the workshop  Monthly support group session	AS Team Managers	Tracking data	Adopters feel able to support children with their life story	
	Children's voice is heard throughout their care planning process and adoption journey	Permanency Planning meetings	Early Permanency Planning Leads; EP Team Manager; FF Team Manager	Audits; Supervision	Child's wishes and feelings are considered at all stages of permanency	

# Adoption Partnership

South East

Delivering adoption services for:



	(including non-agency adoptions)  We ensure that every child with a plan for adoption is visited by an APSE SW and receives a Children's Guide to Adoption	Adoption Plan decision  Family Finding allocation, support visits, and matching.  Rule 14 submission  Adoption Support assessment	Panel Adviser; Panel Team Manager  FF SW; FF Team Manager  RAS SW; RAS Team Manager  AS TMs		planning and are reflected in records throughout process.	
	Develop Children's Guide to Adoption Support with input from young adoptees	October 2023	AS Service Manager; AS Team Managers	Mid-year review of Business Plan	Completed guide available and shared	
	Development of Participation Groups and activities for	Ongoing	AS Service Manager	Quarterly data reports received from VSK,	Children feel positive about having been adopted; increase	

# Adoption Partnership

South East

Delivering adoption services for:



	adopted children across the region.			feedback from participants.	representation in Bexley and Medway	
	Strengthening the Adoptables group	Ongoing	AS Service Manager	Quarterly data reports from VSK.	Champion the voice of adopted young people; increase membership in Bexley and Medway	
	Review and provide an effective use of Learning and Development workshops and Parenting Programme for 2023/24 financial year.	Ongoing	AS Team Managers	Supervision; Feedback forms; Data reports	Increased use and positive feedback from adopters	

# Adoption Partnership

South East

Delivering adoption services for:



## Objective 3: Outcome / Value

Where a child cannot be cared for in a suitable manner in their own country, intercountry adoption may be considered as an alternative means of providing a permanent family. **NMS 11,14**

Aim	Action to be undertaken	Timescale	Lead	Performance Management	Outcome	Updates
Ensure children from other countries for whom adoption is the plan are supported and timely assessments are completed	Commissioned inter-country adoption RAA	Annual renewal	Head of RAA	6 monthly reports	Service provided	Contract is in place

## Objective 4: Outcome / Value

Children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected

### NMS 12, 15

Aim	Action to be undertaken	Timescales	Lead	Performance Management	Outcomes	Updates
Provide responsive and positive service to children, birth parents/guardians and families and adoptive parents and families.	Develop consistency of quality services for birth families, adult adoptees and facilitate post order contact, either directly or indirectly	Ongoing	Head of RAA; AS Service Manager; AS Team Managers	Quarterly data reviews; contract reviews	A 'good, accessible' quality service provided.	CAFIS are contracted to provide support for region. Work is underway to transfer contact arrangements for Bexley & Medway children to CAFIS
	Conclude re-tendering process; award contract and	October 2023	HoS	Contract awarded	Provider in place	

# Adoption Partnership

South East

Delivering adoption services for:



	transition to new provider if required					
	Review and reconfigure RAA Adoption Advisory Board with input from adopters and Adoption staff.	October 2023	HoS; Service Managers; AAO.	Review minutes/actions of meetings; feedback from adopters	Established and effective advisory board meetings	
	Develop adopter-led support groups with We Are Family	October 2023	Service Manager; Adopter Advisory Board	Group establishment and membership; evaluation/feedback	Six adopter-led support groups established across region	
	Review parent mailing list	April 2023	HoS; AAO.	Mailing is updated to include personal specifics; reviewed at Business Plan mid-year meeting	Mailing is refined to target specific demographics with correspondence	

## Target 5: Outcome / Value

Records are clear, accurate, up to date and stored securely, and contribute to an understanding of the child's life.

Aim	Action to be undertaken	Timescales	Lead	Performance Management	Outcomes	Updates
A clear narrative for families through timely, accurate record keeping	All staff to complete relevant LA and AP induction plans.	For new staff to complete within first month of employment	Team Managers	Supervision	Employees integrate well into and across the organisation.	
	Ensure all Adoption Service staff are aware of partner's recording policies guideline and are trained and competent in the use of case	Refresh training for current staff where required.	Team Managers	Supervision	Case recording is accurate and up to date	

# Adoption Partnership

South East

Delivering adoption services for:



	management systems.					
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## Objective 6: Outcome / Value

The agency is managed ethically, effectively, and efficiently and delivering a good quality service which meets the needs of children and other service users.

### NMS 25

Aim	Action to be undertaken	Timescales	Lead	Performance Management	Outcomes	Updates
Ensure Adoption Partnership South East complies with legislation, national and local authority policies and procedures.	Completion of Panel chairs report	October 2023 April 2024	Team Managers, Panel Team	Meetings with Panel chairs	Delivery of Panel Chairs report	
	Annual Report on service delivery & outcomes	July 2023	Service Manager	Annual Report is produced and shared with Members	Full understanding and agreement of direct of travel for RAA	
	Increase use of electronic feedback forms for service users	October 2023	Service Managers	Performance report; mid-year Business Plan review	Gaining insight and responding to lived experience	

# Adoption Partnership

South East

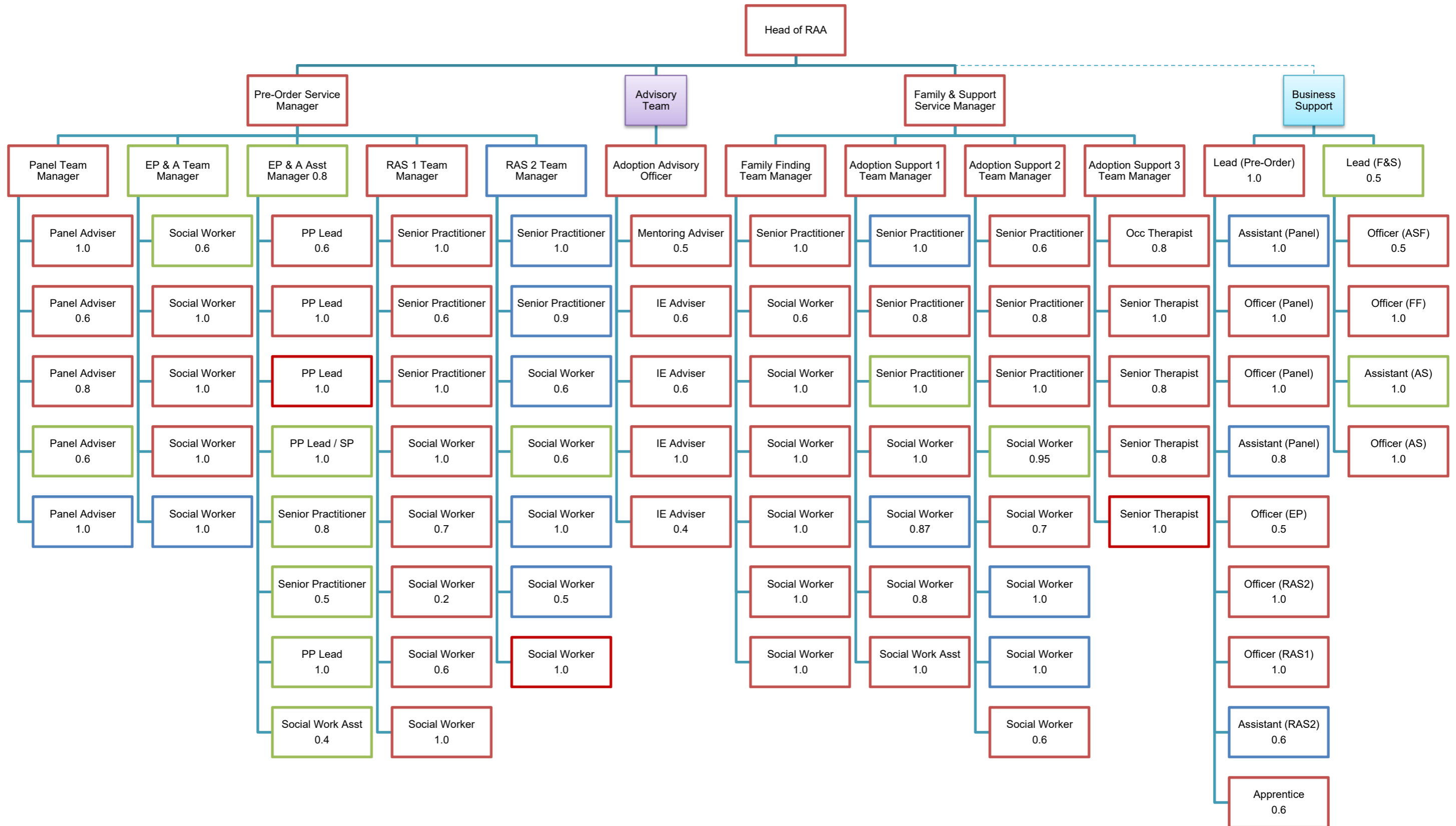
Delivering adoption services for:



	Maintain TriX site for Adoption Partnership	October 2023	HoS	Review deadlines met	Staff and service users can access policies and procedures	
	Effective RAA Partnership Board and governance structure	Quarterly	HoS	Reports, minutes, Business Plan, and reviews	Ownership by each LA Partners and RAA to achieving the Statement of Purpose	
	Meaningful involvement in the national RAA Leaders forum and implementation of best practice initiatives.	Monthly	HoS	Self-assessment against 'best practice' from around the country	APSE is a key 'driver' in identifying and delivering best practice	



Structure Chart





## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

**2023 - 2024**

A smaller blue circle containing the text "By your side" in white, stacked vertically. The word "By" is at the top, "your" is in the middle, and "side" is at the bottom.

**By  
your  
side**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services, that an adoption service produces a statement of purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that it provides. It can be used by children and young people and families as a guide to what they should expect a service to provide and to do.

This document is the Statement of Purpose for Adoption Partnership South East, a Regional Adoption Agency, which was established on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020. It is a shared adoption service working on behalf of the London Borough of Bexley, Kent County Council and Medway Council.

The regional agency is operated under the terms of a Partnership Agreement, which confirms the legal and governance arrangements; the budget; staffing and funding contributions for the three local authorities.

The Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with:

- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- Care Planning Regulations 2010
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011)
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Local Authority Regulations 2005
- Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012
- Care Planning, placement and Case and fostering services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Standards Act 2000.

Adoption Agencies are inspected against these standards by Ofsted.

## 2. PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

The requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 underpin the principles and values of our service:

#### Principles and Core Values:

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond and where possible this should be within their own family
- The Child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process
- The Child's wishes and feelings will be considered at all stages
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible
- The child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, and sexuality will be fully recognised, positively valued, and promoted when decisions are made
- The needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and considered when decisions are made
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many organisations, professionals and individuals who must work together to deliver to meet the needs of the services
- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and offered a support service.

#### Equal Opportunities:

The adoption service abides by equal opportunities legislation and the policies of each Partner. The service works positively and respectfully with all service users and partner agencies regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or age.

Every attempt will be made to secure an adoptive family which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs considering their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender, and disability considering the need to avoid undue delay.

### 3. THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE AGENCY

The agency is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 by:

1. Ensuring the provision of a high-quality adoption service which guarantees the best possible standards of care, safety and protection for children or young people who are looked after and who need adoptive placements
2. Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services
3. Working in partnership with adoptive families and other agencies ensuring the service is based on statutory requirements and good practice within the principles of value for money for the agency.

### Objectives of the agency

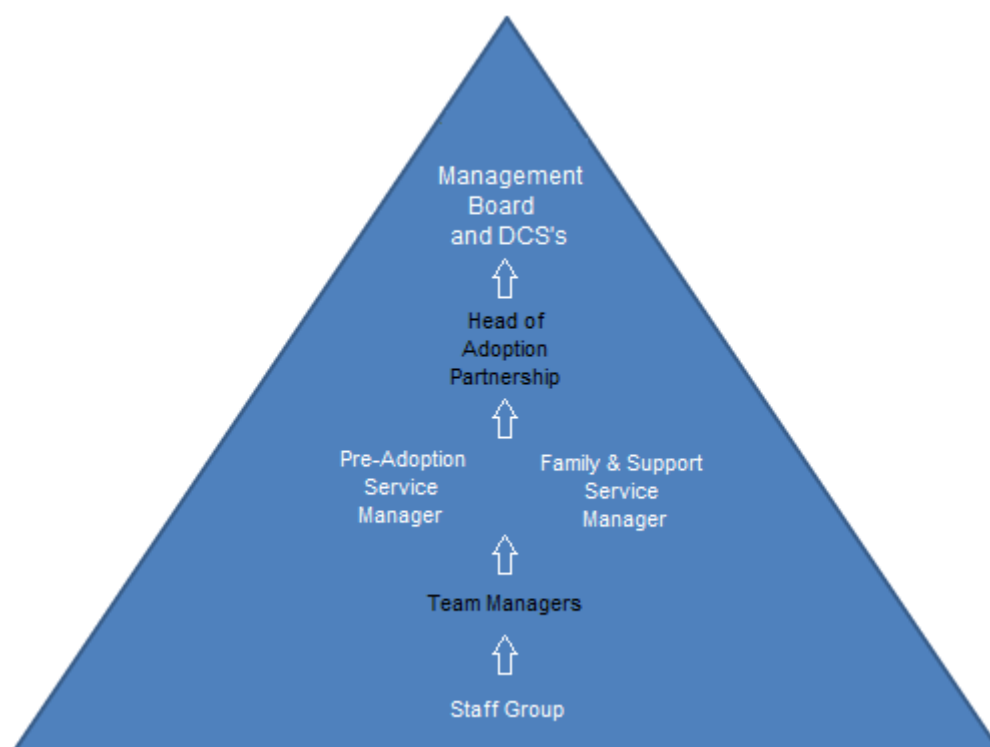
1. To recruit, assess and provide adopters that meet the needs of the children to be placed for adoption within the timescales laid down by National Adoption Standards
2. To provide information on the process to applicants interested in becoming adopters and on the children requiring adoption
3. To ensure that adopters receive appropriate preparation, training, support, and advice to enable them to offer the best possible standards of parenting, safety and protection for children or young people in their care
4. To minimise delay in family finding, always paying attention to the needs of the child
5. To provide information on the services available to all those affected by adoption recognising that as adoption has lifelong implications for all those involved, their needs will change over time
6. To provide a range of adoption support services to birth relatives, adopted adults, adopters, and their children in partnership with other agencies
7. To provide information on the service that is available to those wishing to adopt from abroad
8. To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair
9. That concerns about the service are addressed and that information about the complaint procedure is made available
10. That the organisation regularly reviews the services it provides, consults with, and learns from, those in receipt of their services through comments, compliments, and complaints.



## 4. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

### Governance:

The Head of Service reports quarterly to a Partnership Management Board, which is comprised of Director of Children's Services and Senior Officers from each partner local authority with representation drawn from the wider professional network. The Chair is rotated on an annual basis.

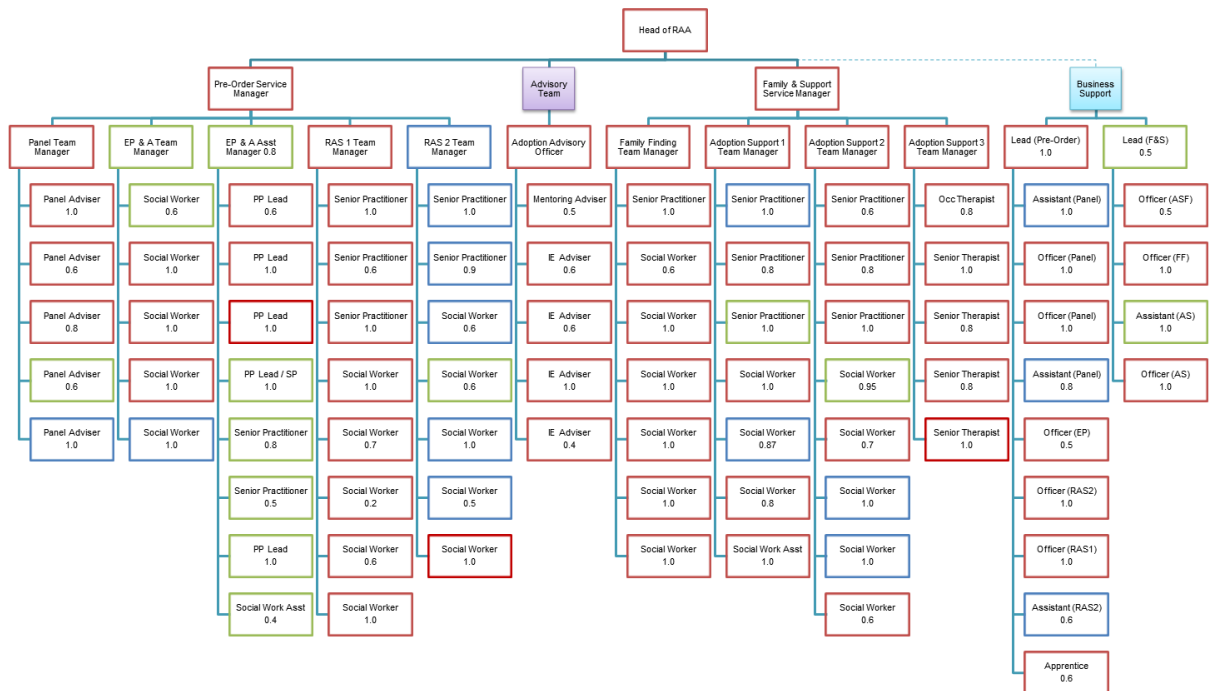


Adoption Partnership South East is managed by a Head of Service, two Service Managers, one of whom is responsible for the pre-adoption order work streams and one who is responsible for overseeing family finding and adoption support. There are nine teams, and the agency has a total of 90 members of staff working within it.

- One Advisory Team
- One Panel Team
- One Early Permanence team
- Two Recruitment, Assessment and Support teams
- One Family Finding team
- Three Adoption Support teams
- Each Team is supported by Business Support Officers who are line managed centrally by their respective local authorities.

The service is staffed as follows:

	Head of Service	Service Manager	Project Officer	Team Manager	Senior Practitioner	Panel Adviser	PPM Lead	Social Worker	Adoption Advisory Officer	Social Work Assistant	Senior Therapist	Mentoring Support Advisor	Initial Enquiries Advisor	Business Support Officer	Business Support Apprentice	TOTAL
Service Management	1	2	1						1							5
Panel				1		5										6
Early Permanence				1	2		4	4		1						12
Recruitment & Assessment 1				1	3			6								10
Recruitment & Assessment 2				1	3			4								8
Family Finding				1	3			6								10
Adoption Support 1				1	4			2		1						8
Adoption Support 2				1	3			4		1						9
Adoption Support Clinical Team				1							4					5
Advisory Team											1	3				4
Business Support														3	12	15
																92



## 5. THE WORK OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

Adoption Partnership South East provides an adoption service directly and indirectly to:

- Children in need of an adoptive family
- Birth families directly and indirectly
- People wishing to become parents of a non-related child through adoption.
- Reconstituted families wishing to adopt a related child
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Adults who have been adopted seeking their records

The service undertakes the following tasks:

- Recruitment of prospective adoptive
- Assessment and preparation of adopters
- Support for families waiting for a child to be placed with them
- Family finding for children who need a permanent home through adoption. The family finding team become involved with every child where adoption may be the plan during the decision-making process and takes the lead in family finding at the earliest point possible
- Advice, guidance, and support to adoptive families during the matching process
- Advice, guidance and support to children and their adoptive families after an adoption order has been granted which can include attending workshops and training, and accessing online support groups
- Adoption support assessments for adoptive families
- The commissioning and delivery of therapeutic support, using the Adoption Support Fund.
- Relative/stepparent adoption assessments
- Those wishing to adopt from abroad are referred to another Regional Adoption Agency that provide a service under commissioning contracts.
- Commissioning of independent services to provide support to those affected by adoption

Information about all aspects of the adoption service can be accessed via the Adoption Partnership Initial Enquiries Team:

- <https://www.adoptionpartnershipsoutheast.org.uk/>
- [Adoption.Partnership@Kent.gov.uk](mailto:Adoption.Partnership@Kent.gov.uk)
- 03000 422373

All enquirers are followed through by an adoption advisor.

Office addresses:

- Bexley Council, Civic Offices, 2 Watling Street, Bexleyheath, DA6 7AT
- Kent County Council, Invicta House, Maidstone, ME14 1XX
- Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4TR

## 6. THE SERVICE TO PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

### Enquiries and first contact

Enquirers can access information on adopting with Adoption Partnership via the Adoption Agency website: [www.adoptionpartnershipsoutheast.org.uk](http://www.adoptionpartnershipsoutheast.org.uk) or make contact through the dedicated advice line. At first contact, enquirers are sent an online information pack and link to an information video. This pack provides enquirers with the information to help them decide if adoption is right for them and their family.

### Consultation Sessions

Enquirers who decide they would like to progress their interest contact the Initial Enquiry team who open them up onto our system and complete an initial enquiry form with them. The enquirer is then booked on to one of our consultation sessions. These sessions are in person and run monthly, with an additional bi monthly event for enquirers interested in the Early Permanence scheme. The consultation sessions are small events giving enquirers an opportunity to meet an adopter and have a one-to-one consultation with an adoption social worker to discuss the next steps of adoption, the timing of this and answer any questions they might have.

### Registration of Interest

Following the consultation session, the enquirer will be invited to contact the Initial Enquiry team and inform them of the decision as to whether they would like to start an adoption assessment. For all enquirers wishing to be assessed a Registration of Interest will be emailed on and on return of this document on of the recruitment team manager will sign it off and allocate to a social worker.

At this stage, the enquirer becomes known as a prospective adopter(s).

### Stage 1 - Pre-assessment process

Stage One begins on the day that Adoption Partnership accepts the registration of interest from the prospective adopter(s) and should normally take 2 months to complete. The allocated social worker will contact the prospective adopters to complete the stage one agreement and arrange for a home visit to take place during stage one.

The stage one process will include the following:

- All the statutory references/checks will be completed including the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check
- The prospective adopter(s) will complete an adoption medical as soon as possible. This will be considered by the adoption agency medical advisor, who will provide advice about any concerning medical issues

- The prospective adopter(s) will be expected to attend training/preparation sessions. This will give prospective adopter(s) more detailed information and will allow them to meet experienced adopters who can help answer questions that they have
- An adoption social worker will be provided to support prospective adopters on completing the stage 1 process and an agreement will be drawn up with prospective adopters detailing expectations

### Preparation sessions

Prospective adopters will be invited to attend preparation sessions in Stage One and Stage Two. The process will be delayed if applicants are unable to attend initial preparation, and a clear indication of their availability will be ascertained. They will also be encouraged to access e-learning components on the First4Adoption website and will be given a one-year subscription to the PACT Adopter hub when they complete stage one.

Preparation groups for first time adopters usually run approximately 10 times per year based on need. Repeat adopter training is provided at regular intervals across the region, as is early permanence carer preparation group training.

### Stage 2 – The assessment process

The stage two assessment process cannot begin until stage one has successfully been completed (apart from repeat adopters and foster carer adoptions, see next page).

Stage two begins when prospective adopters notify the agency of their wish to continue with the process. The prospective adopter(s) have 6 months from the completion of stage one to provide this notification. From the date of receipt of this notification, the stage two process is a 4-month long period during which a home study assessment is undertaken. This leads to a panel recommendation and an Agency Decision about suitability to adopt.

The prospective adopter(s) will be allocated an adoption social worker to complete their assessment. A Stage Two plan will be drawn up between the social worker and the prospective adopter(s) agreeing arrangements for the assessment process and a provisional panel date.

The assessment will involve a series of home visits utilising a variety of assessment tools and will include additional checks including school, nursery, ex-partner, employers, and personal referees will also be visited.

Based on the information in the assessment the adoption social worker will write a Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR). This is a very detailed report providing information about the prospective adopter(s) and their background. The report will reach a conclusion about the prospective adopters(s) suitability to adopt, and the applicants will have up to 5 working days to comment on their completed assessment before it is presented to the adoption panel.

If the agency reaches a decision during the stage 2 process that they cannot recommend approval and/or if the agency decision maker decides not to agree the approval, the prospective adopter(s) will be able to request a review by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The IRM is an independent body that can scrutinize the decisions of adoption agencies.

### Adoption by existing foster carers

Foster carers should notify the service in writing of their wish to be considered as adopters for a child or children in their care. If the child/children's plan is for adoption, this will be acknowledged and a meeting held between workers from the adoption and fostering teams and the child's social worker to consider how this should be progressed and will be discussed with the foster carers, who will also be informed of their legal rights.

A fast-track process will be provided for approved foster carers who want to be assessed as adoptive parents. Stage one and two of the adoption processes will take place concurrently to avoid delay. They will be offered training.

### Repeat adopters

Families who have already been assessed as adopters can apply to adopt again if there is a year's gap following their child's adoption order being made and a 2-year age gap between their child and a potential new child. In this case, they would express an interest in adopting again and be offered a home visit to discuss their circumstances. If it is appropriate to proceed, they would then complete the registration of interest form and start the process. Depending on the circumstances of the family stage one and two of the process may run sequentially or concurrently. They would be offered training.

If their interest is in respect of a subsequent sibling or half sibling of a child they have already adopted, the timescales and age gap would not necessarily apply. This assessment would be given high priority and the home visit would involve the child's social worker too. In these cases, stage one and two would run concurrently.

### Applications for adoptions from overseas

Inter-country adoption is a specialist area of work, as each country has its own rules and regulations regarding adoption. The Inter country Adoption Agency, a specialist Regional Adoption Agency is commissioned to provide a service for families living within the Adoption Partnership region. Applicants pay a fee for their assessment service, including the home study and then further fees for safeguarding checks etc.

### Adoption panel

The main purpose of the Adoption Panel is to consider and make recommendations to the adoption agency on the following:

- People to be approved as adoptive parents
- Whether an assessment to approve adopters should continue following a brief report to panel
- Approval of the match between children and adopters and
- The placement of children for adoption where their birth parents desire adoption to be the plan.

Adoption Partnership South East holds weekly adoption panels; four adoption per month. The panels each have an Independent Chair with experience of adoption.

Membership of the panels meets the statutory regulations and takes its members from a central list. Members include those who have personal experience of adoption and others with relevant skills and experience and aim to reflect the diversity of the population of the region.

All applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel. The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who will make their decision following careful consideration of the recommendations and all the information presented at panel. The Decision Maker must make their decision within 7 working days of the recommendation of the panel. They may make a different decision to that recommended by the panel.

Adoption Partnership South East has an Agency Decision Maker to consider the approval of prospective adopters; Decision Making for children to be placed for adoption is considered by the Agency Decision Maker in the child's home local authority.

Decisions are notified to a child's parent(s), guardian(s) and prospective adopter(s). Social workers will be informed of the agency decision within 2 working days

The decision will be confirmed in writing within 5 working days.

## 7. BEYOND APPROVAL



## Matching and support

### For adopters:

Adoption Social Workers ensure that adopters have access to local support networks and specialist national organisations such as the Adopter hub, PACT, Coram BAAF and We Are Family.

The adopter(s) social worker will help to identify suitable matches with an individual child or a sibling group and will provide support and guidance throughout the whole process. Prospective adopters are referred to Link Maker, with their agreement, if no match has been identified or sooner if it is felt appropriate to do so.

Each child where adoption is a likely plan will have an allocated worker from the family finding team. The family finder works closely with the child's social worker to consider matches for that child.

When a match is being considered, adopters are given the Child Permanence Report and all appropriate written information about the child, their background and assessed needs. The report will include details of any proposal for keeping in touch arrangements including contact, or exchange of information through the letterbox system with the birth family that will operate once the child is adopted.

Adopters meet with the child's social worker and other professionals relevant for that child; medical advisors; child's foster carers; to enable them to make an informed decision regarding their ability to meet the needs of the child.

Details of the level of parental responsibility that will be delegated to the prospective adopters will be outlined and any adoption support, including any financial arrangements will also be discussed. The proposals for the placement will then be set out in the adoption placement report, which will be seen by the prospective adopters before panel and comments and observations will be included in the panel documentation.

### Process for the matching of a child

The child's social worker, the prospective adopters and their social worker will attend the Adoption Panel. The process for panel is the same as for approval with recommendations being made to the Agency Decision Maker who will make the decision on whether the adopters are suitable for a particular child.

If a match is agreed an 'introductions planning meeting' is arranged to plan for the introduction and placement of the child. This meeting will involve the foster carer for the child, the prospective adopters, and the relevant social workers. The meeting will establish that the adoptive family has all the information available about the child and will draw up a timetable and process for the introductions, monitoring and support.

There are some variations to this process if prospective adoptive parent(s) are taking the Early Permanency Route to adoption, are second time adopters or foster carers adopting the child they have been fostering. These differences will be carefully explained to prospective adoptive parents from the beginning of their adoption process with us.

### Annual reviews of prospective adopters

If it is not possible to move to a match within 12 months from approval, the adoption social worker and their manager will conduct a review of the plans and checks, and references may need to be updated. If no placement has been made within two years of approval, an updated report will go to adoption panel for consideration.

### Meeting birth parents

Most adopters will meet the child's birth parents either prior to placement, or once the child is placed and settled. They will be supported by their social workers in a suitable venue. The benefit of meeting birth parents is so adoptive parents can talk to their child about their birth family and aid the exchange of information.

### After placement

Visits will be made by both the child's social worker and the family's adoption social worker. These are based on both statutory requirements and the individual needs of the child and prospective adopter(s).

The child remains a 'looked after' child until an Adoption Order is made. The child must be visited in the first week of placement, followed by weekly visits up to the child's first statutory review at 4 weeks post placement, when the pattern of visiting will be discussed and agreed but will be not less than six weeks. The child's review will determine when an application to adopt may be made and advice will be given by the worker for the prospective adopters. The Annex A report for court will be prepared by both the family's and child's social workers.

A Life story book is prepared by the family finding social worker and adoption social worker in conjunction with the adopters. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that a "later life letter" is completed before the Adoption Order is made, which will give an account of the circumstances of the adoption.

Adopters are provided with a peer mentor who is an adoptive parent, who can offer informal support and advice.

### Keeping in touch contact service

Support with keeping in touch (contact) arrangements between adopted children and their birth families are commissioned by the agency from Barnardo's. The service is called Connecting Adoptive Families Independent Service (CAFIS). All contact arrangements will be reached having taken account of what is in the best interests of the child and will be specified in the Adoption Support Plan before a child is placed. Keeping in touch arrangements may include letterbox contact or face-to-face meetings between the child and members of his/her birth family, including parents, siblings, or extended family members.

Support and supervision of direct contact may be agreed and arranged where necessary and supported by Barnardo's CAFIS.

As a child grows and her/his needs change, a review of keeping in touch, (contact) arrangements will be facilitated by Barnardo's CAFIS to ensure the arrangement previously made continues to meet their needs.

## 8. ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

Adoption Partnership South East provides a comprehensive adoption support service for all those affected by adoption.

The adopters' social worker will ensure that adopters have access to local support networks and specialist organisations, through a variety of subscriptions to other agencies, including Coram BAAF, National Association for Therapeutic Parenting, (NATP) New Family Social, and We Are Family. We have a mailing list with whom we share information and publicise events and other resources as well as using social media to share information with adoptive parents and others.

The agency has 2 specialist adoption social work support teams, and one clinical team, comprising of Therapists who are qualified in a range of clinical interventions. The agency will also 'spot purchase' external provisions when the internal clinical team are not able to provide the service needed.

The adoption support service provides adoption support services in line with the "Adoption Passport" according to individual circumstances.

### For adoptive families:

- Access to a support and advice line
- Access to an assessment of need, resulting in a support package based on the family's identified needs, including consideration of making an application to the Adoption Support Fund.
- Access to support groups
- Access to a learning and development programme and workshops
- Access to therapeutic support groups
- Access to therapists and a range of therapeutic interventions
- Access to support with education via Virtual Schools in each local authority
- Assistance and review of contact arrangements between adopters and birth relatives
- Twice yearly social event for adoptive families

### For adopted children and young people:

- Social groups and activities
- Offering training and advice for schools to help teachers understand adopted children's needs
- Working with children in their adoptive families around understanding their life stories
- Signposting to other organisations designed to help adopted children

### Services for those affected by adoption

The RAA commissions independent services from Barnardo's to support those affected by adoption. The Service is a bespoke service to families eligible to receive support from Adoption Partnership South East. The Service is called CAFIS - Connecting Adoptive Families Independent Service

#### For birth relatives:

- Birth parents whose children have a plan of adoption or who have been adopted can access a confidential and independent advice and counselling service through Barnardo's CAFIS
- Support with keeping in touch (contact) arrangements between birth families and their adopted child is provided through Barnardo's CAFIS, as outlined above. All contact arrangements will be reached having taken account of what is in the best interests of the child and will be specified in the Adoption Support Plan before a child is placed. Keeping in touch arrangements may include letterbox contact or face-to-face meetings between the child and members of his/her birth family, including parents, siblings, or extended family members
- Support and supervision of direct contact may be agreed and arranged where necessary and supported by Barnardo's CAFIS
- Enabling parents to record on their child's file whether they wish to have contact with their child from the age of 18

#### For adopted adults:

- Access to their birth records is delivered through Barnardo's CAFIS. A self-referral process is in place
- Discussion and advice is available from Barnardo's CAFIS for those affected by adoption regarding potentially wishing to make contact with birth relatives

Information about our Adoption Services can be accessed via our Adoption Partnership Advice Line:

- 03000 422373
- <https://www.adoptionpartnershipsoutheast.org.uk/>
- [adoption.partnership@kent.gov.uk](mailto:adoption.partnership@kent.gov.uk)

Barnardo's CAFIS can be contacted via:

- 01795 532081
- [CAFISkent@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:CAFISkent@barnardos.org.uk)

## 9. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

Adoption staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals of their performance. Training needs are identified and met through in-house training or through externally commissioned trainers.

A management information system and government score card is in place which ensures reporting of accurate information about adoption.

Adoption Agencies are monitored by external inspections carried out by Ofsted.

There is regular adoption panel training to ensure that panel members keep up to date with current issues. Panel members also have annual appraisals.

Regular feedback is received from the Adoption Panels and twice-yearly meetings are held between the Management team, Panel Chairs and Agency Decision Makers.

The Head of Service submits a quarterly report to the Partnership Board and provides an annual review and Business Plan which can be presented to individual local authority scrutiny boards or Executives.

A quality assurance framework is in place with regular auditing of files, plus evaluation feedback from adoptive parents and other service users. This is held centrally and is undertaken at key points in the adoption process.

## 10. COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

We welcome feedback from the children and families we support.

There are several forums for receiving feedback outlined below which are used to inform and improve practice and service delivery.

- Adopters' views at the time they attend the adoption panel for approval and a match
- The views of others who attend the adoption panel including social workers from Kent and other adoption agencies if placing the child via inter-agency route
- Adopters' views after they have adopted - an 'after adoption' feedback form is sent to each family after the adoption order is granted
- Panel members attending panel training
- Adopters attending the preparation training
- Adopters attending the Post Adoption Support Team Learning and Development training.

All prospective adopters engaging with the Agency and all birth parents of child for whom the Agency is planning adoption are provided with written information about Complaints Procedures, including contact details for the Complaints Team. All young people, for whom there is an adoption plan and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are also informed of the Complaints Procedures and informed of the role of the Children's Rights Service.

The agency aims to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible. However, if we have not been able to provide a solution within the service, the formal complaints procedure can be activated. The Partnership has agreed that Kent County Council will be the lead partner on all complaints which relate either wholly or in part to the Adoption Partnership South East. The complaints team can be contacted via [Kent County Council website](#).

Details of the Registration Authority

### **OFSTED CONTACT DETAILS**

Ofsted National Business Unit Piccadilly Gate Store Street, Manchester,  
M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231 Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) Web: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

## 11. QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

Sarah Skinner, Head of Service, has overall responsibility for Adoption Partnership south east. Sarah was awarded a BA (Hons) Social Science from Bristol Polytechnic in 1985. She then went on to study at Warwick University in 1987 where she graduated with a MA Applied Social Studies and CQSW. This was followed by completion of the Advanced Social Work Diploma, Goldsmith University 1991. Sarah has over 34 years post qualification experience in children's social care including adoption, but also experience in a variety of different teams including policy and performance, Independent Reviewing Service, and Virtual Schools. Sarah is part of the RAA Leaders Forum and completed the RAA Leaders Programme in 2021.

All Social Workers have a social work qualification and are registered with the Social Work England and have relevant experience in children and families' service. The Clinical Therapists working within the Service are also suitably qualified and experienced practitioners. All staff have the necessary Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check completed.





## Adoption Partnership South East

### Adoption Panel Chair Report

1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022

Document Owner	Katy Bennett, Panel team manager, Adoption Partnership.
Document Author	Cathy Yates, Independent Panel Chair Frances Moffat, Independent Panel Chair Sandra Neilan, Independent Panel Chair Eva Lindsay, Independent Panel Chair Katy Bennett, Team Manager, Adoption Service Amy Coombs, Service Manager, Adoption Service
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Date	30.01.2023
Approved	30.01.2023



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## 1. Introduction

This report covers the work of Adoption Partnership's four adoption panels for the period from the beginning of April 2022 until the end of September 2022.

The report is adhering to NMS17.2 "that adoption panels provide quality assurance feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of reports being presented to the panel"

Adoption Partnership South East is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) working across Bexley, Kent and Medway. Adoption Partnership has four panels which currently take place virtually using Microsoft Teams; this offers flexibility to applicants and ensures that children's matches are heard in a timely way. The adoption panels consider and make recommendations regarding new approvals for prospective adopters for Adoption Partnership, the matches of children from Bexley, Kent or Medway with an adopter, approval of an adoption plan for a relinquished baby and deregistration of approved adopters. All panel adopter approval recommendations are considered and ratified by the Head of Adoption Partnership, Sarah Skinner. Children's matches and plans for relinquished babies are ratified by the relevant Local Authority Assistant Director.

The panels are chaired by experienced professionals and the independent members of each panel include a range of people with personal and professional experience of adoption (for example an adoptive parent, an adopted adult, health care professionals and foster carers). The four Adoption Partnership panels are formed from the previous Bexley, Kent and Medway Panels. The panels also benefit from having social workers from Bexley, Kent and Medway sitting on them. All members are subject to an enhanced DBS check.

The Panel team is managed by Katy Bennett and is part of the Pre-Adoption Order Service within Adoption Partnership, which is managed by the Service Manager Amy Coombs.

## 2. Update on previous recommendations

The previous Panel Chairs' report highlighted the following recommendations:

- Continue to increase representation in panel membership of those from diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds.
- Increased representation of single adopters.
- Undertake consultation to inform a review of virtual panels in 2022.
- Continue to seek service user feedback for all those attending panel.

We have recruited two new independent panel members during this period; both adoptive parents with recent experience of the recruitment and assessment process, including parents who have adopted siblings, and children with additional needs.

We continue to seek a single adopter to sit on panels, and this recommendation is reiterated.

We have also noted a need to increase the age range of those sitting on panels and our two new independent members are in their twenties and thirties.

We have continued to develop ways of obtaining feedback from those attending panels and this is explored further at section 6. We have continued to seek feedback about the experience of those attending our panels in respect of the virtual experience, and this has been largely positive. Primary learning points relate to technology, and changes have been made where possible. At the recent panel chairs' meeting, the feedback was discussed, and chairs agreed that virtual panels have been largely positive and effective, but we agreed to hold a meeting with chairs and panel advisers to consider the more unusual circumstances that have occurred where



dynamics or questions have been more challenging to manage virtually and discuss ways of managing these.

### **3. Membership of panel and membership changes (See Appendix A)**

Each panel includes an independent panel chair, vice chair, medical adviser, panel advisor, independent panel member, social work representative and panel administrator. Each of our four panels has a lead panel adviser and a lead panel administrator, and we ensure that agency updates and progress of matches are fed back to panels regularly.

Appraisal of panel members is carried out on an annual basis, with meetings chaired by the panel chair and supported by either the panel team manager or one of the panel advisors. This incorporates feedback on their performance, strengths, and areas for development by both the panel member, and the agency.

The formation of the Adoption Partnership panels has combined the skills and knowledge from the original Bexley, Kent and Medway panels, which has led to an experienced, varied and skilled panel membership. All panels offer a high commitment from members and quality discussions, informed by a knowledge base drawn from members of wide-ranging experience. This includes social workers in children's services, adoption and fostering, Local Authority Council Members, adopters and adopted adults.

Medical advisers from across Bexley, Kent and Medway sit on our panels on a rotational basis.

Since April 2022, one council member has stood down due to other commitments. One of our panel chairs, Lloyd Glover, has stood down as he is now employed by the adoption agency and therefore cannot fulfil the role of independent chair. Interviews resulted in Eva Lindsay, vice chair of Panel 1, being offered the role of chair of Panel

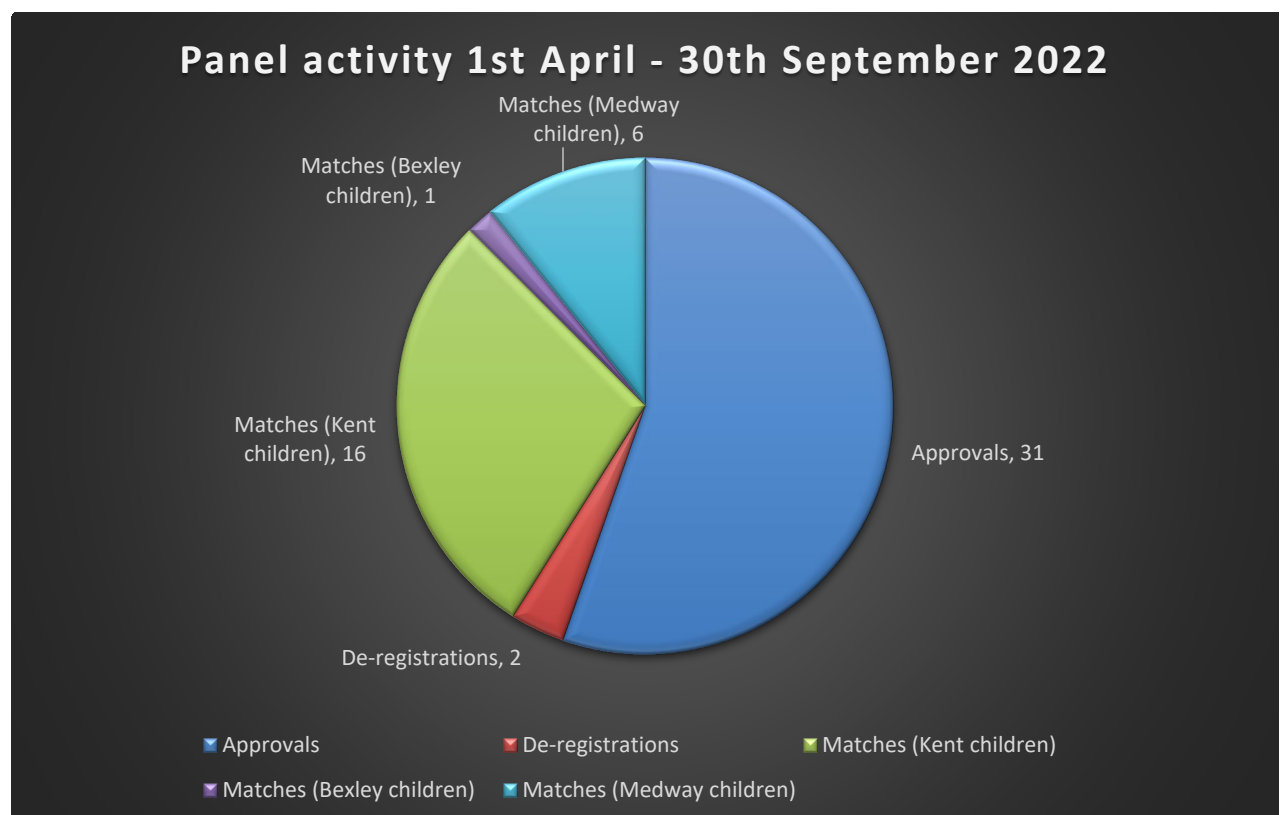
4, and we are pleased to have her experience and expertise within her new position. We have also welcomed three new independent members which has furthered the diversity and range of experience across our panels.

We are already forward planning and taking steps to recruit some new social work members as we know that some of our social workers will need to step down from their roles on panel in the coming months.

**Appendix A includes a full list of all Panel members and their roles**

#### 4. Breakdown of types of cases heard by panel

In total 56 cases were heard at panel between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.



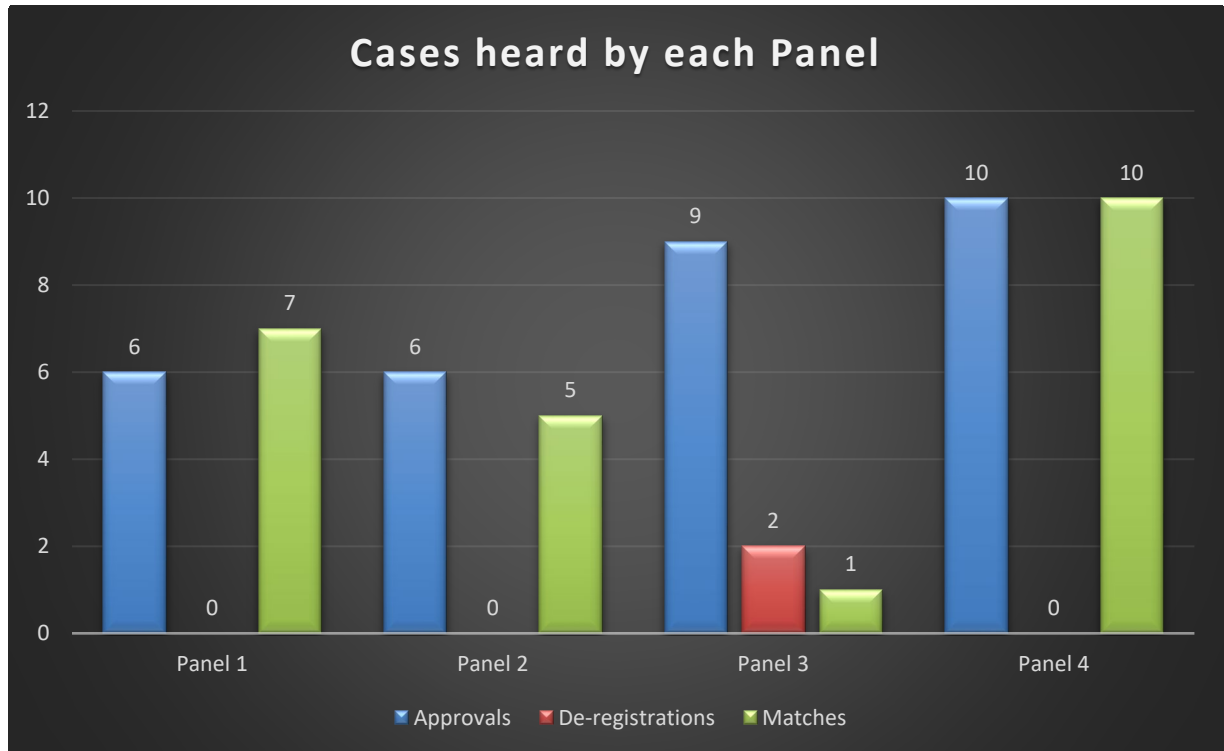
Adopter approvals	33
De-registrations	2
Total matches	23 children
Approvals of plans of adoption (relinquished babies)	0

It is noted that the two de-registrations were families who had decided not to proceed with adopting due to their own circumstances, and both were in agreement with the change in their status. Panel did not therefore have a decision-making function in these cases, but the cases were presented to panel as a formality.

The Agency Decision Maker agreed with all of the recommendations made by panels (all of which were positive).

Children matched with another RAA/VAA in the period between April and September 2022:

TOTAL = 4 (all Kent children)
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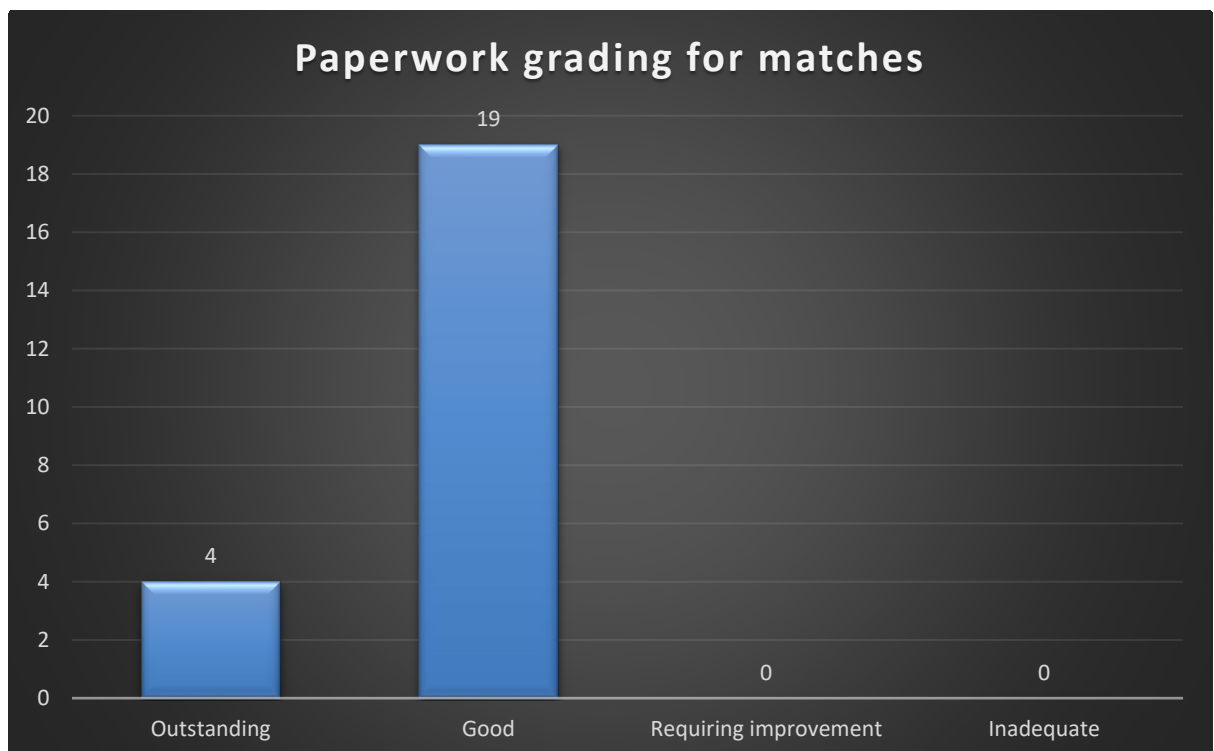
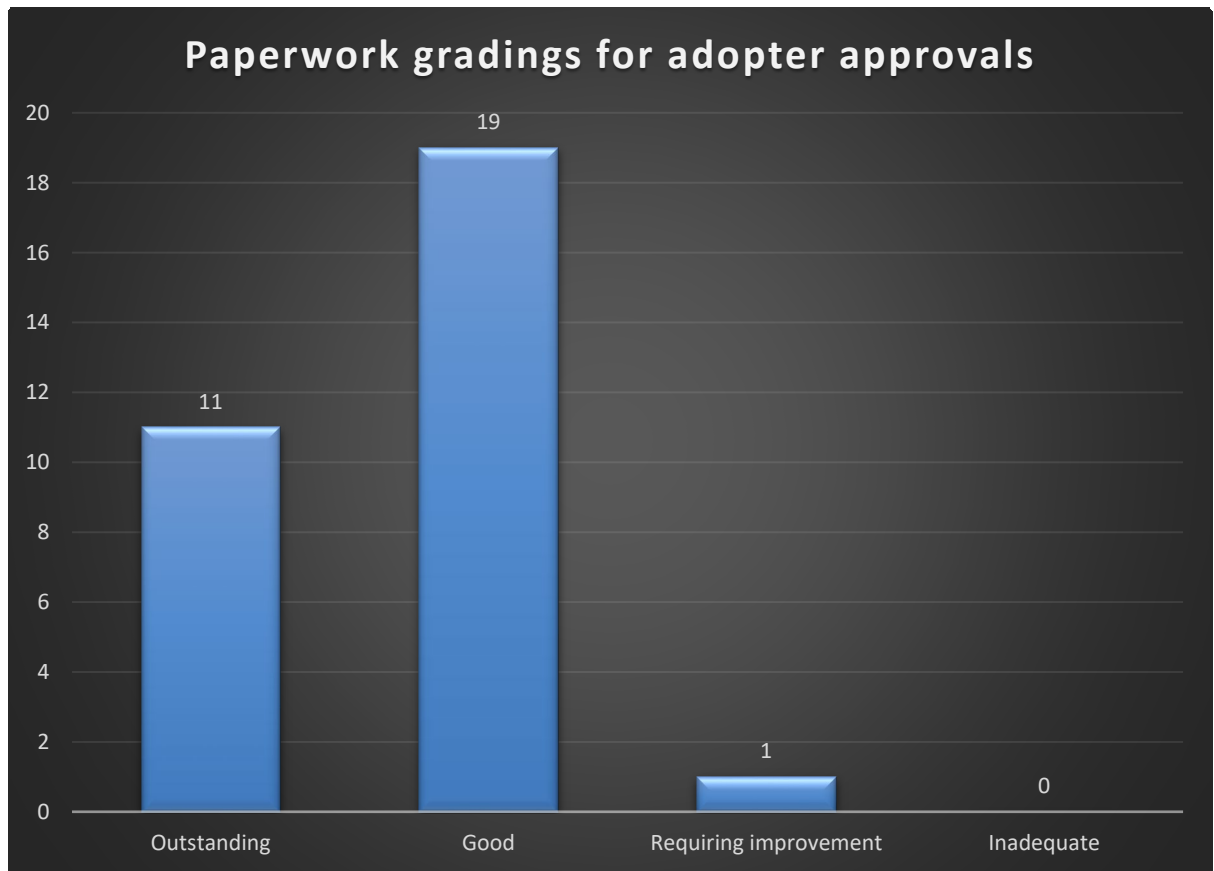


## 5. Quality assurance of reports presented to panel

Part of panel’s remit is to monitor the quality of the paperwork in relation to prospective adopters’ reports and this found to be generally good. All the adoption panels grade the quality of the paperwork presented for both approval and matches.

Below shows the gradings given to panel paperwork between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.





Head of Service Sarah Skinner also graded the paperwork for approvals of new adopters and has concurred with the grading of panel members 71% of the time. When different, the Agency Decision maker graded the paperwork good rather than outstanding, or vice versa, rather than having a significantly different view of the quality.

## 6. Feedback

We have created an online feedback form for both applicants and social workers to complete following panel and are working hard to increase uptake of this, with some success. The form requests the views of those attending virtual panels, and from both social workers and applicants, this feedback is largely positive in terms of the practical arrangements and the quality of the experience. The following comments are a range taken from recent feedback forms since April 2022:

*Very welcoming and put us at ease from the outset, well thought through questions and gave us the opportunity to elaborate on the PAR*

*It was one of the best panels we have attended, I found it much better having it online, we were much more relaxed in only seeing 1 or 2 of the panel members when questions were being asked as I get particularly nervous about speaking to a large group*

*There were a few technical problems with Teams, but everyone did their best to compensate for this. Each member of the panel took the time to introduce themselves and it felt like the aim was to ensure I felt comfortable and able to answer the questions fully*

*We immediately felt welcome, supported and celebrated*



*Prior information had been given about an applicant's hearing impairment. There was a thoughtful approach to how she would access the panel. Panel formulated the questions which were emailed to the applicants just ahead of the panel. Panel members were mostly visible full face and well lit which helped with lipreading. Thank you for making this a good experience*

*I think the questions that the panel asked gave everyone to consider the child and his individual's needs and it felt very child focused*

## **7. Panel Training**

Training is provided for the adoption panel members and is well attended. Our next training day is scheduled for 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022; an external provider will be delivering the day's training on the subject of Parenting Children Across Racial and Ethnic Boundaries. This has been a topic that panel members have requested further training on, and will be particularly helpful with the increasingly diverse children we are considering for adoption.

Panel members' annual reviews are now in process, and their feedback on training needs is being noted for future sessions.

## **8. Panel chairs meeting**

We held our annual panel chairs meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022; the four chairs were joined by panel advisers, service manager Amy Coombs, and Head of Service, Sarah Skinner. The meeting was positive, and chairs were updated about developments across the service. We also discussed feedback from those attending panels, and the strengths and vulnerabilities of holding virtual panels. We agreed to hold a further meeting between chairs and panel advisers to discuss challenges that have arisen with virtual panels, to share and develop best practice in how to manage these.

## 9. Disruptions

There has been one disruption between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022. This child is a Medway child who was placed with her brother with adopters. The adoptive placement disrupted after the child had been placed for eight months. The child had struggled to settle with her adopters and the adopters were finding the presenting behaviours extremely challenging. A disruption meeting **has** since been held and the child is reported to be doing really well in a foster placement where she is the only child. Her brother remains settled with the adopters and they plan to apply to adopt him in the very near future. Learning from this will be shared with the relevant panel.

## 10. Panel Chairs' comments

### Panel 1 – Cathy Yates

The membership of Panel 1 has been very stable over the last 6 months. The vice-chair has been appointed as the chair of panel 4 but has agreed to continue her role as vice-chair for Panel 1 until a replacement has been appointed. Unfortunately, the first attempt at recruiting for this role has not been successful so we are very appreciative of Eva remaining on Panel 1.

The quality of paperwork presented to the panel continues to be of a good quality with several cases being rated as Outstanding. Social workers for adopters and the children generally present well at panel and have a good knowledge of their cases. It has been good to note an increase in the number of social workers who support their applicants at panel by being present in the applicant's home, although it is still something which in my view could be improved upon.

The panel process works well and panel member appraisals during the last 6 months have highlighted the strengths that individuals bring to the panel as well as highlighting some areas for development. The role of the medical advisor is of course crucial to the



process, and it is of value to the panel that we have a consistent medical advisor. The relationship between panel and the Agency remains positive and it is of great benefit that any areas of concern are often able to be resolved before panel.

During the last 6 months, there has been a further very successful panel training day which once again panel members welcomed, and it was immediately evident at panel following the training that areas of learning had been taken on board which I feel reflects positively on the quality and relevance of the training. Panel members also valued being given access to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review in respect of Leiland-James.

One area of development I would like to see in the next 6 months is that social work representation on Panel 1 includes social workers from the Children In Care Services for some panels as I feel their perspective and expertise would be of great value to us.

### **Panel 2 – Fran Moffat**

We have had a period of greater stability in the last six months where panel members continue to prepare well for panel with ready formed questions. Earlier in the year we lost the councillor representative, but we gained two new independent adopter members which has enhanced our diversity. We also have two social work members who alternate between panels which allows them to meet other work commitments whilst offering us some stability. We have a new panel adviser appointed for our panel, Beatrice Jakubinyi, and with her I have been able to start some of the appraisals of panel members.

Quality of paperwork remains good with a few rated outstanding. The one query which comes up fairly frequently is the length of the CPRs. On occasions it has been clear that the CPR has been a court report without bearing in mind how this will seem to the adopted person later in life. For example there have been pages of very detailed visits to the birth parent outlining every time they have fallen short. One CPR was 97 pages long. There has also been some obvious cutting and pasting. Some CPRs have come



with much more of a child focus, the information being written from the child's point of view, and this will make it more personal for the young person reading the CPR.

We had an excellent panel training day face to face, where we could meet for the first time. Unfortunately one new independent member had covid and could not attend! The four independent panel chairs were also able to attend a face to face meeting in November with panel advisers, Amy Coombs and Sarah Skinner, and this was extremely positive in informing us about recent exciting developments taking place in the Adoption Partnership.

### **Panel 3 – Sandra Neilan**

Panel 3 has been through a stable period regarding membership. We have two new panellists who have increased our diversity, with one bringing recent experience of becoming an adopter and Mentor and the second bringing much experience of the education system.

Cases are coming to Panel well prepared, in the main and our Panel Advisers notably quality assure the paperwork before it is uploaded for members to read.

Three Social Workers rotate panel membership as do our Medical Advisers and this works well.

We have experienced a further six months of virtual panels, which we understand are viewed positively by applicants and I can say, by Panel Members. Our IT skills have increased, although there are still occasional glitches.

Panel receives relevant feedback from ADMs regarding recommendations and also comment on our grading of the paperwork.

Numbers of approvals and matches remain constant but could increase in the future. A deregistration was considered, and one case was deferred, due to the death of a parent, the previous evening, of one of the applicants. On returning to our Panel the



following month the applicants concurred with our decision and a positive recommendation was made.

Panel member reviews are kept up to date.

#### **Panel 4 – Eva Lindsay**

I was delighted to be appointed as Chair of Panel 4 and to continue working with the Adoption Partnership, having been Vice Chair of Panel 1.

I chaired Panel 4 in August and September. Panel members made me feel very welcome and I have been so fortunate to have excellent support from the Vice Chair and the Panel Advisors.

It is evident that the panel members work well together and are comfortable with each other.

The quality of the paperwork presented at the two panels I chaired was rated either good or outstanding and the presentations were also good. On these occasions we had no issues with the panel being virtual.

#### **11. Summary by Amy Coombs, Service Manager**

It is positive that the Adoption Partnership South East panels are working so well and that the format of them taking place online continues to be positive for all involved. The feedback of our panels is that; they are accessible and welcoming and when there have been technical issues these are resolved efficiently. Social workers continue to produce high quality assessments which is evident from the grading of their Prospective Adopter Reports. Our panel membership has increased in diversity, and we continue to look to recruit new members to further ensure our membership reflects the community we work with. There continues to be good collaboration



between our panel chairs, members, and the adoption service; by working together and ensuring there is regular communication and learning from cases such as adoption disruptions.

## 12. Recommendations

- Continue to increase representation in panel membership of those from diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds.
- Increased representation of single adopters.
- Continue to seek service user feedback for all those attending panel.



## Appendix A

### Panel membership

Barbara Redsell (social work member)  
Barry Lumsden (independent member)  
Cathy Yates (independent chair)  
Dawn Bigwood (independent member)  
Dr Bhargava (medical advisor)  
Dr Das (medical advisor)  
Dr Eltom (medical advisor)  
Dr Himid (medical advisor)  
Dr Hussain (medical advisor)  
Dr Lebbe (medical advisor)  
Dr Nicholls (medical advisor)  
Dr Tukmachi (medical advisor)  
Ellie Hunter (social work member)  
Eloise Creed (social work member)  
Emma Smith (independent member)  
Eva Lindsay (independent chair)  
Fran Moffat (independent chair)  
Iona Stephens (independent vice chair)  
Jackie Kohler (social work member)  
Jackie Lumsden (independent member)  
James Buckland (independent member)  
John McDonald-Baker (independent vice chair)  
Jon Witham (independent member)  
Joy Bamford (independent member)  
Julia Fagg (social work member)  
Katie Boyce (social work member)  
Kris Bahadur (independent member)  
Louise Hawley (independent vice chair)  
Luke Rains (independent member)  
Penny Cadman (social work member)  
Rhiannon Webb (social work member)  
Sandra Neilan (independent chair)  
Simon Webb (Kent councillor)  
Theresa Gardiner (social work member)  
Wendy Purdy (Medway councillor)

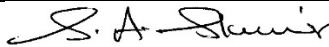




## Adoption Partnership South East

### Adoption Panel Chair Report

1<sup>st</sup> October 2022 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023

Document Owner	Katy Bennett, Panel Team Manager, Adoption Partnership.
Document Author	Cathy Yates, Independent Panel Chair Frances Moffat, Independent Panel Chair Sandra Neilan, Independent Panel Chair Eva Lindsay, Independent Panel Chair Katy Bennett, Team Manager, Adoption Service Amy Coombs, Service Manager, Adoption Service
Version	Draft
Date	27/4/23
Approved	



**Adoption  
Partnership**  
South East

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## 1. Introduction

This report covers the work of Adoption Partnership's four adoption Panels for the period from the beginning of October 2022 until the end of March 2023.

The report is adhering to NMS17.2 "that adoption Panels provide quality assurance feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of reports being presented to the Panel".

Adoption Partnership South East is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) working across Bexley, Kent, and Medway. Adoption Partnership has four Panels which currently take place virtually using Microsoft Teams; this offers flexibility to applicants and ensures that children's matches are heard in a timely way. The adoption Panels consider and make recommendations regarding new approvals for prospective adopters for Adoption Partnership, the matches of children from Bexley, Kent or Medway with an adopter, approval of adoption plans for babies adopted by consent and deregistration of approved adopters. All Panel adopter approval recommendations are considered and ratified by the Head of Adoption Partnership, Sarah Skinner. Children's matches and plans for babies adopted by consent are ratified by the relevant Local Authority Assistant Director.

The Panels are chaired by experienced professionals and the independent members of each Panel include a range of people with personal and professional experience of adoption (for example an adoptive parent, an adopted adult, health care professionals and foster carers). The four Adoption Partnership Panels have several experienced Panel members who had previously sat on the respective partners' adoption Panels, as well as containing newer Panel members recruited in the last two and a half years. The Panels also benefit from having social workers from the Local Authorities sitting



on them. At present, there are no Bexley social workers sitting on the Panels but there are social workers from Kent and Medway. All members are subject to an enhanced DBS check.

The Panel team is managed by Katy Bennett and is part of the Pre-Adoption Order Service within Adoption Partnership, which is managed by the Service Manager, Amy Coombs.

## **2. Update on previous recommendations**

The previous Panel Chairs' report highlighted the following recommendations:

- Continue to increase representation in Panel membership of those from diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds.
- Increased representation of single adopters.
- Continue to seek service user feedback for all those attending Panel.

We have recruited four new social work Panel members during this period; three are experienced social workers from the Children in Care service, and one is a social worker from Adoption Partnership's Recruitment and Assessment team. We continue to seek a single adopter to sit on Panels, and this recommendation is reiterated. We are in the process of completing checks and references for a new independent Panel member who is an experienced foster carer, and from a Muslim background.

We have continued to seek feedback about the experience of those attending our Panels in respect of the virtual experience, and this has been largely positive. Primary learning points relate to technology, and changes have been made where possible.



### **3. Membership of Panel and membership changes (See Appendix A)**

Each Panel includes an independent Panel Chair, Vice Chair, Medical Adviser, Panel Advisor, independent Panel member, social work representative and Panel Administrator. Each of our four Panels has a lead Panel Adviser and a lead Panel Administrator, and we ensure that agency updates and progress of matches are fed back to Panels regularly.

Appraisal of Panel members is carried out on an annual basis, with meetings chaired by the Panel Chair and supported by either the Panel Team Manager or one of the Panel Advisors. This incorporates feedback on their performance, strengths, and areas for development by both the Panel member, and the agency. The Panel Chairs also have their own annual review which is undertaken by the Head of Service and supported by the Panel Team Manager.

The formation of the Adoption Partnership Panels has combined the skills and knowledge from the original Bexley, Kent, and Medway Panels, which has led to an experienced, varied, and skilled Panel membership. All Panels offer a high commitment from members and quality discussions, informed by a knowledge base drawn from members of wide-ranging experience.

Medical Advisers from across Bexley, Kent and Medway sit on our Panels on a rotational basis.

Since October 2022, one of our social work members stood down due to other commitments. We still need to recruit and appoint a Vice Chair to Panel 1, as currently this role is being covered by the Chair of Panel 4. This is one of our goals for the upcoming months.

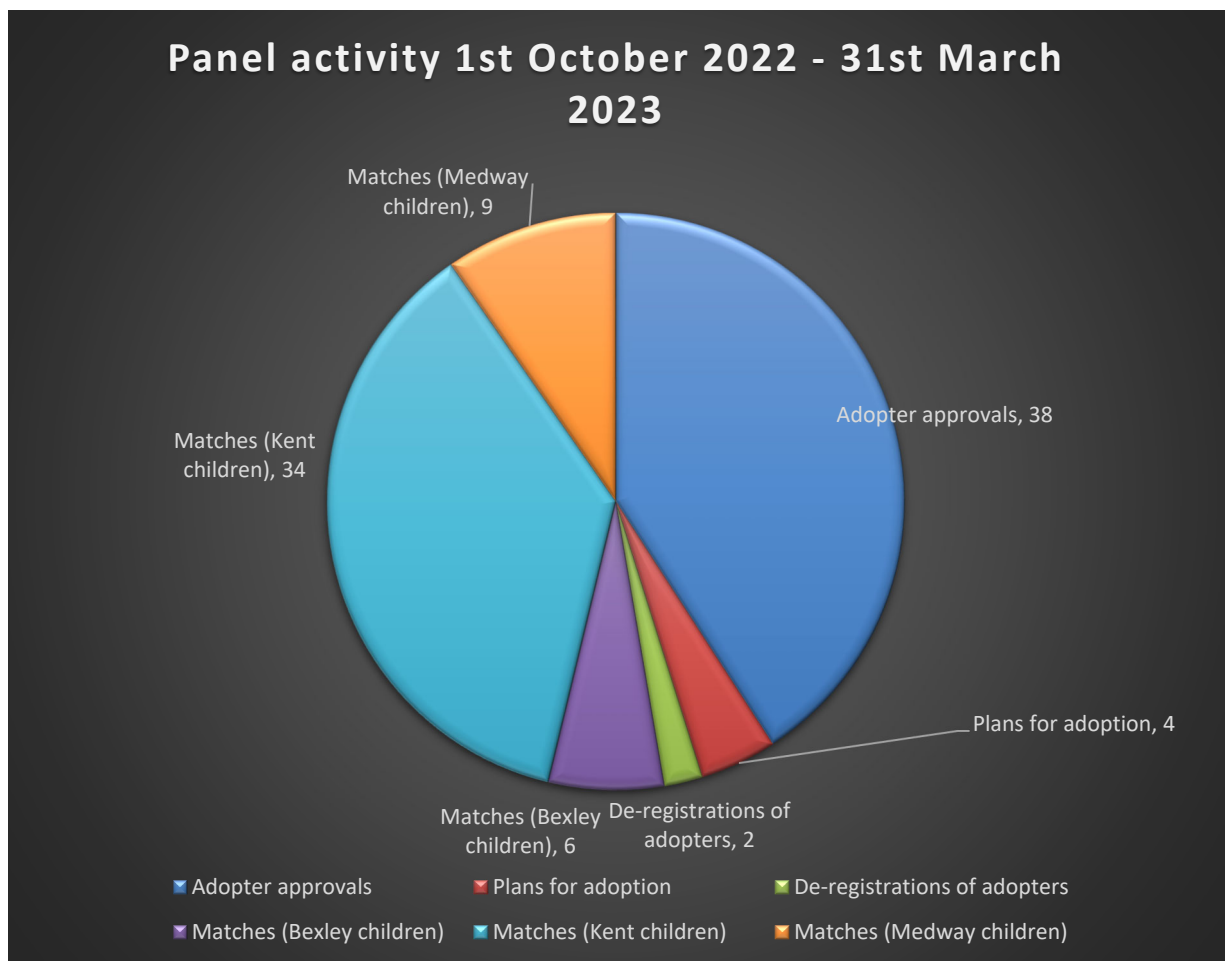


We have recruited and are completing references for a new independent Panel member, an experienced foster carer, who is Muslim and has lots of skills and experience to offer our Panels.

*Appendix A includes a full list of all Panel members and their roles.*

#### 4. Breakdown of types of cases heard by Panel

In total 93 cases were heard at Panel between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.







Adopter approvals	38 households
De-registrations	2 households
Total matches	49 children
Approvals of plans of adoption (adoption by consent)	4 children

It is noted that the two de-registrations were families who had decided not to proceed with adopting due to their own circumstances, and both were in agreement with the change in their status. Panel did not therefore have a decision-making function in these cases, but the cases were presented to Panel as a formality.

It is also noted that Panel members deferred their recommendation for a couple to be approved as adopters in December 2022, however when this case was brought back to Panel in January 2023, the majority recommended their approval. Therefore, this case appears twice in the figures of cases heard at Panel, so 37, rather than 38, households have been approved in the past six months.

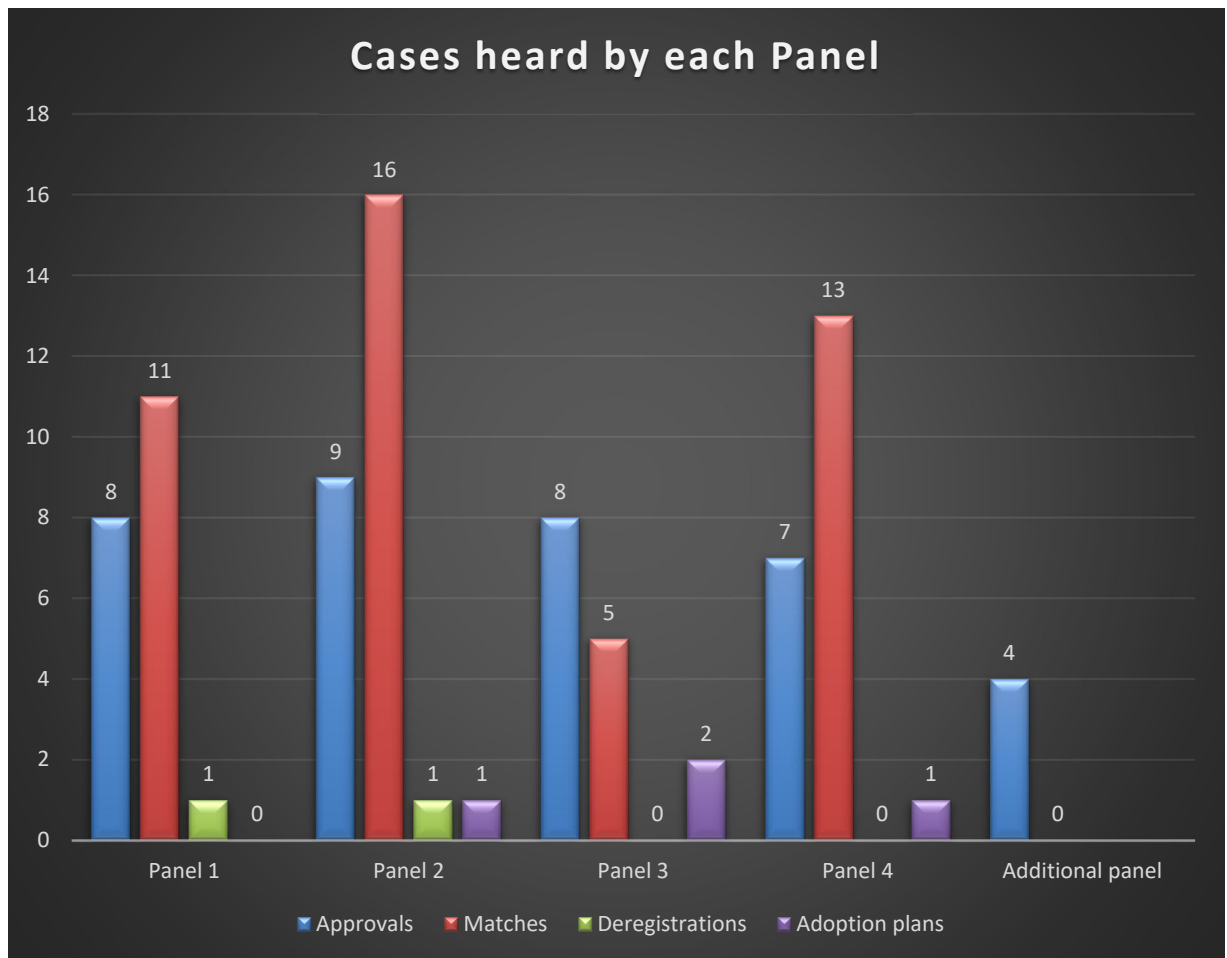
The Agency Decision Maker agreed with all of the recommendations made by Panels (all of which were positive).

Children matched with another RAA/VAA in the period between October 2022 and March 2023:

TOTAL = 3 (all Kent children)
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It is noted that two were a sibling group where a match could not be identified from within the RAA, and the other child was placed for adoption with a full sibling who

had been adopted outside of the RAA prior to her birth parents moving to Kent and having a subsequent child.

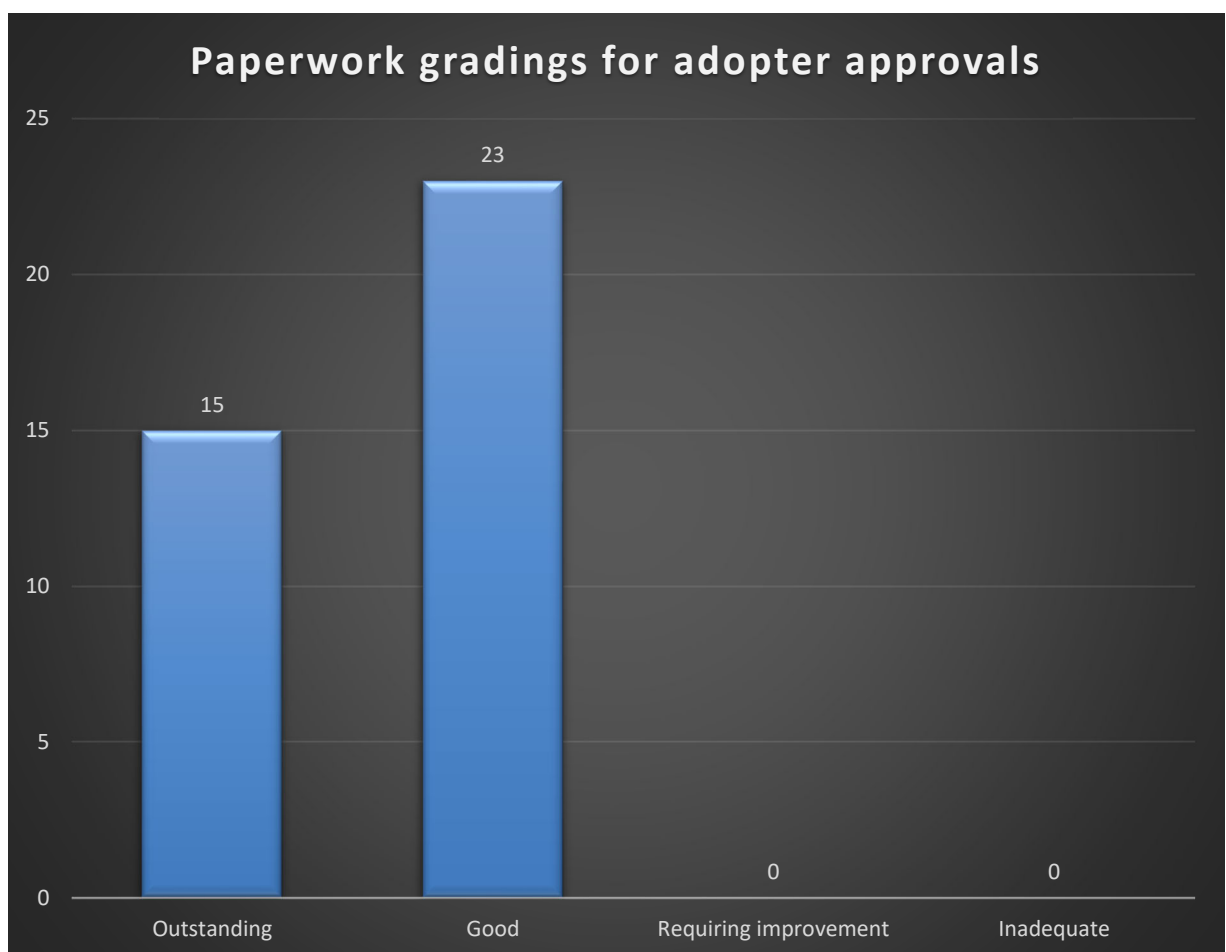


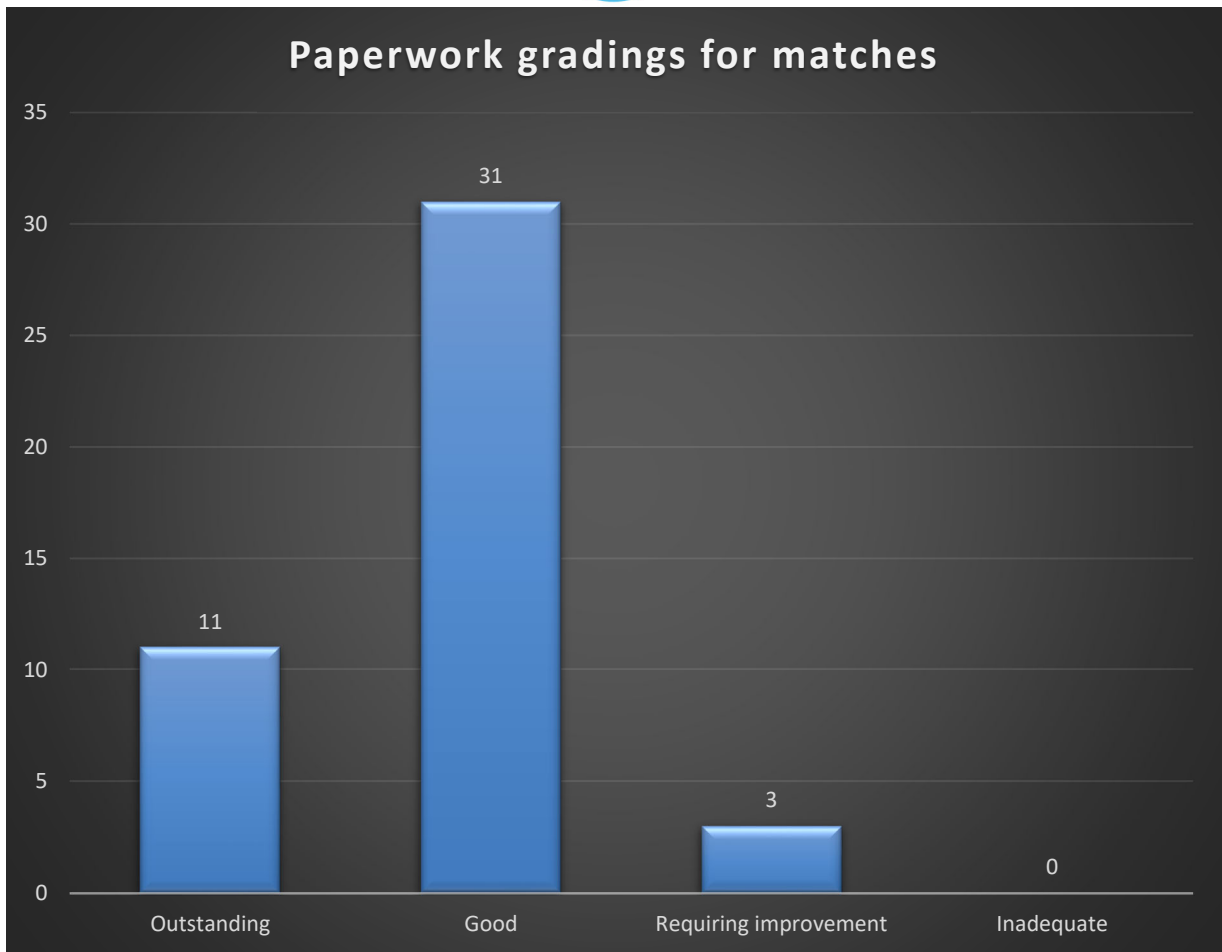
We identified in early 2023 that we had an increase in both approvals and matches needed to be heard at Panel, and therefore held a one-off additional Panel in March 2023 to ensure these cases could proceed without delay.

## 5. Quality assurance of reports presented to Panel

Part of Panel's remit is to monitor the quality of the paperwork in relation to prospective adopters' reports and this found to be generally good. All the adoption Panels grade the quality of the paperwork presented for both approval and matches.

Below shows the gradings given to Panel paperwork between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.





Head of Service Sarah Skinner also graded the paperwork for approvals of new adopters and has concurred with the grading of Panel members 86% of the time. When different, the Agency Decision Maker graded the paperwork good rather than outstanding, or vice versa, rather than having a significantly different view of the quality.

## 6. Feedback

We have created an online feedback form for both applicants and social workers to complete following Panel and are working hard to increase uptake of this, with some success. The form requests the views of those attending virtual Panels, and from both social workers and applicants, this feedback is largely positive in terms of the practical



arrangements and the quality of the experience. The following comments are a range taken from recent feedback forms since October 2022:

- *"Everyone was really engaging and made us feel comfortable in a potentially stressful situation. It was well organised and thought out. We enjoyed the process and the questions asked enabled us to reflect on how far we had come in the process and how much we had learnt."*
- *"We were initially concerned that it would be harder to build a connection with Panel memories being virtual, but we needn't have worried!"*
- *"The members of the Panel helped put me at my ease, so I felt confident answering their questions, despite feeling nervous."*
- *"Each individual Panellist was knowledgeable, kind, empathetic and encouraging. They all made the occasion a very positive experience."*
- *"We felt very at ease with the matching Panel as was opportunity to share some lovely information about our child."*
- *"The process was explained, and questions were asked in a respectful and sensitive manner."*
- *"It was clear that Panel had thought through questions well that were pertinent to the match."*
- *"Chair explained the process, questions were asked in manner to enable applicants to feel at ease and speak freely."*



All feedback received since October 2022 has been positive, other than a couple of comments about the internet connection being unstable, momentarily affecting the quality of the conversation.

## **7. Panel Training**

Training is provided for the adoption Panel members and is well attended. Our last training day took place on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2022; IAC the Centre for Adoption provided a day's training on 'Parenting Children Across Racial and Ethnic Boundaries'. This has been a topic that Panel members had requested further training on and will be particularly helpful with the increasingly diverse children we are considering for adoption. Feedback from Panel members was extremely positive and have already noticed a change in the pre-Panel discussions and questions being asked of adopters and social workers about the evidence base for matches where children do not share the race or culture of the proposed adopters.

Panel members' annual reviews are now in process, and their feedback on training needs is being noted for future sessions.

## **8. Panel Chairs meeting**

We held our annual Panel Chairs meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022; the four Chairs were joined by Panel Advisers, Service Manager Amy Coombs, and Head of Service, Sarah Skinner. The meeting was positive, and Chairs were updated about developments across the service. We also discussed feedback from those attending Panels, and the strengths and vulnerabilities of holding virtual Panels. We agreed to hold a further



meeting between Chairs and Panel Advisers to discuss challenges that have arisen with virtual Panels, to share and develop best practice in how to manage these.

## **9. Disruptions**

There have been two disruptions between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. The first disruption took place in December 2022 and was a Medway child; a three-year-old boy who had been placed with his adopters for 16 months. A high level of therapeutic input was put in place for the family; however the placement came to an end in December. A disruptions meeting has taken place, chaired by an independent person outside of the RAA and Local Authority, and key learning from this is being progressed.

The second disruption took place in February 2023 was a Kent child; a five-year-old boy placed with interagency adopters. A disruptions meeting is due to take place. This will be chaired by an independent person outside of the RAA and Local Authority.

It is intended that the learning from these cases will be an area for the next Panel member training.

## **10. Panel Chairs' comments**

### **Panel 1 – Cathy Yates**

Panel 1 has continued to be busy during this six-month period with 8 approvals and 11 matches being presented for a recommendation. Sadly 1 match has disrupted during this period and Panel members look forward to learning any lessons from this when the details are shared with Panel.



Panel membership has remained stable during this period, although we still have a vacancy for Vice Chair role which I understand will be being advertised again soon. In the meantime, Eva Lindsay continues to fulfil this role. We have also lost Wendy Purdy as a full-time member on Panel 1 as she will no longer be a Medway County Councillor. However, it has been agreed that Wendy will continue as an independent Panel member on the central list. Towards the end of this period, we have also been fortunate to have children in care social workers sit on Panel which has proven to be very helpful and adds another positive dynamic to the Panel.

One ongoing challenge for Panel, has been the difficulty on some occasions of all the relevant medical information being available. On one occasion this unfortunately led to one case being postponed.

The quality of paperwork being presented to Panel continues to be of a good standard and on several occasions, Panel has rated the paperwork as outstanding. I would, however, echo the comments from Panel 2 that sometimes poor spelling, grammar and typos detract from the quality of the paperwork. Panel 1 has welcomed the recent shift in many CPRs in that they are being written to the child which we feel will be helpful to young people when accessing their files and understanding their journey.

Relationships between the Agency and the Panel remain positive with the support from Panel Advisors and Panel Administrators continuing to be invaluable to the effective functioning of the Panel.





## **Panel 2 – Fran Moffat**

Panel 2 has been quite busy during this six-month period, with an increasing number of matches being presented to Panel, several of them where a child has been placed for early permanence. As Chair I have also co-Chaired (with Eva Lindsey) an extra Panel as there was a need for more approved adopters and hence more applications to adopt to be referred to Panel.

All Panel members come well prepared to Panel and able to evidence their concerns, and phrase sensitive questions. Membership of Panel members has been more stable in this period, and we also have a new permanent independent member which is excellent as this improves our gender balance and brings the valuable experience of an adopter with young children. Sadly, we will be losing another Panel member who is taking maternity leave.

We sometimes struggle with grading paperwork, especially when there are some good points of analysis or a child centred viewpoint, but where there is also some carelessness in terms of spelling or grammar. On occasions we also have concerns about the amount of detail in CPRs which might prove overwhelming to a young person accessing their files.

## **Panel 3 – Sandra Neilan**

Panel 3 membership has remained stable during this period, with the rotation of Social Workers and Medical Advisors working well. The County Councillor, who had joined Panel during this period made the decision to stand down and has not been replaced, yet.



Panels in September and December were cancelled.

Annual reviews for Panel Members have been going ahead.

Our Lead Panel Advisor has kept us up to date regarding the Agency changes affecting Panels and we continue to receive excellent support from Panel Advisors and Admin Support.

Presentations by Social Workers have proved most helpful, and Panel appreciates their positive involvement. Reports are generally very good, being more focused and containing appropriate analysis. We did have to defer a case as the medical information was incomplete, but the case later returned to Panel and was given a positive recommendation.

We have been presented with two cases of Adoption by Consent.

#### **Panel 4 – Eva Lindsay**

Over the six-month period Panel membership has been stable with regular attendance.

The quality of the paperwork presented has been of a high standard with some outstanding work and presentations to Panel have been good. Panel members work hard to put applicants attending Panel at their ease and to be clear in their questions.

The Panel has been very well supported by the Panel advisors and our lead advisor is extremely helpful and available for discussion when there are concerns or issues.



At her appraisal last autumn, the ice Chair of the Panel said she would find it helpful to Chair a case on a regular basis, not only when there is a large agenda. She felt this would increase and maintain her confidence for Chairing cases. This has been achieved since her appraisal and has worked well.

This year's appraisals for Panel members are now being planned.

## **11. Summary by Amy Coombs, Service Manager**

The last six months has clearly been a busy time for the Panels, with a higher level of matches and adoption by consent cases. The Panels have managed this well and it is really positive that some members assisted with being part of an additional Panel. It is also good to read that our Panel members and the Chairs have felt well supported by the Panel team of advisors and administrators. Our Panel membership diversity regarding ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and adoption experiences continues to increase and remains high on the agenda when recruiting new members. Panel paperwork continues to receive praise for its quality from our Panels, however it is noted that Panel Chairs have raised an issue with spelling and grammar in some reports. Our Panel teams will now be delivering training to the children's social workers across the region on writing CPRs and it is hoped that feedback from the Panels on these documents can be delivered within this training. Feedback from those attending our Panels also continues to be positive and evidences the accessibility of our virtual Panels for our applicants.

## **12. Recommendations**

- Continued focus on diversity of membership of Panels which reflects our adoption community.



- CPR training to be delivered to the children's social workers across the region on a quarterly basis.
- Feedback to be given to relevant Service managers when documents are received which contain a high level of spelling/grammatical errors.
- Continued learning from disruptions and Panel deferrals to be presented either at Panel training or during Panels.



## Appendix A

### **Panel membership**

Anne Kohler (social work member)  
Barbara Redsell (social work member)  
Barry Lumsden (independent member)  
Cathy Yates (independent Chair)  
Claire Jones (social work member)  
Dawn Bigwood (independent member)  
Dr Bhargava (medical advisor)  
Dr Das (medical advisor)  
Dr Eltom (medical advisor)  
Dr Himid (medical advisor)  
Dr Hussain (medical advisor)  
Dr Lebbe (medical advisor)  
Dr Nicholls (medical advisor)  
Dr Tukmachi (medical advisor)  
Eloise Creed (social work member)  
Emma Smith (independent member)  
Eva Lindsay (independent Chair)  
Fran Moffat (independent Chair)  
Iona Stephens (independent vice Chair)  
Jackie Kohler (social work member)  
Jackie Lumsden (independent member)  
James Buckland (independent member)  
John Mcdonald-Baker (independent vice Chair)  
Jon Witham (independent member)  
Joy Bamford (independent member)  
Julia Fagg (social work member)  
Katie Boyce (social work member)  
Kerry Larkin (social work member)  
Kris Bahadur (independent member)  
Louise Hawley (independent vice Chair)  
Luke Rains (independent member)  
Melissa Cubbon (social work member)  
Penny Cadman (social work member)  
Rhiannon Webb (social work member)  
Sandra Neilan (independent Chair)  
Theresa Gardiner (social work member)



Wendy Purdy (Medway councillor)

# Adoption Partnership South East



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## Recruitment Strategy 2023/2024

### Introduction

Adoption Partnership South East, a Regional Adoption Agency, which was established on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020. It is a shared adoption service working on behalf of the London Borough of Bexley, Kent County Council and Medway Council.

'Permanence, stability, quality of care and avoidance of delay are the factors which most affect children's welfare and their future chances in life' (DfE, 2016<sup>1</sup>).

Reducing the time, it takes to match, and place children ensures that they are given the best chances for the future. To achieve this Adoption Partnership South East needs to ensure it recruits a pool of adoptive families who can meet the diversity of needs of the children who require adoptive families.

Our priority is to secure permanence for children living within our region who need a permanent family who are unable to live within their birth families and for whom and adoption is agreed as the best alternative.

### Principles and Values

The work of the RAA is governed by the Education and Adoption Act 2016, Adoption and Children Act 2002, Children and Adoption Act 2006, Children Act 1989

<sup>1</sup> DfE (2016). *Adoption A Vision for Change*. Department for Education [Online], available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/512826/Adoption\\_Policy\\_Paper\\_30\\_March\\_2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/512826/Adoption_Policy_Paper_30_March_2016.pdf) (accessed 22-Nov-16)



## Adoption Partnership South East

### Principles and Core Values

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond and where possible this should be within their own family
- The Child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process
- The Child's wishes and feelings will be considered at all stages
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible
- The child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, and sexuality will be fully recognised, positively valued, and promoted when decisions are made
- The needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many organisations, professionals and individuals who have to work together to deliver to meet the needs of the services
- Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and offered a support service.

### Equal Opportunities

The adoption service abides by equal opportunities legislation and the policies of each Partner. The service works positively and respectfully with all service users and partner agencies regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or age.



Every attempt will be made to secure an adoptive family which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs considering their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender, and disability considering the need to avoid undue delay.

## **The Adoption Marketplace**

The Adoption recruitment Service operates in a competitive marketplace with Adopters viewed as a valuable resource. The Adoption Strategy will form the basis of a response to stave off competition in the marketplace to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of Bexley, Kent and Medway's children. A pool of approved adopters more than the number of children with an adoption plan within the agency waiting for an adoptive placement, enables early linking. This reduces time spent on family finding, resulting in less delay with matches being approved at panel within 1- 2 months of placement orders being granted. Those children who are part of sibling groups or who have medical uncertainties or complex needs can take longer to place. The agency subscribes to Link Maker which supports earlier family finding. There are systems in place for long term placements and rescinding of placement orders if care plans change to permanent fostering.

Adoption Services need to be able to respond to changes in the needs of children who are entering care to take account of changing demographics and ensure appropriate adopters are being recruited. To remain competitive in the changing marketplace, Adoption Partnership South East will need to be flexible and responsive in its planning, marketing, and delivery of services.

The development of the Adoption Strategy and subsequent Marketing Plan will be the foundation for creating a flexible and a responsive service, as they will take account of the numbers of children needing services, future trends, physical resources, policy and legislative changes.

## **The Adoption Recruitment process**

### **Enquiries and first contact**

Enquirers can access information on adopting with Adoption Partnership via the Adoption Agency website: [www.adoptionpartnershipsoutheast.org.uk](http://www.adoptionpartnershipsoutheast.org.uk) or make contact through the dedicated advice line. At first contact, enquirers are sent an online information pack and link to an information video. This pack provides enquirers with the information to help them decide if adoption is right for them and their family.

### **Consultation Sessions**

Enquirers who decide they would like to progress their interest contact the Initial Enquiry team who open them up onto our system and complete an initial enquiry form with them. The enquirer is then booked on to one of our consultation sessions. These sessions are in person and run monthly, with an additional bi-monthly event for enquirers interested in the Early

Permanence scheme. The consultation sessions are small events giving enquirers an opportunity to meet an adopter and have a one-to-one consultation with an adoption social worker to discuss the next steps of adoption, the timing of this and answer any questions they might have.

### Registration of Interest

Following the consultation session, the enquirer will be invited to contact the Initial Enquiry team and inform them of the decision as to whether they would like to start an adoption assessment. For all enquirers wishing to be assessed a Registration of Interest will be emailed out and on return of this document one of the recruitment team managers will sign it off and allocate to a Social Worker.

At this stage, the enquirer becomes known as a prospective adopter(s).

### Stage 1 - Pre-assessment process

Stage One begins on the day that Adoption Partnership accepts the registration of interest from the prospective adopter(s) and should normally take 2 months to complete. The allocated social worker will contact the prospective adopters to complete the stage one agreement and arrange for a home visit to take place during stage one.

The stage one process will include the following:

- All the statutory references/checks will be completed including the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check
- The prospective adopter(s) will complete an adoption medical as soon as possible. This will be considered by the adoption agency medical advisor, who will provide advice about any concerning medical issues
- The prospective adopter(s) will be expected to attend training/preparation sessions. This will give prospective adopter(s) more detailed information and will allow them to meet experienced adopters who can help answer questions that they have
- An adoption social worker will be provided to support prospective adopters on completing the stage 1 process and an agreement will be drawn up with prospective adopters detailing expectations.

### Preparation sessions

Prospective adopters will be invited to attend preparation sessions in Stage One and Stage Two. The process will be delayed if applicants are unable to attend initial preparation, and a clear indication of their availability will be ascertained. They will also be encouraged to access e-learning components on the First4Adoption website and will be given a one-year subscription to the PACT Adopter hub when they complete stage one.

Preparation groups for first time adopters usually run approximately 10 times per year based on need. Repeat adopter training is provided at regular intervals across the region, as is early permanence carer preparation group training.



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## Stage 2 – The assessment process

The stage two assessment process cannot begin until stage one has successfully been completed (apart from repeat adopters and foster carer adoptions, see next page).

Stage two begins when prospective adopters notify the agency of their wish to continue with the process. The prospective adopter(s) have 6 months from the completion of stage one to provide this notification. From the date of receipt of this notification, the stage two process is a 4-month long period during which a home study assessment is undertaken. This leads to a panel recommendation and an Agency Decision about suitability to adopt.

The prospective adopter(s) will be allocated an adoption social worker to complete their assessment. A Stage Two plan will be drawn up between the social worker and the prospective adopter(s) agreeing arrangements for the assessment process and a provisional panel date.

The assessment will involve a series of home visits utilising a variety of assessment tools and will include additional checks including school, nursery, ex-partner, employers, and personal referees will also be visited.

Based on the information in the assessment the adoption social worker will write a Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR). This is a very detailed report providing information about the prospective adopter(s) and their background. The report will reach a conclusion about the prospective adopter(s) suitability to adopt, and the applicants will have up to 5 working days to comment on their completed assessment before it is presented to the adoption panel.

If the agency reaches a decision during the stage 2 process that they cannot recommend approval and/or if the agency decision maker decides not to agree the approval, the prospective adopter(s) will be able to request a review by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The IRM is an independent body that can scrutinize the decisions of adoption agencies.

### Adoption by existing foster carers

Foster carers should notify the service in writing of their wish to be considered as adopters for a child or children in their care. If the child/children's plan is for adoption, this will be acknowledged and a meeting held between workers from the adoption and fostering teams and the child's social worker to consider how this should be progressed and will be discussed with the foster carers, who will also be informed of their legal rights.

A fast-track process will be provided for approved foster carers who want to be assessed as adoptive parents. Stage one and two of the adoption processes will take place concurrently to avoid delay. They will be offered training.



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### Repeat adopters

Families who have already been assessed as adopters can apply to adopt again if there is a year's gap following their child's adoption order being made and a 2-year age gap between their child and a potential new child. In this case, they would express an interest in adopting again and be offered a home visit to discuss their circumstances. If it is appropriate to proceed, they would then complete the registration of interest form and start the process. Depending on the circumstances of the family stage one and two of the process may run sequentially or concurrently. They would be offered training.

If their interest is in respect of a subsequent sibling or half sibling of a child they have already adopted, the timescales and age gap would not necessarily apply. This assessment would be given high priority and the home visit would involve the child's social worker too. In these cases, stage one and two would run concurrently.

### Marketing Strategy

Most applicants state that they have been thinking about adoption for some time before deciding that the time is right to contact an adoption agency. An advert may provide the

'tipping point' for contacting the Adoption Service. Adoption Partnership South East therefore aims to use a variety of methods to attract potential adopters and to maintain a high-quality adoption service, reminding the public of the children requiring adoptive families and the support they can expect should they take on the role of an adoptive parent.

Feedback received from approved adopters indicates that reassurance to become adopters was important to them, it is therefore key that any information material presents clearly that Adoption enquiries are welcome from a wide range of the community irrespective of marital status, age, sexual orientation, or colour for example. Also hearing directly from adopters who have been through the adoption journey was most useful when considering if they wanted to proceed forward. These points were considered when planning our recruitment campaign and things like adopters' stories have been factored into information on the Adoption Partnership South East website as well as at the consultation sessions.

Other feedback revealed the importance to adopters of feeling valued and welcomed. Feedback from information events is that Enquirer's felt the Adoption Service was welcoming and informative.

The Marketing Strategy is reviewed at least every 6 months to ensure it is meeting the needs of children. Where there are concerns the frequency of marketing and reviewing the success of the service would need to be addressed more frequently. There is a need to maintain the momentum of recruitment activity and so ensure a high level of public awareness of Adoption Partnership South East as an Adoption agency.



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### **Adoption Recruitment Campaign**

The Adoption Recruitment Team works closely with the Communication Officers, Press Officers and digital and website teams regarding advertising and promotion of the adoption service to raise awareness; provide information and attract new enquiries.

Adoption Partnership South East's website provides information to the public about adoption and how to enquire. It also provides a platform for the recruitment team to promote the Adoption service, advertise upcoming events and announce national Adoption events such

'#you can adopt' national recruitment campaign, LGBT Pride and National Adoption Week. Adoption Partnership South East is also advertised on the First4 Adoption website.

Advertising and marketing strategies that produce high levels of interest and quality leads will need to be regularly employed. This will be done by ensuring we have an active social media presence on Facebook and advertising through of media forums such as radio when there are national campaigns. There will also be times when we will recruit families who are not yet approved for children and then prioritise their assessments.

### **Recruitment Targets**

Our aim is to recruit and approve the right people who can meet the often-complex needs of our children who have a plan for adoption. We aim to ensure we have enough adopters for the children so that the best possible matches can be made for each child who needs an adoptive family within a timescale appropriate for the child.

To ensure there is a sufficient pool of adopters in the region, adoption forecasts the number of adopters needed each financial year. This is done by looking at the number of children granted placement orders the year before and the number of adoptive placements made, then adding an additional 20% to this number. The priority is to recruit families able to parent sibling groups, children with complex needs or disabilities, older children, children from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups and Early Permanence carers. In cases when sibling groups cannot be adopted by one family due to the children's individual needs, we seek adoptive families committed to maintain contact between the children on a regular basis. This requires careful matching of adopters for the whole sibling group.

### **Recruitment Calendar**

There are monthly consultation sessions held throughout the year.

### **Evaluation and Review of Adoption Recruitment Strategy**

The Recruitment Strategy will be regularly evaluated. The Adoption Service will carefully consider any feedback through the systems in place. The recruitment campaign is reviewed to assess effectiveness. The Initial Enquiries Advisors are managed within the adoption service so there is a constant overview of the number of enquires at any one time. Realistic budgets will be set and reviewed annually by the Head of Service to support all recruitment activity, including advertising costs.

The targets set for the total number of Adopters to be recruited and approved during the year will be reviewed quarterly to assess if the annual target will be met.

