



Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

Adoption

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH
ADOPTION**

ANNUAL REPORT

1ST APRIL 2022 – 31ST MARCH 2023

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1. Overview & Background

This report is the second Annual Report of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption – the Regional Adoption Agency for Cambridgeshire County Council & Peterborough City Council. The Agency is responsible for adoption services on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council & Peterborough City Council. Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council collaborated to establish Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Adoption, which is a hosted model, hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council and started from December 2020. The Regional Adoption Agency was created in response to the legal requirement that authorities regionalise their adoption services. The vision and ambition of the two Local Authorities is for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption to ***make a life-long difference to the lives of children for whom adoption is in their best interests.***

The responsibility for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption has remained as for recruiting, assessing and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and intercountry adoptions. We have also had the primary responsibility for family finding for all children with adoption plans from the two Local Authorities. Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption is also responsible for providing support to all parties affected by adoption, including adopters, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth relatives as well as supporting the partner local authority special guardians.

This Report provides a summary of developments for the period 01 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, the second full operational year of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption. The report fulfils the statutory requirement that an annual report be produced.

The Report is divided into subsections covering: an overview of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption, Performance, Service Update and Staffing Update.

During its last year of operation, between 01 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption has:

- Matched **52** children,
- Placed **49** children,
- Supported **52** children to be adopted,
- Placed **16** children in Early Permanence Placements,
- Commenced **44** prospective adoptive assessments
- Approved **36** adopters,
- Matched **35** adoptive families with children,
- Supported families with **£784, 523.19** worth of Adoption Support Fund packages of support.

The RAA continues to make good progress in relation to the development of practice, systems and processes that operate across both Local Authorities. This ensures that children and young people receive a consistent and child focused intervention that brings about securing permanence arrangements where adoption is considered to be in their best interests. Continued effectiveness in developing additional support services for adopted children, young people and adopters, as well as special guardians, remains critical to the growth of the RAA, as well as utilising the Adoption Support Fund. The RAA will continue to have a presence nationally at the RAA Leaders' group and represent the views of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough residents to ensure we keep abreast of national trends and influence policy and government strategy where we can.

In February 2023, Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council launched a People's Services consultation that was in relation to a decision made to separate the current shared services arrangements for Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care, Education and Commissioning functions. The consultation provided details of the proposed new organisational structures for each of the following functions: Adults Services, Children's Social Care, Education and Commissioning. It will provide clarity around the proposed roles and about the impact upon current teams and colleagues. The consultation was clear that there are no proposed changes to the structure of the Regional Adoption Service as outlined in the Partnership Agreement.

2. RAA Governance

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption remains a hosted Regional Adoption Agency and there is a written Partnership Agreement that outlines the specific roles and responsibilities between the two authorities, as well as governance arrangements required for overseeing service provision and terms of the partnership.

The RAA is funded by a designated percentage contribution between PCC (30%) and CCC (70%), taking into account indexation in line with local pay awards, other changes in staff pay, changes in the type of service provided, or any changes in law, government policy, guidance and best practice.

Governance is provided substantially by the 'Regional Adoption Agency Partnership Board' which is chaired by the Assistant Director of Fostering, Regional Adoption & Specialist Young Peoples Services, and comprises key services - finance and safeguarding managers. The Partnership Board shall carry out a quarterly review of the operation with a report being provided to the Partnership Board by the Head of the Regional Adoption Agency. There is an annual review of the Regional Adoption Agency which the Director of Children's Services and Cabinet Leads from each Local Authority shall also attend.

Over the year there have been four Partnership Boards and there is an Annual Board meeting planned for August 2023. The membership of the Partnership Board has remained consistent and includes Virtual School, Looked After Child Health and an Adoptive Parent to ensure the board has a breadth of knowledge around adoption to enable it to play an effective role in developing the services provided by the Regional Adoption Agency.

In March 2022 a Governance Audit was undertaken by the Internal Audit Service of Peterborough City Council and the final report was completed in May 2022. The outcome was Reasonable Assurance and made recommendations all of which have been completed. These recommendations included reviewing the Terms of Reference for the Partnership Board and ensuring partners attendance and commitment to the board, timing of the Annual Report and Annual Board and promoting the boards' role around Quality Assurance. See Appendix A.

3. Service Structure

The Regional Adoption Agency provides a range of services to children and their families including children who are requiring an adoptive placement, supporting those caring for children in a permanent placement, as well as the birth families for those children who are placed for adoption. Here is an overview of these services.

Recruitment, assessment, and approval of adopters – The team supports prospective adopters from the start of their interest in adoption with their initial enquiry, completing the assessment process to enable them to be approved as adoptive parents. The team continue to support the prospective adopters with identifying the children they wish to adopt, enabling the children to move in and until they become the sole legal parents for the children through an Adoption Order.

Family Finding – A key activity of the Regional Adoption Agency is ensuring that children are successfully linked with their forever family as early as possible. Dedicated Family Finding social workers will have developed a detailed knowledge of the child throughout their time in local authority care to ensure that the child's adoptive family can be identified and linked as soon as adoption is the plan for the child.

Adoption Panel – Alongside the Recruitment & Assessment and Family Finding teams is the Adoption Panel that considers all applications for approval from prospective adopters, and all applications for the approval of a match between a child/ren from the RAA and suitable adopters. Their recommendation goes to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

Early Permanence – Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have a passion for securing permanence at the earliest opportunity for children and have embedded practices of Early Permanence into the Adoption Service as well as the safeguarding teams. Early Permanence is where adoptive parents are also approved as foster carers so they can provide a safe and stable placement prior to adoption being confirmed as the plan for the child. This will prevent changes in the child's primary caregivers and enables these attachments to be developed at an earlier part of the child's life. Family Finding will consider if Early Permanence is a suitable plan for the child and the adoption assessing social worker will prepare the adopter(s) to support children with these plans.

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support – The team provides support to adopters, special guardians, and their children to enable them to make positive changes to challenges that they face throughout their childhood and beyond. Their approach is rooted in developmental trauma and attachment. They work with a range of stakeholders to provide a child-centred comprehensive approach grounded by the evidence base. The team is responsible for the delivery of letter box contact, birth

records, counselling and intermediary services.

4. Performance

4.1 Children with a plan for Adoption – (with a Should Be Placed For Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions and subject to Placement Orders - also known as Best Interest Decision)

Provisional ASLGB data indicates that over the year, 37 children in Cambridgeshire and 28 children in Peterborough had a plan for adoption and 30 children in Cambridgeshire and 17 children in Peterborough were made subject to Placement Orders.

The national trend is that the number of children with a plan for adoption and placement order has been falling significantly, however Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are not following that trend and the numbers are remaining stable. In 2022-23, 39 children in Cambridgeshire had a plan for adoption and 35 children were made subject to a Placement Order. In Peterborough 21 children had a plan for adoption and 16 were made subject to a Placement Order. This has highlighted that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough continues to have a positive view about adoption and ensures that children have this as a permanence plan when there are no alternatives within the family.

4.2 Children Placed For Adoption

Over the year, 30 children in Cambridgeshire and 19 children in Peterborough were placed for adoption giving an overall total of 49 children being placed for adoption. Of these 49 children, 22 children had been in an early permanence placement prior to being matched as an adoption placement.

When comparing to the previous year, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have had a slight decline in the number of placements however last year the number of placements were higher than expected performance (2021-22 42 children in Cambridgeshire and 23 children in Peterborough) and it was not expected that the number this year would mirror that data. It is important to acknowledge that only 7 of these children (4 in Cambridgeshire and 3 in Peterborough) had been waiting for over a year since the Placement Order was granted due to having characteristics that has meant they were harder to place (including complex developmental needs, ethnic background and sibling groups).

The Agency has a success rate of being able to place 71% of those children who have a placement order with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough adopters. Those placed outside are deemed harder to place with seven being part of sibling groups and the other four being over 4 years old or with complex developmental needs. This has been fed into the marketing strategy for 2023-2024.

4.3 Children Adopted

Over the year, 31 children were adopted in Cambridgeshire and 21 were adopted in Peterborough giving 19% of Cambridgeshire children and 19 of Peterborough children exiting care via adoption which both are higher than the target (18%) as well as the rates on a national (10%) and Eastern Region (12%).

When comparing to the previous year, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have had a slight dip in the number of Adoption Orders granted and the proportion exiting care by adoption. However, it is important to note that 2021-2022 were higher than expected.

For this cohort, the average number of days for A2¹ is 238 for children in Cambridgeshire and 153 for children in Peterborough. The national target is 120 days and the national average is 198 days with the Eastern Region being 180 days.

For this cohort, the average number of days for A10² is 510 for children in Cambridgeshire and 400 for children in Peterborough. The national target is 426 days and the national average is 482 days with the Eastern Region being 464 days.

It is acknowledged that even though the timeliness of adoption is greater than the target, nationally local authorities and regional adoption agencies are struggling to achieve the target. Looking at the children behind the figures, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Adoption have secured Adoption Orders for a number of children who were deemed harder to place – including sibling groups and children over the age of 5 years old – and for these children the timescales to achieve adoption is longer. 40% were part of sibling groups and 25% were children over the age of 5 years. It is important to acknowledge this as positive practice in striving for permanence for these children. It is also noteworthy that there were 5 children where the timeframes had been significantly (5-8 times) higher than the target which had led to a decrease in our performance. These factors together have led to an increase in the average timescales for children adopted over the past 12 months.

Being aware of this dip, we have the Family Finding Team Manager takes a proactive approach to monitor timeframes for children who they are currently family finding for to ensure we can prevent drift and improve practice in the future. We have a number of strategies in place to address this and improve practice.

There are closer relationships between the Recruitment & Assessment team and the Family Finding Teams which has enables early identification of matches within the agency. This has also enabled early identification of children where an interagency match will be needed.

The Family Finding Team Manager attends the Permanency Planning Meetings that are held by the Safeguarding teams. These meetings track all children subject to Public Law Outline and Care Proceedings and this ensures that the Family Finding

¹ (Average time between a Local Authority receiving Court authority to place a child and the Local Authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days) - A low number shows good performance)

² (Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted (days))

team are aware of all the children who have a parallel plan for adoption and ensure any adoption links are started early in the child's journey. The Team Manager is also able to support and influence plans for children to ensure adoption is considered as a parallel plan at the earliest opportunity.

We are promoting early permanence where children will be placed with their potential adoptive families earlier in the child's looked after journey. This has been particularly positive with 24% of the children adopted in the past 12 months were in an early permanence placement. We anticipate this will increase as 40% of the children placed with their adoptive families in the past 12 months were with an early permanence family.

We have a proactive marketing strategy that ensures regular marketing activity and has a focus on recruiting adopters for harder to place children – this will enable us to achieve more adoptions within our own adopters that will in turn will improve the timeliness of adoptions.

There is a Matching Project worker that is currently employed by a neighbouring Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption Connects, who is leading on improving practice for harder to place children. She is working alongside our Family Finding Social Workers to support earlier matching for any children that we are unable to offer an adoptive family. This includes arranging our own Activity Days, proactive profiling of children on any digital platforms as well as developing connections with other Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

4.4 Early Permanence

Sixteen children have been placed in early permanence placements during this period with early permanence carers (dually approved carers) and fostering for adoption families (temporarily approved as foster carers). We have continued to promote early permanence with our adopters and have embedded an 'opt-out' approach rather than the current 'opt-in' approach.

The success of early permanence has continued through the lead practitioners in the Recruitment & Assessment and Family Finding teams. We have also strengthened our relationship with the safeguarding teams through regular attendance at the Placement Planning Meetings that are chaired by Safeguarding. This ensures that we are aware of all children subject to care proceedings and will allow tracking of a child's adoption journey from the earliest appropriate opportunity.

It is clear that we have had a positive year with early permanence placements, however there is a build on this practice further. One aspect is that we are aware that many of our early permanence placements have been later in the child's care journey (including after the Should Be Placed For Adoption decision or the granting of the Placement Order). There have been a number of factors contributing towards this including the reluctance of the family courts and CAFCASS in placing earlier as well as the child's social worker seeing Early Permanence as a parallel plan.

The Regional Adoption Agency will take a focus on earlier placements and to achieve this there needs to be an approach of closer joint working with various services and

agencies to ensure that EP is considered as a parallel plan for children from the point they enter care.

In February 2023 the National Regional Adoption Agency released the National Standards for Early Permanence and these are standards that all Local Authorities are expected to achieve. We have developed a working group, headed up by the Head of the Regional Adoption Agency to develop an action plan to ensure successful implementation of the standards. This has started internally with the RAA, however this needs to broaden and include colleagues in the Safeguarding & Children in Care services so there can be a joined up approach.

4.5 Change of Child’s Plan

It is important to consider any children where the court accepted the local authority’s plan for adoption and granted a Placement Order, however the child’s care plan had subsequently changed. Between April 2022 and March 2023 there have been no children where a placement order has been granted and the care plan has changed.

4.6 Recruitment of Adopters

Year	April 2022- March 2023
A13 - Number of applications to be adoptive families (still being assessed)	31
A21 - Number of adopter approvals	36
A22 - Number of applications commencing Stage 1	44

The data to the end of March 2023 showed that Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption had approved 36 adopters. In relation to applications to adopt, at the end of March 2023 there were 44 applications commencing stage 1 with a total of 31 adopters in assessment. We have maintained a stable number of enquiries with an average of 25 per month (308 over the whole year) and with a steady increase in the number applications to adopt and active assessment, with a 14.2% conversion rate from enquiries. One area that has been a focus is around increasing adopters for harder to place children and this has been supported by our marketing strategy.

An area that has been a focus for the recruitment and assessment team has been in relation to timeliness of assessments. We have established a tracker for all assessments which highlights adopters where their assessments have been significantly delayed allowing the team manager to be proactive in addressing this.

The ASGLB data indicates that stage 1 is not completed within 60 days and 26% of stage 2 assessment are completed in 4 months with the average number of days being 150 days (target of 120 days). It is important to note that the average across England is 14% of stage 1s are completed in 2 months and 40% of stage 2s are completed within timescales with the average number of days being 152 days.

It is acknowledged that we continue to remain behind in terms of performance for our stage 2 assessments, however we are making positive steps since Q1 where the

average number of days has dropped from 154 days and proportion has increased from 22%. However, we need to be more proactive in identifying delays at an earlier point and understanding the themes behind the delays. This is an areas that I will work Christine Clipston (Recruitment & Assessment Team Manager) so we can endeavour to improve over the next year.

Interagency placements for children from other LA

The majority of the children placed with our adoptive parents are from Cambridgeshire & Peterborough (87%) however when there are no suitable matches from our Local Authorities, we support adopters to offer an adoptive placement to children from other local authorities. Over the 12 months we have placed 6 children – one family with 3 children and three families with a child each.

Non Agency Adoption

It is important to acknowledge that there is an element of the activity in the Recruitment & Assessment team that is not included the work outlined above. This includes Step Parent Adoption, Intercountry Adoption for families as well as foster carers making direct application to adopt the child in their placement who is not subject to a Placement Order.

Over the past year there has been a continuous demand on the service for these areas of practice.

In relation to Step Parents Adoption there has been 38 enquiries that have resulted in 20 initial assessments. Despite many of the assessments recommending alternative legal orders, 6 have decided to pursue an application to an Adoption Order which means that a full assessment has been completed. The family court has a clear view that Adoption Orders will only be granted when no other order will do. 3 have resulted in an AO being granted.

In relation to intercountry adoption, the Regional Adoption Agency commission Intercountry Adoption Centre to carry out enquiries and assessments for adopters resident in the UK who wish to adopt a child internationally. However, alongside this we have families who have adopted child whilst living abroad and have subsequently returned to live in the UK who wish to have their adoption order recognised in the UK. To achieve this, we have to complete a court report that is presented to the High Court. We have had 2 of these.

Finally, for foster carers who have been caring for a child for longer than 12 months, they have the legal right to apply to the court for an Adoption Order. These are decisions that foster carers take in conjunction with the child's social worker, the Independent Reviewing Officer as well as birth parents. This is a really positive outcome for the child as it provides them with permanence. During the last 12 months, we completed 4 assessments.

4.7 Adopter Gap

The ASLGB refers to *The Adopter Gap: This is an analysis on the gap between the number of adopters available compared with the number of children needing adoptive parents.*

The National Adopter Gap is +70% indicating that there is an excess of adopters available.

The Eastern Region has a +86% mirroring the national trend with there being an excess of adopters available.

However, the data for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption is very different; we currently have a 2% adopter gap indicating that we have a small gap between the number of adopters available for children (18 adopters available for 18 children) – the adopter gap only considers those children with a Placement Order. However, internally, we monitor the number of children who have an ADM for adoption and this data indicates there are an additional 19 children where the plan for adoption has been ratified and waiting for the outcome of the Court. It is important to acknowledge that this is associated with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough authorities continuing to promote adoption as a care plan for children, where appropriate.

The proportion of children in with an ADMs³ for adoption in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough is 43% which is higher than the national average at 31% evidencing that adoption has remained an active permanence plan for children. Additionally, liaison with other Regional Adoption Agencies local to us has continued to indicated that they have excess adopters, however they also are struggling to match the adopters due to a mix match of the adopter offer and children available. All of this indicates the importance that we continue to have an active recruitment campaign for adoption to ensure we have a continuous flow of approved adopters to enable to timely matching for children.

5. Disruptions

There have been no disruptions of children from Cambridgeshire & Peterborough in pre adoptive placements.

As outlined above, we have placed 6 children paced with our adopters from other Local Authorities. One of these placements disrupted prior to the Adoption Order being granted. The child was 4 years old at the time of placement. She was placed in July 2022 and the placement disrupted in March 2023. There is a disruption meeting planned for May 2023 where further learning can be taken forward. Information has indicated that there were difficulties from early in the placement and the needs of the child upon placement was far more complex than indicated during matching. There was a range of support offered to the family from us as well as the child's local authority, including therapeutic support to the child and the adopters. Unfortunately, we were unable to support the family to continue to care for the child and there was a joint decision between the adopters and the child's local authority that this was not the best placement for the child. It is important to note there were no safeguarding concerns for the family.

³ % children taken into care before turning 5 with a Best Interest Decision

6. Service Overview

The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption Agency is overseen by a Head of the Regional Adoption Agency. There are four main service areas and each area has one team:

- Recruitment & Assessment
- Family Finding
- Adoption Panel
- Adoption Support

Recruitment & Assessment

The Recruitment and Assessment Team comprises of a Team Manger, 3 Senior Practitioners, 6 Social Workers and a Recruitment Officer.

Potential adopters who contact the Regional Adoption Agency will initially spend time talking with the Recruitment Officer to explore their interest in adoption. They will have the opportunity to attend an Information Session to understand more about adoption and the assessment process. Initially, due to Covid, we stopped running information sessions as we did not have the facility to run virtual information sessions so we provided detailed written information to adopters. However, after appointment of the Recruitment Officer we have started to hold Information Sessions over MS Teams as well as in person and have run alternate sessions. There will be a review of this approach, including gathering views from those enquiring, as to the future plans for Information Sessions.

Those that meet the criteria to be considered will be offered an initial interview by a member of the social work team; the Recruitment Officer remains their main point of contact during the enquiry phase all the way up to submitting their Registration of Interest, after which the prospective adopter will be allocated a social worker from the Recruitment and Assessment Team.

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption continues to operate a 2-stage assessment process in line with the statutory regulations; stage 1 includes completing statutory checks, and these must be completed and reviewed by the line manager before stage 2 can commence. In addition, the prospective adopters will be asked to complete a series of worksheets in order to increase their understanding in relation to adopting a child from care.

Over the past year we have supported a number of adopters with complex aspects to their life and despite these factors we have supported to them to become approved adopters and then have a child placed. This has enabled the team to broaden the offer of adopters and celebrate the diversity of adoption.

We run support groups for adoptive families – one for those who offer an Early Permanence placement and another one for all adopters from early in their placement. Both of the support groups are really busy and have been a positive way to support adopters in developing their networks with other adoptive families.

As highlighted earlier in the reported year, we accepted 44 applications to adopt and had 31 adopters in assessment at the end of 31 March 2023.

The RAA's approach towards early permanence needed reviewing to align Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Authorities. Cambridgeshire took a concurrency approach where children were placed early in their looked after journey, whereas Peterborough would place children under a Foster to Adopt arrangement closer to the point where the court were considering the LA's proposed care plan of adoption. It was clear that there were benefits for both and the Agency needed to find a way to merge the approaches so that children were able to achieve permanence as early as possible. A review of the marketing & training material was completed, and the Agency now has a clear approach for both models and messaging that enables adopters to understand each route. The Marketing Strategy for 2022-2023 includes focused social media posts and, alongside this, the Recruitment Team are moving towards an 'Opt-out' as opposed to 'Opt-In' approach to Early Permanence when adopters wish to adopt a child under the age of 2 years old. This will be a strength for the Agency as we will be able to offer permanence to children at the earliest opportunity. There is also work being undertaken by the National RAA team into Early Permanence looking at the definition and the training provided – it is reassuring to see the proposed approach mirrors our approach.

The Agency has a dedicated training lead who has undertaken a review of the training courses offered, as well as the material used. We have improved the quality, engaged adopters in supporting to deliver the training and broadened the information as needed. There is a clear whole team approach that even though there is a training lead, all members of the team take a proactive role in delivering training.

The training offer is:

Prepare to Adopt Training – Stage 1 & Stage 2

Stage 1 is the first part of the core training for prospective adopters and provides a baseline of information around adopting. The training includes practical information about the process of the adoption journey whilst also focusing of the developmental and attachment needs of children placed for adoption. Stage 2 is the second part of the core training and this builds on the previous training. There is a focus on providing adopters with the skills on parenting children with a detailed session around therapeutic parenting, involving case discussions to support adopters into thinking about translating this theory into practice. There is also information around supporting children with their own identity and contact with birth families. The course will provide thinking around loss for children and how to support them with this. There is an opportunity to hear from adopters on their own experiences of adopting. It is also a valuable opportunity to build up support networks with those in the training.

Transitions Training

This training takes the next step for adopters to think about their journey after being an approved adopter. Covered in this training is the matching process as well the introductions and supporting the child with the move. This includes working with schools and provides some practical tools around talking about adoption and using Theraplay games to support developing the child's relationship with the adopter.

Early Permanence

This 2-day course is a course for all adopters who are interested in adopting a child under 2 years old. The course provides detailed information about the principles and

processes around Early Permanence and gives the opportunity to consider this alongside the case examples.

Adopting Siblings

This course focusses on preparing adopters for caring for siblings. The course will help adopters to understand the impact of trauma on sibling relationships and also give the opportunity to hear from an experienced sibling adopter. Alongside this there will be chance to gather some practical advice about managing time, emotional and practical resources within the family, and give space to think about applying theory into practice with some case examples.

Preparing existing children

This is a course aimed at prospective adopters who already have children in the family home, to provide some discussion and suggested tools and resources to support parents in preparing their children.

Friends and Family Training

This is a course offered to any friends and family members of adopters to support them to understand the children placed for adoption, the assessment process and how they can support adopters and children throughout their childhood and beyond. We run this course on a video platform and this has enabled us to reach those members around the world including Canada, Australia and many European counties as well those physically closer to home.

Marketing:

We have a small and dedicated Marketing & Communications Team with a Marketing & Communications Manager working with the RAA as well as the Fostering Service for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. In 2022 we added a time-limited part time marketing assistant to the service to enable the Agency to take a proactive role around the current marketing approach. The marketing assistant post has been a valuable addition to the Regional Adoption Agency – it is currently due to end in September 2023, however I would recommend that the post becomes a permanent addition to the service, There is no expectation that the post could have an additional financial cost to the Local Authorities and can be included in the Regional Adoption Agency budget.

The marketing assistant has allowed us to increase our social media presence and develop the Regional Adoption Agency Website and there are plans to build on this with the creation of podcasts and videos, strengthening our relationships with communities.

We have seen a continuous increase in the enquiries, and it is important that we don't have gaps in our marketing presence to ensure this is maintained.

Over the year marketing and communications have been planned, executed and delivered so that the service is able to meet the needs of the children and young people who need adopting. We have formed an activity plan which details events, campaigns, internal meetings, newsletter publish dates, department comms, light touch messages for social media, reports, supports groups for prepare to adopt, and campaign planning meetings. This means we have been able to co-ordinate all of our activity with the service and make sure that we hit deadlines and keep activity and awareness high. We have undertaken three large campaigns to date covering LGBT month,

YOUCANADOPT and National Adoption Week – all co-ordinated throughout the year to help capitalise on adopters and those core groups highlighted in our marketing and recruitment plan for adoption.

One area we were keen to develop was creating new stories of those that have adopted in order for us to promote the real adoption messages. We have built on the sibling video created last year and created a video based on Early Permanence which we have used as promotion on social media as well internally to encourage those already open to the service to consider being an early permanence carer. This video is on the home page of our website – www.cpadoption.co.uk. We have started to develop plans to create podcasts regarding siblings, early permanence and support available which can have a multi-use through social media as well as within our own information sessions and training offer.

To help us target and reach more adoptive parents we have profiled our service using ACORN. This system uses household information (which is adopted by the council) and allows us to look more closely at reaching families for children with disabilities and sibling groups. It shows us how and where to target them for example the best supermarkets, email or social media. We have based this on the postcodes of our approved adopters since the Regional Adoption Agency has been live.

The Marketing & recruitment Strategy for 2023 – 2024 is Appendix C.

Family Finding:

The Family Finding Team comprises of a Team Manager, 2 Senior Practitioners and 2 Social Workers.

The Regional Adoption Agency has dedicated Family Finding Social Workers who have knowledge of all the children from Cambridgeshire and Peterborough who may need an adoptive placement. The Family Finding Social Workers will regularly review the permanency plan for the child and once it is clear adoption is the plan for a child active family finding will start.

Family finding activity includes early information sharing of children with a plan for adoption with the Regional Adoption Agency approved adopters, the use of exchange events and adoption activity days where required, as well as forums such as Link Maker.

When a child is identified by an adopter, there will be a series of meetings with the Regional Adoption Agency and the Local Authority, or other agency where applicable, to ensure that adopters have full information about the child – as far as is available. This will include meeting with the Medical Advisor, the current foster carer, the child's school, if at school age, and a Child Appreciation Day to gather detailed information about the child's experiences and history to date. Prospective adopters are entitled to all available information about the child that they are considering and will need to feel confident that all information about the child has been shared with them.

If a child is placed on an Early Permanence basis when the final care plan is not yet determined, the placement will be supervised, managed, and supported in line with fostering regulations.

As outlined earlier, over the year, 37 children in Cambridgeshire and 28 children in Peterborough had a plan for adoption and 30 children in Cambridgeshire and 17

children in Peterborough were made subject to Placement Orders. Despite the national trend indicating a decline in numbers, we have not seen this. In fact, our numbers are increasing. This has highlighted that both Local Authorities continue to have a positive view about adoption and ensure children have this as a permanence plan when there are no alternatives within the family. The Should Be Placed For Adoption ADM and Courts for both Local Authorities are the same and this ensures continuity and consistency in the decisions with regards to children.

It is important to acknowledge that over the past year, 49 children have been placed for adoption and even though this is lower than last year, it remains in line with performance as last year was significantly higher. Of these 49 children, we have placed 19 children in sibling placements and many of these children are deemed harder to place not only by being part of a sibling group but also due to their own complex needs. Some of the sibling groups have not been placed together due to the number of children as well as their needs, however we have promoted that the adopters for all of the sibling groups connect up and this has ensured that the siblings maintain their relationships despite not living together. Part of the Family Finding Social Worker role has been to support older children in their preparation for moving to a permanent family. They are undertaking some direct work as well as supporting foster carers in preparing the children. We have been keen to ensure we embed the child's voice in the matching process so this has been a positive platform for us to build on.

It is also positive to acknowledge that we currently have 3 children who have been waiting longer than 12 months. 1 child has been placed with an Early Permanence carer and was matched in April 2023 and 2 of the children are matched with adopters, however due to birth parents subsequent appeal of the placement order the final placement of the children has been put on hold. This is contradictory to the national picture as the work currently undertaken by the national RAA team has shown there are significant concerns for children waiting over 18 months for their adoptive placement.

The National Regional Adoption Agency team has released funding for Regional Adoption Agency's to have joint project workers to support with improving matching timescales. After a joint bid led by Adoption Connects, we have been successful in appointing a 3 year project worker for Adoption Connects and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption. The worker started in March 2023 and is employed by Adoption Connects however is working closely with us to support with matching for children who are deemed harder to place. Tom Hey, Family Finding Team Manager, is the lead link for this project.

The Regional Adoption Agency does not have a statutory role with the ADM for Should Be Placed For Adoption (also known as Best Interest Decision), however we have been working closely with the ADM to review the processes so we can align Cambridgeshire & Peterborough. As part of this strategy, we are introducing the Agency Advisor to play a quality assurance role for the papers being presented for Should Be Placed For Adoption ADM. The new processes were launched in September 2022 and it is anticipated it will be reviewed following the implementation of the People's Services Consultation.

At 31 March 2023:

	Cambridgeshire	Peterborough
Children being tracked	79	42
Children with PO	13	6
Children with Should be placed for Adoption	14	8
Children Linked	9	4

Panel:

The Adoption Panel for the Region is constituted in accordance with legislation, regulations, and guidance. There is a central list of 23 approved panel members, including three Chairs and a Vice-Chair. The work of the panel is overseen by the Agency Advisor and is supported by a Panel Advisor and Panel Administrators. The Regional Adoption Agency has recently recruited an Adoption Advisor, Jade Cullum, whose primary role is Panel Advisor. She joined us in February 2022.

Members of the Adoption Panel include individuals with personal experience of adoption, adopters and adopted adults and other independent members with professional experience of adoption, fostering and looked after children. Panels are balanced as far as possible in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and experience.

The purpose of the Panel is to consider all applications from prospective adopters for approval and makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker. The Panel considers all applications for the approval of a match between a child/ren from the RAA and suitable adopters. This recommendation goes to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for the relevant Local Authority of the child being placed. The Panel also considers placements for adoption where the birth parent(s) request their child be adopted. The recommendation goes to the ADM for the relevant Local Authority.

Over the year there were 35 Panels held that heard 34 approvals, 44 matches, 1 relinquished baby plan and no adopter de-registrations. The Panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), who makes the final decision on the suitability of the adopter or the match of the child with their adoptive family.

All but one of the applications had a positive recommendation and ADM concurred with these recommendations. The one application that did not have a positive recommendation was regarding the match of a child from Cambridgeshire. ADM concurred with panel recommendation and the match was not approved. This was in relation to a single child that was part of a sibling group of 3 children. The child was 2 years old and had a plan for adoption on her own. Following this, I undertook a review of the match and it was clear that there were a number of factors that contributed towards the recommendation, and I could understand the recommendation and subsequent ADM. We are taking forward some changes in panel around the questions posed to applicants (including the number of questions), using breakout rooms for adopters and social workers to meet to discuss questions and supporting social workers to play a more active role in supporting adopters to answer questions. There were concerns raised regarding the clarity in child's plans for adoption on her own or with her sibling following a recommendation made by the judge and how this was shared as part of the case transfer from Safeguarding to Children in Care. The Family

Finding Social Worker will ensure that should there be any similar situations they will ensure greater clarity through the family finding meetings.

The Panel members are provided with training, including mandatory courses, such as equality and diversity, safeguarding, data protection and other learning events relevant to panel activity. These are e-learning modules made available by Cambridgeshire County Council Learning & Development team.

There has also been 4 face to face workshops with topics including

- Therapeutic models used in adoption support including the Trauma Informed Model,
- Prepare to adopt training
- Understanding and awareness of the traveller/gypsy community
- Learning from the Serious Case Review in Cumbria

Alongside this Jade provided 4 group supervision sessions for panel chairs and monthly catch ups for all panel members.

Jade has continued with providing a regular training programme for the upcoming year. There will be a bespoke safeguarding course that has been developed by the Learning & Development team in Cambridgeshire County Council. There are a minimum of 4 workshops planned and some of these are joint with the recruitment & assessment and family finding team and there is a joint session with panel members from Adoption Connects. Topics arranged so far include:

- Early Permanence
- Adopting Siblings
- Secure Base Model
- Transitions for children
- Birth parents of adopted children

Jade will continue with the 4 group supervision sessions for panel chairs and monthly catch ups for all panel members.

There is a detailed Annual Report completed by the Panel Chairs and this is Appendix D.

Adoption & Special Guardianship Support:

The Regional Adoption Agency has a broad offer of support, and this includes approved adopters and the partner local authority Special Guardians Support Order. Post placement adoption support is provided by both the allocated child's social worker and the adopter(s)' social worker or connected person social worker. Once a child is adopted or subject to a Special Guardianship Order, the support is provided by the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team.

The Adoption & Special Guardianship Support team comprises of a Team Manager, 4 Senior Practitioners, 1 Social Worker, a Therapeutic Family Worker, a Birth Relative Outreach Worker and 3 Post Box Co-ordinators. Despite the difficult year before, this has been a positive year for the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support team and they have been able to build on their strengths. The staff base in the team is more

stable. There are no vacancies in the team and despite some absences via sickness and maternity leave, the team have been supported through agency social workers to fill the gap.

The Regional Adoption Agency provides a range of adoption support services including advice, guidance, birth relative outreach support, birth records counselling, support with contact arrangements (direct and letterbox), intermediary services, access to adopter peer support and more targeted support through access to therapeutic support via the Adoption Support Fund. There has been an internal review of how we offer support and we have developed a Tiered Approach to support which provides a clearer understand of the support families receive (appendix).

Over the past year the Team has received:

Initial Assessment for family support	104 referrals (70 – Adoptive families, 34 – Special Guardianship Families)
BRC/Intermediary/GRO	44 referrals
Financial Needs Based Assessment	104 referrals
Value of ASF Applications approved by the DfE	£784,523.19

On receipt of a referral for support, an initial assessment will be completed to outline the identified needs for the family, but also the support to be provided to the family. Services can include advice and guidance, parenting support, family work and individual work with children. Some of these services are delivered through the Adoption Support Fund. There has continued to be a high demand for an assessment and subsequent support and even though the waiting time for families to access an assessment has reduced significantly, there continues to be a higher demand that the team has to resource to fulfil. It was agreed that we would employ an additional social worker on a 12-month fixed term contract to help with the demand and the funding for the post would be secured through the team providing Adoption Support Fund commissioned services to families. This will be through 1-1 therapeutic support to families, group therapeutic parenting courses and therapeutic life stork work. A social worker has been appointed and will join the team in April 2023

We have continued to commission therapeutic support through the Adoption Support Fund and over the past 12 months we had agreement for £784,523.19 worth of therapeutic support for families. This is a significant amount of money and shows the positive work of the team despite the pressure of capacity.

Three post box co-ordinators sit within the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support team facilitating indirect contact for children who Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have placed for adoption. The Team will also support families where there are plans for direct contact between the children and their birth families.

Birth records counselling and intermediary services are another key area of work for the Team and due to Covid-19 and the difficulties with office-based working, the provision of this support had previously been paused and led to an increase in the

number of people waiting for a service. In acknowledgement of this we employed a Social Worker on a 6 month fixed term contract who focused on only working with Birth records counselling and this was an effective intervention that has brought the waiting list down considerably.

Another area that has become part of the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team is the review of Adoption & Special Guardianship allowances. The annual reviews are overseen by the Head of the Regional Adoption Agency who works closely with the respective Local Authority Finance teams. Where there is a clear financial hardship a means test allowance can be provided. However, there are times where the needs of a child indicate the need for an allowance by exception. In these situations, the Support Team will undertake a needs-based assessment to consider the needs of the child and the financial support that should be offered. The Financial Allowance process for Adoption & Special Guardianship Allowances was reviewed and the new process has been in place since July 2022. It has allowed for more timely review of means test allowance and any request for an allowance by exception. In January 2023, there was a decision to review the policy for Special Guardianship and Adoption Allowances, including the means test tool used to calculate the allowances. It was hoped this would be in place by April 2023, however there has been a delay and it is yet to be formally implemented.

The Team facilitate regular support groups for children and families across various locations. There are 6 support groups that run on a minimum of a monthly basis. They are based across the local authorities with a focus to support adopters to build up their own support networks. Members of the Support Team attend to offer advice and support. There is one support group that was set up to support Special Guardians and this is based in Peterborough.

We have run our first summer and Christmas parties for our all of our adoptive families, where new or more established. We have a further one planned for August 2023 that we are running in conjunction with National Trust who have offered us a venue and activities for free. We have also decided to broaden this and offer a summer party for our Special Guardianship families that we will held at an outdoor family activity centre in Peterborough.

We have continued to increase the therapeutic skills in the Team to enable them to provide therapeutic informed support and training to families. All members of staff have provided training on the Trauma Informed Model as well as DDP Training. We are planning to expand our offer of therapeutic support direct to families via providing Foundations For Attachment group training, 1-1 DDP informed therapeutic parenting support to families whilst continuing with offering Therapeutic Life Story work. This will allow the team to generate income via the Adoption Support Fund and has less reliance on external providers to support families. The additional social worker in the team is vital to allow us to offer this without impacting on families waiting for an assessment.

It is an achievement to end this year with such significant improvements for the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support team and even though there is always higher demand than there is resource available, the team have been able to work in ways that have improved the service offer to families.

7. Financial Statement

The budget of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption is provided by the two Local Authorities and was set by the Partnership Agreement in 2020 with the financial management being overseen through Partnership Board that the Finance Officers for both Local Authorities attend. This ensures robust financial monitoring, with variance challenged and scrutinised.

The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption in 2022/2023 budget set by the Partnership Agreement was £2,247,723 with Cambridgeshire contributing £1,599,111 and Peterborough contributing £648,612. As outlined in the Annual Statement, the actual spend for the year was £1,534,353.74, an underspend of -£64,757. The underspend was primarily as a result of recruitment campaigns, mileage & Interagency Costs. This has resulted in £64,757 being added to reserves for the Regional Adoption Agency

As part of the financial planning for 2023-2024, it is clear that, despite the underspend, the budget allocated for the Regional Adoption Agency is not excessive and is vital for the running of the essential services. It is proposed that the reserves remain with the Regional Adoption Agency and there are proposals to use these funds to contribute towards the costs of placing children with interagency placements.

8. Commissioned Services

There are a number of services that the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) has to commission to fulfil the needs of the service costing approximately £557,332.35 on an annual basis.

	Annual Cost
Medical Advisor – this is to complete reports with regards to the <i>adopter medical reports that are a statutory requirement for assessment and review of approved adopters</i>	£7,000 (approx.)
Linkmaker – <i>Online service to support linking for children with a plan for adoption and prospective adoptive parents across England, Wales and Scotland</i>	£19,639.35
Birth Relatives Counselling – <i>this is a statutory provision and is currently provided by Adoption Plus.</i>	£17,043
Intercountry Adoption – <i>there is a statutory duty for the local authority to provide intercountry adoption where by the adopters are assessed in the UK and linked with a child that is not based in the UK.</i>	£13,650
Adoption Support Fund – <i>a DfE statutory service where the adoption support fund (ASF) provides funds to local authorities (LAs) and regional adoption agencies (RAAs) to pay for essential therapeutic services for eligible adoptive and special guardianship order (SGO) families.</i>	£500,000 (approx.)

Over the past year the Regional Adoption Agency has been working with the Procurement team to develop a Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing Framework for the services commissioned as part of the Adoption Support Fund. It is anticipated that the framework will be in place by October 2023.

Alongside this, we have ensured that all contracts have followed the procurement rules and waivers have been sought for the Linkmaker, Birth Relatives Counselling and Intercountry Adoption. There is a plan to advertise the Adopter Medical Advisor post in June 2023 to review the current provider.

The Department for Education has implemented their plan to support the National Regional Adoption Agency and cross Regional Adoption Agency commissioning with the ambition to improve efficiencies within commissioning. This is early days, however we will be working with Adoption Connects and Adopt East to explore cross RAA commissioning opportunities.

9. Staff Profile group

As with any service, the staff group is a vital part of the effective running of the Agency and it is really positive to share that there has been increased stability in the service.

We started the year with 2 Social Worker vacancies, however we had appointed to them with members of staff joining in April and July. The management team has remained stable and this has been vital to support the Regional Adoption Agency with settling and embedding practice. We have had a business support officer who has taken a career break, however we have been able to fill this post with a fixed term contract.

Over the year:

8 members of staff have left	3 Social Workers, 2 Business Support Officers, 2 Senior Practitioners & 1 marketing assistant
9 members of staff have joined	5 Social Worker positions, 1 Senior Practitioner, 2 Business Support Officers & a Marketing Assistant
1 members of staff have been promoted	1 Social Worker to a Senior Practitioner.

As at the end of the year we have no vacancies.

Another area that has continued to create pressure for the RAA has been around sickness and this is particularly so for the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team. We have also had a Business Support Officer who had a period of sickness followed by a career break to support her with her personal circumstances. We have been able to cover the absences with agency workers and fixed term contracts as a way of minimising the impact of the absences.

Over the 12 months the Service has lost 652 days to sickness over a total of 22 employees. The prevalent reason being stress with 231 days, followed by injury at 142 days and anxiety at 134 days. 465 days have been linked to long-term sickness for 4 members of staff.

For all of those workers who have had a period of sickness, there is a return-to-work meeting and for those on long-term sickness, an Occupational Health assessment was considered and a there is a planned phased return over a 4-week period, with additional support to enable a successful return to work.

It is really important that we ensure the voice of those working for the Regional Adoption Agency is heard, so alongside team meetings and supervision, we have a feedback questionnaire that staff can complete at any time. It asks for their feedback on their team, their manager as well as the Regional Adoption Agency as a whole. They were to give ratings out of 5 (1 being low and 5 being high)

- Rate My Team – 4.57

- Rate My Cohesion – 3.43
- Rate My Recognition – 4.71
- Rate Your Manager – 4.71
- Rate Your Leadership – 4.43
- Would you recommend working for the RAA – 85% said 1 and 15 % said Maybe and no one said no.

Some of the comments included:

The RAA is very supportive offers flexible working and I enjoy the variety of the role.

I have really enjoyed my year and a bit since joining the RAA. In terms of attitude of colleagues, passion for the work we do across the team, and openness to work alongside each other and learn, my experience has been really positive. The opportunities for professional growth in my role has been really welcomed and only further cements my commitment to the role. Leadership and management is really good, and approachable, from my personal manager to higher.

I feel lucky to be able to have recorded five stars across lots of areas and I realise that I am afforded lots of opportunities to do areas of work that I enjoy in the adoption service. I feel that things are more stable in and it feels like it has been a long time since we were constantly raising issues with/discussing staffing and capacity, which is really nice after years of everything being unsettled on every level.

We also asked for feedback on how we could improve, and the consistent theme was closer joining up the separate teams within the Regional Adoption Agency. So we have arranged regular service development workshops as well as cross service working groups on practice themes.

10. Complaints

Over the past year we have received 13 Stage 1 complaints which have come from 12 families. 12 of the complaints related to the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team. We upheld 4 complaints, partially upheld 5 and did not uphold 4.

Of these complaints

- 1 was regarding delays in accessing an assessment and support from the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team,
- 5 were with regard to delays around post box contact,
- 5 related to special guardianship allowances,
- 1 was related to delays in setting up an adoption allowance
- 1 was regarding accessing birth records as an adopted adult,

We have had two Statutory Stage 2 complaints and two Statutory Stage 3.

The stage 2 complaints and one of the stage 3 complaints related to their Special Guardianship Allowance Policy and it's application to their circumstances. The other stage 3 complaint was related to delays in access to Adoption Support and the support that was offered to the family.

For the Stage 2 complaints and the stage 3 complaint relating to Special Guardianship Allowances, there have been recommendations made regarding the individual allowances however there were also recommendations that the Adoption & Special Guardianship policy be reviewed with specific consideration to the allowances.

For the stage 3 complaint regarding delays in access to Adoption Support and the support that was offered to the family, there were 13 complaints considered of which 6 were upheld, 1 was partially upheld and 6 were not upheld. There were 5 recommendations and these have all been implemented.

11. Service Developments

The Regional Adoption Agency has completed its second full year and it has built on the strengths that were emerging at the end of March 2022. A significant strength is a stable staffing base and we end the year with no permanent vacancies in the team. Those who work for the service show their passion and dedication and will often go behind their role showing that at the heart of what we offer is child and family focused. There is a drive to improve and evolve what we offer and how we offer it.

We have built on the Trauma Informed Practice that we started last year, and this will become our practice model that will be central to everything we do. We have a plan to hold our second Regional Adoption Agency Service Away Day in May 2023 where this will be the theme for the day. This is just the starting point and we will offer follow up sessions throughout the year to embed this further.

Even though we have made several positive strides this year, we have plans not only to ensure that we continue with these but build on them further and this is outlined in the Service Plan – Appendix E



Joanne Banks

Head of the Regional Adoption Agency.

28/06/2023

Appendix A – Internal Audit Report

See Internal Audit Report attached

Appendix B – Marketing Strategy 23-24

See Marketing, Communication & Recruitment Strategy 2023-2024 Attached

RAA Proposed Budget 2023/2024

Cost Centre (T)	Account	Account (T)	Final Budget	Notes
Regional Adoption Agency	A0000	Pay	1,261,831.00	Salary
Regional Adoption Agency	A1000	NI	127,668.00	Salary
Regional Adoption Agency	A2000	Pension	250,347.00	Salary
Regional Adoption Agency	A3005	Other Allowances	48,600.00	Panel fees - £1350 x 36 & inc training sessions
Regional Adoption Agency	A3100	Apprentice Levy	6,309.00	Jo Banks Salary Spreadsheet 23-24
Regional Adoption Agency	A4000	Agency Staff	12,792.00	ISW £2k x 5 assessments + 2792 misc
Regional Adoption Agency	A6200	Staff Training & Development	6,000.00	Staff Training & therapeutic training
Regional Adoption Agency	A6400	Staff health & welfare Costs	1,000.00	OH/Eye tests
Regional Adoption Agency	A6510	Other Staff Deductions	12,433.00	pay increments
Regional Adoption Agency	B2005	Casual hire of facilities	5,000.00	Support Group Hall Hire & Hall Hire for Info sessions
Regional Adoption Agency	C5000	Car mileage and allowances - staff	15,000.00	car mileage
Regional Adoption Agency	C5010	Car mileage and allowances - other	1,500.00	Adopters introduction expenses
Regional Adoption Agency	D0230	Books and Multimedia Supplies	200.00	Books for training
Regional Adoption Agency	D1100	Catering Provisions	500.00	Service Away day
Regional Adoption Agency	D3100	General Office Expenses & Stationery	500.00	stationary
Regional Adoption Agency	D4105	External Legal Fees	1,000.00	legal fees
Regional Adoption Agency	D4110	Professional Fees and Hired Services	39,000.00	Medical Advisor (£9k), Adoption Plus (£17k), IAC (£13k)
Regional Adoption Agency	D4800	Advertising / Publicity (non Recruitment)	36,000.00	Marketing & Recruitment
Regional Adoption Agency	D5110	Mobile Phones	500.00	Mobile Phones
Regional Adoption Agency	D6000	Staff subsistence	1,500.00	Staff overnight & out of county visits
Regional Adoption Agency	D7000	Subscriptions	40,000.00	Coram Baaf Licences - £2500, Coram Baaf Membership - £8k, Ofsted £4250, Linkmaker £19k, NFS £900, Coram EP £500, CVAA £100, other
Regional Adoption Agency	E7100	Adoption Agency	355,650.00	x10 VAA Placements
Regional Adoption Agency	F1010	Adoption Allowances	20,000.00	IA Placement Supervision Fees post 12 months
Regional Adoption Agency	J2205	Other Funding Contributions	-648,612.00	PCC contribution (30%)
			1,594,718.00	

Appendix D - Panel Chairs Annual Report



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH
ADOPTION**

ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE PANEL REPORT – ANNUAL

1st April 2022 to 1st April 2023

Author- Jade Cullum Regional Adoption Agency Advisor

1.0 Agency Advisors' Introduction

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Adoption, Regional Adoption Agency, was formed on 1st December 2020.

The Adoption and Permanence Panels from both Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council came together to form one Adoption and Permanence Panel for the RAA.

The detail and statistics for this report are for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption Agency Adoption and Permanence Panel.

The Function of Panel remains unchanged. Panels make adoption recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) in respect of:

- Whether prospective carers should be recommended as suitable to adopt,
- Whether children should be matched with specific adopters, where their permanency plan is for adoption,
- Whether a relinquished child should be placed for adoption

2.0 Adoption Panel

Central List Membership

Gary Shorter	Independent Chair (social worker, adopter and foster carer)
Fernley Copping	Independent Member/Vice chair/Independent Chair
Lesley Hamilton	Independent Panel Chair (Birth Parent)
Jackie Fernandez	Independent Panel Chair (Adopter)
Mervyn Cowdell	Independent Member
Cathie McCulloch	Social Worker, PCC
Sue Hogg	Independent Member (foster carer)

Kathryn Moore	Independent Panel Member (adopter)
Geraldine Moyo	Independent Panel Member/Social Worker
Sabina Giga	Independent Panel Member
Deborah Ward	Independent Panel Member (adopted person)
Jackie Venables	Independent Panel Member (foster carer)
Horia Astalos	Independent Social Worker
Stephen Cook	Independent Member (Adopted Adult)
Patricia Cullen	Independent Social Worker
Rayna Wallis	Independent Member (Adopter)
Louise Fraser	Independent Member (adopted adult)
Laura Dilkes	Independent Social Worker
Darren Jenkins	Independent Member (Adopter)
Elaine Barry	Independent Social Worker
Hugh Minty	Independent Social Worker, (adopter and foster carer)
Patricia Pearce	New member. Independent Social Worker, adoptive grandparent
Monica Dallas	New member. Independent Social Worker
Stacey Haywood	Independent Member (Adopter)
Dr Rachel Bower	Independent Panel Member & Medical Adviser (Designated Doctor for LAC)

The Regional Adoption Agency Adoption and Permanence Panel has a core membership of highly skilled, knowledgeable, committed individuals from diverse professional backgrounds including adopters, adopted adults and a birth parent. The current central list provides us with panel members who have the experience and understanding of the adoption process in order to be able to consider the assessment.

Dr Tim Ladbrooke, Medical Adviser, provides adult medical advice to the Agency. Dr Rachel Bower focuses on children's medicals for Cambridgeshire County Council and when available sits on Panel for matches. Dr Gregory and Dr Augustic provide focuses on children's medicals for Peterborough City Council. Dr Bower, Dr Gregory or Dr Augustic meet with prospective adopters for each child to go through the child's and their family's medical history as far as it is known and provide comprehensive medical reports for adopters and Panel.

Panel members have been appointed subject to relevant references and have up to date enhanced DBS checks. Individual Panel member appraisals took place between April-August 2022 and will be repeated in 2023. Panel Chair appraisals were completed in December 2022 and will again take place in December 2023.

Membership updates

Some Panel members, including one of the Panel Chairs, have been sitting on Cambridgeshire County Council Fostering Panel again this year which has the benefit of further helping them in reaching recommendations on fostering and adoption dual approval cases.

We have had members on temporary hold due to personal circumstances on occasion.

All other Panel members have confirmed that they wish to continue as Panel members and be part of the central list for the RAA Adoption and Permanence Panel.

We have continued to look to increase and diversify our Panel members. As a result of this we have recruited new Panel members, Monica Dallas is a qualified Social Worker with a long-standing experience in children's services adoption teams and Stacey Haywood is an adoptive parent of 2 young children who brings valuable lived experience and expertise to panel. We had had numerous enquires to join the panel and a waiting list is now in place. As part of appraisals the chairs and I will be reviewing panel membership to look at what is needed for the future.

I have also sent enquiries to children's social work teams as I would like to recruit more practicing social workers, this would give panel relevant information reflecting social work practice now and the demands on the service.

Panel Chair Gary Shorter confirmed he will be stepping down from his chair role to focus on family life and his full time business. Gary will be very missed within the panel and we would wish to thank him for his years of service to children in PCC and CCC.

Elaine Barry was successfully interviewed to become a panel chair and her induction started in January 2023. She is due to begin chairing in June 2023.

Panel operation

Jade Cullum remains in post as Agency Advisor.

The Should be placed for adoption processes have been a focus of work for the AA and service manager of the RAA in liaison with medical advisors, ADM and legal. This was to support robust systems being in place (noting importance of the Somerset Judgement) and aligning PCC and CCC process. A new practice guide, process flow chart for social workers and new templates have been created and shared across teams. The Somerset Ruling has been a significant legal ruling in relation to adoption cases, which took place in November 2021, and had a significant impact on adoption activity nationally. The reach, and impact of the Somerset ruling has had a profound effect nationally and led to a significant re-examination of the medical advice provided to Agency Decision Makers (ADM) in coming to their decision that adoption is the Local Authority plan for the child. Specifically, whether the requirements of Adoption Agencies Regulation 15 and 17 (2005) were met in each case. Within our RAA we were fortunate to have not been impacted as formally appointed medical advisors for both PCC and CCC were in place. However we did review procedures, and processes for the making of the Agency Decision, to ensure ongoing compliance with AAR (2005) and specifically Regulations 15 and 17.

There are 2 full time Panel administrators' posts; however, this has been an area of difficulty historically. Tracy Fifield and Helen Griffiths remain in post which has had a very positive impact on panels functioning. Having 2 panel administrators remaining in post will greatly improve the running of panels and will over time enable the agency advisor to focus on development of the service. Helen also administrates the should be placed for adoption.

Written Legal Advice is provided by PCC and CCC and ensures cases are well evidenced for the Agency Decision Maker and that the plans are robust and there are no legal issues which may prevent the plans from being considered. There is a good working relationship between myself as agency advisor and the legal leads for both LA.

3.0 Panel processes

Since the RAA started in December 2020, we have continued to operate as a paperless Panel and SharePoint as the method to securely share files. There is a dedicated RAA Adoption & Permanence Panel SharePoint site. Panel has been operating successfully on a virtual platform, Microsoft Teams. We have maintained a quoracy of five members. Panel meetings continue to be virtual at this time.

The online panel processes have been continuously monitored and streamlined to offer continuity and same level of scrutiny across panels; the processes continue to be revised by the Agency Advisor and chairs. Panel has been held virtually since April 2020 using the platform of Microsoft Teams and although there have been some technical challenges at first it has been necessary for all to adjust to working on a virtual platform given the covid impact on face-to-face meetings.

Panel has always operated on the dates planned and no cases have been delayed being considered by Panel. We have been able to use the platform to ensure a better experience for adopters attending. The current plan is future Panel meetings to remain virtual. Social workers have the capacity to request an in-person panel as needed but so far this has not been requested.

The wider context of adoption panels across the area appears to be to remain virtual. In feedback from Panel members there appears to be a majority who prefer virtual and several who have stated they would not necessarily continue to be Panel members if the Panels reverted to in person. While it is recognised that face to face Panels may provide Panel members with the opportunity to consolidate working relationships and for applicants to have direct contact with Panel, this is agreed to be outweighed by benefits of Virtual Panels. The advantages of Virtual Panels are seen to be the accessibility of Virtual Panels for applicants and prospective adopters who may be at some distance to the Agency, and to placing social workers.

With Panel operating on a virtual platform the Panel Chair and AA meet new applicants to have a pre-Panel discussion prior to joining Panel on the day. This discussion notes how panel will function, strengths in their application and question themes that will be asked. The applicants are then offered an opportunity to discuss with their social worker if they wished. Cameras are kept on by the Panel Chair, Panel member asking the question and applicants and their social workers. This is to assist with applicants being able to respond to questions without multiple images of people and uncertainty of who to direct answers to.

A system for Panel to feed back to the Agency on the quality of reports on a case-by-case basis has been established since March 2015 and has proved beneficial to the Agency and to Social Workers. This is an area where additional value could be obtained as the uptake on completion remains low.

Minutes: The format of the Panel minutes has been standardised by Agency advisor and Panel admin in post during the reporting period. Draft minutes are sent for an accuracy check to the Chair and agency advisor before being then sent to Panel members. Templates were updated February 2023.

ADM decisions: The Adoption Panel makes recommendations to the agency and there is a statutory requirement for the ADM to make their decision within 7 working days of receiving the finalised minutes. This is being achieved.

Panel business runs smoothly with all relevant paperwork provided in advance. Panel minutes are available promptly for Panel members' oversight. The process of authorising the Panel minutes has now been amended so that the final Panel minutes is always signed off by the Panel Chair.

4.0 Panel Training

A Panel training session for members took place in August 2022 addressing therapeutic models used in adoption support. The focus was on Betsy De Thierry RAA Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) The session addressed the main aspect of the model:

Relationships are the only way to facilitate healing and enable recovery

Self-Regulation follows Coregulation and enables reflective, appropriate responses

Psychoeducation reduces shame and facilitates confidence

Processing and making sense of the impact of trauma is essential for recovery.

An In person training day took place on 7/10/22 for all the panel team, which was very well attended. The focus was on adopter training in assessment, and gaining an insight into the traveller/gypsy community, which is the largest minority group in Cambridgeshire.

On the 20/10/22 the agency advisor presented a virtual teams training session on the lessons from the safeguarding review relating to the tragic case of Leiland-James Corkhill.

The agency advisor has set up a virtual coffee morning conversation each month to discuss themes/catch up for the panel members which has been attended each time.

Online training via Cambridgeshire County Council's learning and development team has now been set up by the agency advisor with CCC virtual college. An account on the council's Learning Management System for each member was set up to allow them to gain access to eLearning for their roles as Panel Adoption members.

Modules cover.

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for Employees
- An Introduction to the Autism Spectrum Training
- Mental Health Awareness
- Modern Slavery and Trafficking
- Cyber Security Awareness
- Information Governance
- Safeguarding for the Children's Services Workforce
- County Lines

Within Sharepoint there is a folder for Panel members to access files and videos to support their learning. For example prepare to adopt presentations and research has been added..

Panel Chairs attend the quarterly CoramBAAF meetings for Adoption Panel Chairs.

The agency advisor attends the CoramBAAF Panel advisor Forum and adoption forum meetings.

Panel chairs, Agency advisor and management within PCC/CCC have regular meetings (Panel Advisory Group).

Panel Chairs have 3 monthly supervision/discussion meetings facilitated by the agency advisor.

Panel training has been planned for 2023 which will run from May-December. Additional training will be added as required.

A joint training day with Adopt Connects (neighboring RAA) and with our own RAA adoption team has now been arranged for Autumn 2023.

During the year Panel welcomed a number of social workers, health professionals in training and new Panel members as observers.

5.0 Panel Business – Number of Panels held

	01.04.22 to 30.09.22
Total Panels	19
Cases Considered	18 approvals; 16 matches; 1 De-Registration

	1.10.22 to 1.4.23
Total Panels	17
Cases Considered	17 approvals; 26 matches; 1 De-Registration
Total number panels 1st April 22- 1st April 23	36 panels 35 approvals; 43 matches; 2 De-Registration

The Adoption Panel has met on average 3 days per month. Two Panel meetings were cancelled, one in July and one in August due to lack of cases being booked. We have increased the number of Panel meetings

than were originally planned to ensure the timely throughput of cases and prevent delay for children. September 2022 was very busy with a panel each week after a quieter August due to SW's availability/leave. October to April 2023 period was very busy with children's matches being presented.

6.0 Panel feedback

Social workers, Panel observers and adopters continue to be invited to provide feedback on Panel activity. This is always considered by Panel as part of its post-Panel reflection with discussion and careful consideration about whether any changes are necessary. 6 feedback forms have been received in the last year. Applicants are asked to electronically return their feedback forms. The feedback from adopters remains very positive.

Comments from 3 of these stated;

-The chair made us feel very welcome and calm. The comments we received from the panel members were relevant and useful

-We would like to say how welcomed we felt when we went to matching panel. Everyone was professional but made us feel at ease. We couldn't of had a better panel of people.

-We had a very positive experience with panel.

We left feeling very happy that we had answered all the questions to the best of our ability. With panel being virtually we feel that we were more at ease as we were in our own home and would have been more relaxed especially as there is distance involved.

7.0 Approved Adopters

Number of Adopters Approved (Households)	01.04.22 to 30.09.22
	19
	Mixed Sex Couples 12
	Single Female Adopter 2
	Same Sex Male Couple 4

	Same Sex Female Couple	1
	01.10.22 to 1.4.2023	
Number of Adopters Approved (Households)	17	
	Mixed Sex Couples	12
	Single Female Adopter	4
	Same Sex Male Couple	1
total	36 approvals	

8.0 Ethnicity of Adopters

Ethnicity (as identified by adopters/adoption SW)	Number of Approved Households 01.04.22 to 30.09.22
White British	17
White European	1
White European/White British	2

Ethnicity (as identified by adopters/adoption SW)	Number of Approved Households 1.10.22 to 1.04.2023
White British	11
Middle eastern	1
Asian and British	1
White British & White European	1
White European	1
Canadian	1

Ethnicity (as identified by adopters/adoption SW)	Number of Approved Households 1.4.22 to 1.04.2023
White British	28
Middle eastern	1
Asian and British	1
White British & White European	3
White European	2
Canadian	1

9.0 number of Children matched at panel 2022-2023

April- Oct 22	18 children, including 2 sibling groups
Oct-april 23	32 children, including 6 sibling groups
total	50 children

10.0 Ethnicity of Children matched at panel

<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>number</u>
White BRITISH	45
Black AFRICAN	1
White EUROPEAN	4

11.0 Who children were matched with

April 2022- October 2022	number
CHILDREN MATCHED with CCC ADOPTERS	13
VOLUNTARY ADOPTION AGENCY	5

October 2022-April 2023	number
CHILDREN MATCHED with CCC ADOPTERS	20
VOLUNTARY ADOPTION AGENCY	6

12.0 De-registrations

One de-registration case was presented to Panel in the period 01.04.22 to 30.09.22. The case was a couple with a birth child who during introductions felt unfortunately due to the uncertainties regarding possible

complex needs of the child they could not proceed with the match. They decided to withdraw as an adopter as they recognized they could not manage the levels of uncertainty in general.

1 de-registration took place between October 2022 and April 2023. This was due to the prospective adopters relationship breakdown prior to a match taking place.

13. IRM

When a Qualifying Determination (QD) is made by the ADM following a negative recommendation from Panel, the applicants have the following options:

- To accept the QD;
- To appeal to the ADM with additional information; or
- To appeal to the IRM to hear their application.

In this period there have been no negative recommendations or cases where Panel had to consider that approved adopters are no longer suitable to adopt and therefore no applicants have made an application to the IRM

14.0 Quality of Reports

The overall quality of reports is good, and this is reflected in the vast majority of the feedback sheets produced by the Panel on each case heard.

Agency advisor and Chairs will continue to feed back to the Agency on the quality of reports received and the timescales of bringing cases to matching and approval. Panel would also welcome increased feedback from social workers attending.

Agency Advisor and panel team have been working to ensure reports are compliant and of an acceptable level to be heard at panel.

Within the CPR social workers have to sign to confirm whether they have met the regulatory requirements for the qualifications of the workers writing reports, and whether the information required in Schedules 1, 4 and 5 of the AAR is contained in the adoption reports.

Panel compile feedback on each case presented to them, which is reported back to the agency. This is an area that has been further developed to enable more time to be spent on this and the feedback to be constructive, noting good practice and areas of improvement.

The AA is aware that many agencies also provide a rating for reports to provide a more qualitative and informed judgement on how reports have improved or deteriorated over time, and this is being explored.

15.0 Prospective Adopter Reports

The establishment of a more concise PAR has also become embedded in practice and is welcomed by Panel.

The PAR usually evidences well how prospective adopters can meet the needs of the child.

-There is clarity and thoroughness, with clear ecomaps and genograms supplied

-PARs are now more routinely explicit about whether Early Permanence has been explored and discussed with the applicants. There is evidence that Fostering for Adoption had not only been discussed by the social worker, but that the applicants understood the implications

-Feedback from Preparation Course facilitators and applicants on their own learning.

-The Agency has worked to ensure a consistency of format, content and quality of the PARs presented to Panel.

-It is positive to see that the majority of adopters have gained experience of working with children through volunteering when needed.

On occasion the Advisor and Chair have required additional work to be completed prior to formal consideration by Panel however this is rare.

16.0 Child Permanence Reports

The quality of the Child Permanence Reports is seen to be inconsistent, ranging from very good examples to poor. Where CPRs were seen to be of good quality, there was a clear explanation of the child's journey, consideration of birth parents' circumstances and those of siblings and an understanding of the child's experience of being cared for. There were strong examples of where the child 'came to life' from the page with a good description of them as individual children.

There have been some concerns raised around the quality of the CPRs in the sense of a clear narrative on the child's journey in placement as different workers have contributed towards the report. This has been fed back and will become an area for further work.

Areas for continuous review by social workers, particularly prior to matching, are the consistent inclusion of parents' views and post adoption contact plans, in particular contact plans with siblings. As much background information as possible on a child's birth parents and siblings or halfsiblings, including photographs, is obtained. Also contact post adoption is prescriptive, generally no consideration to direct contact. This needs to be further reflected on by the childrens social work teams.

There is ongoing work needed in respect of allocated social workers' ownership of the CPR regardless of if written by someone else. This included attending to tasks from LAC and adoption medicals set out by the medical adviser.

The agency adviser addresses the concerns regarding the Child's Permanence Report needing to be updated before matching to reflect the child and their birth family situation since the making of Care and Placement Orders. AA seeks updated versions that include the final position of the Guardian, the person tasked to represent the child's best interests in court, and whose view is therefore relevant to that child and the IRO.

The agency adviser is exploring how to be of help to the children's services teams. Teams video calls with individual workers are taking place as requested. A presentation on CPRs has been written by the agency adviser to present to children's teams, how to deliver this is currently being explored with head of the RAA and childrens managers. There are considerable changes with PCC and CCC senior structure from April/May 2023 as joint services and roles are separated into PCC and CCC. Teams within children's services will be impacted and the functioning of the RAA will likely be affected. There is ongoing consideration as to how we could further connect with the children's teams to support practice and working relationships with new staff/roles.

17.0 Adoption Placement Reports

Panel has noted-

-The APRs set out the child's journey to adoption, their needs and the family finding process well.

- The contributions by adopters were valued in the report.

-There continues to be concern regarding the progress of Life Story work when a match comes for consideration at Panel. The Panel Chairs understand that there is now a dedicated team within the local authority helping with progressing life story work in a timely way.

-APRs do not always include details of prospective adopters' plans for adoption leave and future childcare plans. Adoption Support Plans would benefit from setting out more clearly the longer-term plans.

- There appears to be a blanket approach regarding the frequency of Letterbox contact with it often being set at twice per year regardless of the likelihood of this being successful. Further consideration is required in APRs on an individual case basis about the reasons behind proposals regarding Letterbox contact. This is also true within CPRs.

-Transitions planning could be further addressed, and the agency adviser did meet with the adoption managers to discuss how this could be done. It is very helpful for Panel to have a full picture of the contact with adopters and foster carers, play dates, telephone calls or other pre panel contact there has been.

-Chairs have also noted how introduction plans and books for children created by adopters were previously shared and are missed by panel.

18.0 Relinquished baby plans

	01.04.22 to 01.04.23
Relinquished baby plans	0

This is an area of ongoing work as a few cases have had paperwork submitted where issues were found resulting in cases not progressing to panel. The AA is working with the adoption team manager to explore further and raise awareness of policy and practice needed.

19.0 Adoption Disruptions (Cambridgeshire children)

	01.04.22 to 31.09.22
Adoption Disruptions	0 child

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There have been no disruptions of adoptive placements between April and September 2023.

20.0 Strengths

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Regional Adoption Agency has been running since December 2020 and throughout that period there has been a smooth transition for the Adoption and Permanence Panel. The Panels have gradually come together with central lists, processes, documents and practice being reviewed and merging together into the RAA Panel. This work is being continued by myself in the post of Agency advisor since February 2022.

Strengths

- Panel is well organised with Panel paperwork made available to Panel members in a timely way
- The Panel benefits from child focused Panel members from a wide range of backgrounds.
- Panels are quorate with no delays to Panel business
 - The quality of assessment and decision making for children has been positive over this last reporting period.
- There are good examples of early permanence
- To strengthen the Quality Assurance role of Panel there is more focus on a specific Quality Assurance item on the agenda of each Panel meeting for each case

I will be exploring how to communicate regular updates for Panel members detailing progress of approved adopters with linking/matching and how matches heard at Panel are progressing. This task - relatively easy for a single Panel constituted from a small central list of members and serving a single local authority pre-regionalisation - has proved challenging where Panel line-ups vary widely. Nevertheless, it is recognised that for Panel members a short update on the progress of a match to which they have given much time and care helps to 'complete the circle' and brings its own reward. While recognising the constraints on social workers' time to provide updates for Panel. Further discussions with the adoption team and chairs will take place to plan how to introduce a level of reporting back for some cases if not all.

Panel will continue to respond to new case law to ensure a full and reasoned recommendation for adoption matches.

I attended a Coram Baaf from which spoke of the report from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review for the tragic death of Leiland-James Michael Corkil. A meeting has been arranged with the adoption team manager and service manager in September to discuss lessons from this review. A workshop to explore this with panel members was completed in October 2022.

21.0 Looking forward

We believe there is a strong argument for Social Workers joining some of these training sessions so the learning can be across the RAA. Dates are booked for 2023 for this with the adoption team.

Ensuring the robustness and credibility of the Panel role is still ongoing. This will be evidenced through further learning around, and development of, the potential of virtual platforms on the part of Panel Chairs, members and staff alike, all of whom will continue to review the effectiveness and limitations of Panel meetings held online. The needs of Panel members to feel part of a team through in-person events were considered, with events occurring in 2022 and further dates planned for 2023.

Panel chairs would like to have regular contact with Assistant Director for Fostering and Adoption and the ADM which has not happened this reporting year.

Signed:

Lesley Hamilton

Panel Chair



Jackie Fernandez

Panel Chair



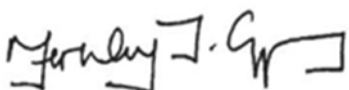
Gary Shorter

Panel Chair



Fernley Coping

Panel Vice Chair



Jade Cullum

Regional Adoption Agency Advisor

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lynn".

Appendix E - Service Plan 2023-2024

Key Performance Indicators – 2023-2024	
Recruitment & Assessment Of Adopters (CC)	
Number of Enquiries	300
Number of Registration of Interest Received	45
Number of Adopters Approved	40
Timeliness of stage 1	18% completed in 4 months
Timeliness of stage 2	50% completed in 4 months

Joanne Banks (JB) – Head of the Regional Adoption Agency

Chris Clipston (CC) - Team Manager

Tom Hey (TH) – Team Manager

Kelly Johnson (KJ) - Team Manager

Jade Cullum (JC) – Agency Advisor

Katie Gales/Claire Butcher (KG, CB) – Senior Practitioner with EP lead

Susan Place (SP) - Senior Practitioner with a lead for post box and support groups

Tony Darnell (TD) – Marketing and Commination Manager

Lottie Ettling (LE) – Recruitment Officer

Adam Weir (AW) – Business Officer in Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team

Children (TM)	
Number of children with a plan for adoption	CCC - 36 PCC - 18
Number of children placed for adoption	CCC - 34 PCC - 16
Number of children adopted	CCC – 40 PCC - 20
Proportion of the children exiting care via adoption	18%
Number of Early Permanence Placements	10
A2 - Time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days) – A2	National Target - 185 CCC - 300 PCC - 185
A10 - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted (days) – A10	National Target – 426 CCC - 500 PCC - 426

Adoption Support (KJ)	
Referrals to be triaged by TM	5 working days
Referrals for support average waiting time	2 months
Initial Assessments completed in 4 months	80%

Objective	Action	Leads	Outcome	Performance Indicator	Target date for delivery
Communication & Recruitment (TD & CC)					
Increased adopters, specifically got for harder to place children – Siblings, children with additional needs, early permanence. Ensure Adopters views central.	Social media presence to expand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular social media posts (in line with the posting guide) Dedicated Twitter Handle??? Creating new material with the voice of adoptive families 	TD, CC	Increase in the number of enquire in total and a higher proportion of interesting in adopting harder to place children.	Number of Enquiries	Review every quarter
	Improve the useability of the website – focus on adoption support pages	TD			July 2022
	Month long campaigns to promote adoption – yearly planner.	TD, CC			Review September 2023
	Create plan for presence at community events.	TD, CC			July 2023
	Continue to develop relationships with external partners to promote adoption overall as well as with those employed – including (but not limited to) fertility clinics, hospitals, police force, fire brigade and community hubs.	TD, CC			March 2024
	Quarterly Newsletters to continue	TD			March 2023
Assessment of Adopters (CC)					

<p>Recruiting Adopters – creating a stronger resource in line with the children’s needs.</p>	<p>Build creative resources to encourage adopters for harder to place children – create a timeline for additional resources .</p> <p>Explore how to implement the Adopter ambassador role within RAA to feed into recruitment campaigns.</p>				
<p>Strengthen adoptive family relationships early in placement.</p>	<p>Expand therapeutic training offer – including Foundations For Attachment with the Adoption Support Team.</p> <p>Upskilling social workers with DDP training to support social workers with offering families therapeutic parenting support on a 1-1.</p>		<p>Support adoptive families early placement to strengthen relationships</p>	<p>Disruptions & Fragile Placement numbers remain very low</p>	<p>September 2023</p> <p>March 2024.</p>
<p>Improve evidence in assessments.</p>	<p>Recruitment & Assessment team to hold a workshop on evidence based for Prospective Adopter Reports.</p> <p>BO for R&A to continue to ensure Part 2 of the Prospective Adopter Reports is up to date.</p> <p>As a response to the Serious Care Review (Cumbria CC 2022) - evaluate the Approved Adopter Review process to identify any additional checks needed. BO to support with tracking. Update practice guidance.</p>	<p>CC</p> <p>CC, JC, JB</p>	<p>Ensure robust adoptive parents and any areas where support to adopters is identified at the earliest opportunity.</p>		<p>July 2023</p> <p>Review Sept 2023</p>

	Explore implementation of Social Media Checks	JC			
Early Permanence (CC, TH, KG/CB)					
Increase the number of placements earlier in the child's care journey.	Review the EP FF process around referrals to FF for UBB to ensure referrals are made prior to child's birth. Track UBB prior to the referral. TH to be supported by FF BO's to track potential EP placements		Children are placed EP at the earliest appropriate opportunity.	Number of EP placements.	September 2023
	Continue to develop close working between children's Safeguarding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend Permanence Planning Meetings Offering workshops and sessions on Early Permanence 				April 2023 onwards
	Relinquished babies and pre birth protocol to be embedded into the EP processes.				July 2023
	Develop links with legal and CAFCASS to promote Early Permanence.				September 2023
	Review EP training to explore ways to encourage to have confidence for EP.				September 2023
	Review terminology of FFA and EP ensure clarity of the EP offer and expectations of EP carers.				September 2023

Improve practice in line with Early Permanence National Standards	Create an Action Plan to ensure the RAA complies with National Standards.	JB			July 2023
Linking & Matching (TH)					
Interagency Matching – harder to place children	<p>Feed into the National RAA processes around external linking.</p> <p>Create internal process guide when considering interagency placement for children to prevent delays for placements. FF BO to support in reviewing the draft document and oversee the tracker for potential placements.</p> <p>Strengthen the relationship with Adoption Connects including continuing to share profiles, and working the Matching Lead with Adoption Connects to feed into improved practice for harder to place children. Explore the offer of joint playdays.</p> <p>Review FF role for IA placements post placement to prevent drift for children.</p>	<p>TH</p> <p>TH</p> <p>TH</p> <p>TH</p>	Clear processes on interagency placements – pre and post placements.		<p>July 2023</p> <p>September 2023</p> <p>From April 2023 onwards</p> <p>November 2023</p>

<p>Improve quality of the child's documents to reflect their journey and needs.</p>	<p>Improve the quality of APR inc Support Plans by including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work completed with children • Planning and transitions to be included • Contact plans to be explicit 	JC/TH	<p>There is a clear journey for the child in their adoptive paperwork.</p>	August 2023
	<p>Identify good practice examples to be identified and shared within the RAA and children's social care.</p>	JC, TH		August 2023
	<p>Ensure the APR is a useful information resource for adopters to access support based on current needs and also projected potential need.</p>	TH, KJ		September 2023
	<p>Once a permanent BO is within FF there needs to be a review of their role to expand their responsibility to ensure they play a proactive part of the matching process.</p>	TH, RE		August 2023
	<p>CPR's good practice examples to be identified and shared within the RAA and children's social care. Offer workshops alongside this.</p>	JC		

Family Finding to support Child's Social Worker with the child's journey to adoption	<p>FF to support the child's social worker to ensure thorough consideration of the child's need and assessments have fed into the plans for adoption.</p> <p>Continue to improve communication between Safeguarding – particularly for expectations during court process.</p>	TH	Robust and clear decision making regarding plans for children.		From April 2023
Adoption Panel (JC)					
Ensure effectiveness of panel.	<p>Continual review of process for panel to identify strengths and areas for potential improvements. Meetings between JC, CC, TH, RE to allow a continuous review.</p> <p>JC to meet with the Panel Chairs on quarterly basis.</p> <p>Review the template for the panel minutes to ensure clear headings, clear views are recorded & are fully signed. Review in September and Panel admin being involved and make suggestions for improvements</p> <p>Consider implementation of panel members feedback and questions ahead of panel.</p> <p>Feedback from panel to be more detailed and ensured shared with all parties to ensure this can impact on</p>	<p>JC</p> <p>JC</p> <p>JC</p> <p>JC</p> <p>JC</p>	<p>Ensure panel is running effectively and meeting the needs of the adopters and children.</p> <p>Minutes to be a clear documents that represents the meeting.</p>		<p>From April 2023</p> <p>September 2023</p> <p>August 2023</p> <p>September 2023</p>

	practice. Panel admin to collate feedback to be able to see themes				
Increase the number of adopters suitable to adopt siblings.	Work with CC on expanding evidence in PAR's around parenting siblings. Join workshop with panel members, R&A and FF to explore this. Support panel chairs to ensure view on unsuitability for siblings is evidence based and robust.		More internal sibling placements.		November 2023.
Panel Membership	Review panel membership and allow new panel members to join and add the adopters perspective. Expand SW membership with a child's SW experience. Increase diversity of panel members. JC to link with traveller community for panel membership.	JC JC	Sufficient panel members to ensure panel can take place. Panel recommendations & ADM decision to align. More diverse panel members.		October 2023 March 2023
Effective Panel Processes	There has been a continuous evolving role for panel admin upon merging of CCC and PCC panel. Vital to ensure effective organisation of panels given statutory requirements. Review Panel admin role for the RAA		Panel to run effectively and allow the panel admin to manage the process with minimal input from JC & RE.		September 2023
Adoption Support (KJ)					

Clear Support Offer	Practice guides for to be developed (for the RAA and for families) and to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postbox • BRC & Intermediary • Initial Assessments • ASF 	KJ	Clear process around support offer – ensure consistency for families.		August 2023
	Therapeutic Offer document to be widely shared. Simplified version to be created.	KJ			July 2023
	Clear information on the website on service offer.	JB			June 2023
	Formulate a plan of options for an online resource hub for adopters & special guardians.				September 2023
Increase Therapeutic offer	A SP to embed Trauma informed practice into the team, RAA and wider services.	KJ, LB	Assessments use the Trauma Informed Practice in their analysis.		March 2024
	Therapeutic parenting to be baseline to practice – all workers to be DDP Level 1 Trained	KJ	All workers are trained.		June 2023
	Offer Foundation For Attachment training for adopters and special guardians. A SP to take a lead	KJ	Course dates are booked in.		September 2023
	BO to develop knowledge and expertise around internal ASF processes include	AW	Broader knowledge of the ASF processes and prevent delays for children & their families.		September 2023

	internal application. Support the TM with developing a practice guide.				
ASF Framework	<p>JB to work with procurement team to complete the preparation for the framework.</p> <p>Upon launching of the framework a BO to play a proactive role in overseeing the framework and support the TM in managing applications. BO to have a understanding of the ProContract system to then support any new applications after the initial launch.</p> <p>Develop internal processes for managing the framework and the BO will work closely with the TM to achieve this.</p>	<p>JB</p> <p>AW, KJ</p> <p>AW, KJ</p>	<p>Procurement framework to be launched.</p> <p>Clear and transparent process for registering therapeutic providers under the ASF.</p>		<p>June 2023</p>
Strengthening relationship between birth parents & adopters	<p>Settling in letters to be provided by the adopters – Recruitment & Assessments Social Workers for internal placements and Family Finding SW for interagency placements to ensure these are completed.</p> <p>Clear practice guide for post box to be embedded and reviewed – to include the responsibility for completing the agreements. Explore Recruitment & Assessments Social Workers for</p>	<p>CC, TH</p> <p>SP,CC, TH</p>			<p>From April 2023</p> <p>August 2023</p>

	<p>internal placements and Family Finding SW for interagency placements to ensure these are completed by 2nd LAC review.</p> <p>BO to continue to support CCC post box co-ordinator in processing letters upon receipt to then support the post box co-ordinator in the circulation of letters.</p>				From April 2023
Regular Support Groups to be accessible	Review the support group offer for adopters & special guardians	SP	Families have stronger local support networks		September 2022
Quality Assurance (JC)					
Clear awareness of the quality of the written work of the RAA.	Review the Audit Tool for the RAA and create clear expectations on completing Audits.	JC, JB	Clear awareness of the quantity and quality of the recording of the service.		June 2023
	Monthly audits completed by the RAA Management team initially on their own. Review in Q3.	JB, KJ, CC, TH, JC			August 2023
	Review Action Plan from Self-Assessment to ensure improvement are embedded.	JC & JB	Clear action plan for areas of concern of practice.		November 2023

	Self-Assessment to be reviewed in Q2 or Q3 by Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Service.		Identify strengths and areas for improvements.		
To ensure effective and robust Should Be Placed for Adoption Decisions	Continue to QA paperwork to ensure accurate information is considered by ADM.	JC			From April 2023
	Offer workshops to Safeguarding & CiC to promote best practice and to offer a written guide for children's social workers.	JC			September 2023
	Panel admin currently play an active role in co-ordinating papers and the ADM decisions – continue to ensure timely and robust decisions..				From April 2023
	Review the role of the RAA within the Should Be Placed For Adoption process.	JC, JB & ADM			October 2023
Child's Voice					
Action Plan to increase the child's voice in all aspects of the RAA	Create a working group to develop and implement a plan around increasing the child's voices. This to include (but not limited to): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment of adopters Voice of the child to be – top ten tips for adopters 	JC	Child's voice is more central to the work of the RAA		From July 2023

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of ways to bring the child's voice into panel. JC to discuss with CC, TH and panel chairs • Guide for including the child's voice in Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Initial Assessments • Create a children's guide to the RAA 				
Adopter Voice					
	<p>Create a leaflet asking for adopters to be an active part of the RAA service delivery.</p> <p>This to include (but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment of adopters – including case studies, pod casts and videos • Feedback on the website and identifying improvements • Explore Adopter Ambassadors • Expand adoptive parents as panel members • Explore adopters involvement in training adopters. 		<p>RAA to be offering service that meets the needs of adopters & special guardians. To increase the number of adoptive families available for our children.</p>		<p>November 2023</p>

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