

Cabinet

21 October 2025

Adoption Partnership South East, Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report 2024/2025

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Adam Price, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (including statutory responsibility)

Report from: Kelly Cogger, Assistant Director of Children's Services

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Summary

Adoption Partnership Southeast is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) providing adoption services for Medway, Kent, and the London Borough Bexley.

The fifth RAA Annual Report attached provides information and an overview of the adoption service activity and practice development for the period April 2024 - March 2025.

The report was previously considered by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 October 2025, the minutes of which are set out at section 8 of the report.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1. The Cabinet is asked to note the comments made by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in section 8 of the report.
- 1.2. The Cabinet is asked to note the annual report as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, which outlines the activity that has taken place across Adoption Partnership South East between April 2024 - March 2025.

2. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 2.1. Statutory guidance requires adoption agencies to report on adoption agency activity in the previous year.

3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. Adoption Partnership South East operates under a pooled budget from Medway, Bexley and Kent.

4. Background

- 4.1. The Statutory Regulations require that elected Members be informed of the Adoption Agency's activity on a regular basis. This annual report provides information that will assist elected Members in respect of their responsibilities as Corporate Parents for Looked After Children.
- 4.2. The report should be read in conjunction with all the appendices, including the Adoption Agency's Statement of Purpose (SOP). The SOP 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).
- 4.3. The agency is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 by:
- 4.4. 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.
- 4.5. The RAA works in collaboration with Children's Services with the support they provide children through the adoption process, with tailored direct work that reflects each child's age, developmental stage, and emotional needs. This includes tailored preparation for adoption, and later life letters to help children understand their journey and identity.
- 4.6. The RAA works with the birth family and the adoptive parents to produce the child's Life story book. The family times with birth parents, before the child is placed with adopters are carefully managed by Children's Services; ensuring these moments are handled sensitively and, in the child's best interests. In line with recent national developments, we are seeing a shift towards more direct family time even after adoption orders, where appropriate, to maintain safe and meaningful connections.
- 4.7. This work is carried out in close collaboration with social workers, carers, and specialist teams like CAFIS Barnardo's to ensure every child's journey through adoption is supported with care and clarity. Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services.
- 4.8. Working in partnership with adoptive families and multi-disciplinary professionals ensuring the service is based on meeting statutory requirements, good practice, and innovation within the principles of value for money for the agency.

5. Options

- 5.1. Adoption Partnership South East (APSE) to continue to provide adoption service for Medway children.

6. Advice and analysis

- 6.1. The report provides information regarding children's adoption journeys, adopters' journeys and reports the voice of adopted children and adoptive parents.
- 6.2. The report provides detailed information about how children's needs are at the centre of all the work which takes place within the adoption service.
- 6.3. The report provides information about adopter recruitment and the number of people enquiring about adopting through APSE.
- 6.4. The report provides information regarding adoption support services offered to children and families by the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

7. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Recruitment of the right adopters for the children of Medway.	The challenge is to recruit adopters who can meet the needs of Medway's children, who may have complex needs.	All three local authorities have access to a wider pool of adopters for their children, resulting in very few children in APSE needing to be placed with adopters approved by other agencies.	BIII
Finance	The principle underpinning the Adoption Partnership has been that there will be no increase in funding for the first 3 years of the Partnership.	Legal agreement in place	CII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

8. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 8.1. The report was considered by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 October 2025 and the draft minutes of this discussion are set out below.
- 8.2. The Head of Adoption Partnership South East introduced the annual report which detailed the service activity and practice development for the period April 2024 – March 2025.
- 8.3. The Committee learned that:
 - 8.3.1. The partnership had been successful in securing funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to assist with several projects, to help with practice and continued to deliver service that meets changing needs of families, such as development of an earlier permanence scheme and ability to place siblings together.
 - 8.3.2. Focus was on promotion of growth in community engagement run by volunteers adopters across the region, which was useful for connecting families and supporting each other.
 - 8.3.3. There was focus on early permanence where possible.
 - 8.3.4. The Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) works closely with social workers with adoption care planning and training and building of experience
 - 8.3.5. There has been an increase in adoption for Medway children in the last year and significant rise in placement orders for children to be placed for adoption.
 - 8.3.6. Timescales between placement orders and matching with adopters continued to outperform national average.
- 8.4. Members raised several comments and questions which included:
 - 8.4.1. The partnership was commended for their commitment to improving outcomes for young people of Medway.
 - 8.4.2. Members were supportive of partnership working, which provided good value for money.
 - 8.4.3. **Budget** – it was asked if Medway received value for money when comparing the amount of Medway's contribution to the budget, which was approximately 23% against that of the other two authorities. Additionally, Medway received less than the 23% contributed back, as only 20% was received when there was an underspend returned. The Committee was informed that when the RAA was set up, it was agreed that Medway would pay into the partnership what its existing budgets were for the first 3 to 4 years. Last year and this year would be the first year that we enact the agreement to base the budget on demographic demand. The percentages were kept under constant review. The return received of just under 20% was being discussed with the partnership board. The partnership continued to offer exceptionally good value for money as the Council would incur higher costs if it worked independently.

- 8.4.4. **Life story** - in response to the work undertaken in terms of continuation of life story work undertaken by foster carers, the Committee was informed that the valuable information gathered by foster carers continued with children when adopted. All children had a life story book created in collaboration with social workers which outlined their full journey as it was vital that children understood their birth history and be enabled to stay connected with birth families. It also enabled adopters to be able to support the young person's culture and identity.
- 8.4.5. There was ongoing work being undertaken to support young people with their identity as it enabled them to have a good understanding when they began to question their life journey.
- 8.4.6. **Support** – in response to a question about availability of support for families post adoption, considering challenges experienced in the first 2 years of adoption, the Committee was informed that the RAA as well as the National Adoption Agency had been looking into the support available post adoption. It was clear that many families waited until they hit crisis before reaching out for support which meant that specialist interventions occurred at late stage. There were changes to the adoption approach which had been put in place this year which would be reported next year. In order to be more accessible to families, the RAA had put in place a catch-up call service, this has been made possible through DfE funding and was a scheme for parents to sign up to following their adoption order to encourage them to stay connected. A lead social worker would make annual calls to families to check up, signpost where necessary and provide any additional support.
- 8.4.7. **Local support** – it was commented that not all support groups and activities where local and some families may find it hard to access services due to travel limitations. The Committee learned that the vision was for an increase in local community groups, but this remained a challenge as the partnership was spread over a large region.

8.5. **Decision:**

The Committee noted the report.

9. **Climate change implications**

- 9.1. Reducing carbon footprint – Staff are supported to work from home and can use different offices across the region to reduce the need to travel.
- 9.2. Current practices are reviewed regularly to ensure we can plan strategically to deliver a quality service and respond to changes as and when they are required.

10. **Financial implications**

- 10.1. A legal Partnership Agreement underpins each Partner's financial contribution to the RAA under a pooled budget arrangement.

- 10.2. The 2024-25 partnership operating budget was £4,394,136, of which Medway's contribution equated to £1,024,079. At the end of the financial year, the service underspent its budget by £317,281 (Medway's share equalled £63,456) which was rolled forward into the 2025-26 operating budget.
- 10.3. Quarterly RAA Board meetings are held, as outlined in the annual report, where Directors from each local authority partner review budget expenditure and forecasting as well as regular meeting with the finance representatives of each local authority.

11. Legal implications

11.1. 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.

Lead officer contact

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - APSE Annual Report 24024-2025

Appendix 2 - Presentation

Background papers

None