

Cabinet

25 August 2026

Adoption Partnership South East – Annual Report – 2025/2026

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

Report from: Dr Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief
Executive

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Summary

Adoption Partnership South East is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) providing adoption services for Medway, Kent, and the London Borough of Bexley. This is the fifth RAA Annual Report, which provides information and an overview of adoption service activity and practice development for the period April 2025 – March 2026.

The report highlights continued recruitment of adopters, the expansion of adoption support through therapeutic services, peer support and the Adoption Support Pilot, and a strong commitment to involving adopters, adopted people and birth families in shaping services. The report also recognises the successful matching and placement of Medway children with approved adopters and the strength of partnership working across Medway, Kent and Bexley.

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.

The report was previously considered by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 August 2026, the minutes of which will be set out in an addendum report to be published in a Cabinet Supplementary Agenda.

1. Recommendations

- 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 the addendum report.

- 1.2 The Cabinet is asked to note the annual report as set out at Appendix 1, which outlines the activity that has taken place across Adoption Partnership South East between April 2025 - March 2026.

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, Kent and Bexley.

4. Background

- 4.1 Medway Council is a statutory adoption agency under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and is required to provide a range of adoption services. These functions are delivered through Adoption Partnership South East (APSE), the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). National adoption policy since 2017 has promoted the regionalisation of adoption services to improve adopter sufficiency, reduce delay and strengthen adoption support.
- 4.2 The APSE Annual Report 2025-26 highlights continued strong partnership working across the region to secure permanence for children. APSE has expanded its adoption support offer through the Adoption Support Pilot, therapeutic interventions, peer support networks and earlier advice and support for families.
- 4.3 For Medway children specifically, APSE continued to prioritise timely permanence planning and early permanence. Children in Medway benefitted from APSE's specialist family finding, permanency planning and matching arrangements, supported by dedicated adoption advisers, family finders and adoption panels. The report also highlights ongoing collaborative working between APSE and Medway Children's Services to progress adoption plans and secure suitable adoptive families for Medway children.

5. Advice and analysis

- 5.1 The annual report demonstrates the positive impact of the Regional Adoption Agency model in delivering adoption services for Medway. Through APSE, Medway benefits from access to a wider regional pool of approved adopters, specialist family finding, adoption support and shared practice development across the partnership. This supports Medway's ability to secure permanence for children through a more coordinated and resilient regional service.
- 5.2 The report highlights APSE's continued focus on timely permanence planning, early permanence and finding the right families for children with a range of needs. Specialist permanency planning leads, agency advisers and family finding social workers work alongside Medway Children's Services to support

well-informed adoption care planning, effective tracking and careful matching. This collaborative approach helps ensure children's plans are progressed with appropriate oversight, challenge and support.

- 5.3 A further strength identified in the annual report is the development of APSE's adoption support offer. This includes early help, therapeutic support, support and advice arrangements, peer connection, adopter-led community groups and multi-disciplinary working. These developments are important because adoption support is central to helping families feel confident, connected and able to meet children's needs throughout their adoption journey.
- 5.4 The report also highlights positive feedback from families, who describe feeling listened to, supported and clearer about next steps. This reflects the value of APSE's relationship-based and responsive approach, with support shaped around the needs of children and families rather than a single point in time.
- 5.5 APSE's commitment to listening to lived experience is also evident throughout the annual report. Adopters, adopted young people and birth families have contributed to service development, helping APSE understand what support feels like in practice and where further improvements can be made. Continued collaboration between APSE and Medway Children's Services remains central to supporting timely permanence planning, effective matching and ongoing support for adopted children and their families.
- 5.6 A Diversity Impact Assessment is not required for this report, as it is not recommending a change to policy or service provision. However, APSE remains committed to ensuring that its recruitment activity reaches and welcomes a diverse range of prospective adopters who reflect the communities across our region. APSE also recognises the importance of supporting diversity within its workforce and ensuring staff feel valued, included and able to contribute to the development of inclusive adoption services.

6. 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.	B3
Finance	The principle underpinning the Adoption Partnership has been that there	Legal agreement in place	C2

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	will be no increase in funding for the first 3 years of the Partnership.		

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	1 Critical 2 Major 3 Moderate 4 Minor

7. Consultation

- 7.1 There has been no separate public consultation undertaken in relation to this report. The annual report has been developed through the established governance arrangements for Adoption Partnership South East, including oversight through the APSE Partnership Board and engagement with partner local authorities.

8. Climate change implications

- 8.1 There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 A legal Partnership Agreement underpins each partner's financial contribution to the Regional Adoption Agency under a pooled budget arrangement.
- 9.2 The 2025-26 partnership operating pooled budget is shared across Medway, Kent and Bexley, with Medway's contribution equating to 23%.
- 9.3 Quarterly RAA Board meetings are held, as outlined in the annual report, where Directors from each local authority partner review budget expenditure and forecasting, alongside regular meetings with the finance representatives of each local authority.

10. Legal implications

- 10.1 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 - Adoption Partnership South East Annual Report 2025/2026

Background papers

None