Adoption Tees Valley

Statement of Purpose

October 2026



Adoption Tees Valley

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1. Introduction

Adoption Tees Valley is a Regional Adoption Agency, established in May 2018, with delegated responsibility for discharging the adoption functions of Stockton Borough Council; Middlesbrough Borough Council; Hartlepool Borough Council; Darlington Borough Council, and Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council.

This Statement of Purpose has been written in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act (2002) and the associated Regulations, and Adoption Statutory Guidance 2013. It fulfils the requirements of Regulation 2 and 4 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003; Regulations 3 and 24 B and Regulations 4 and 24 C of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003; and of Regulation 5 and 6 of the Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005. It also fulfils the requirement of Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption (2014).

The 2014 Adoption National Minimum Standards can be accessed at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336069/Adoption_NMS_July_2014_for_publication.pdf

The 2013 Statutory Adoption Guidance can be accessed at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-statutory-guidance-2013

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of Adoption Tees Valley as a Regional Adoption Agency, providing adoption services to children and families and partner agencies across the 5 Local Authorities of the Tees Valley.

The statutory and regulatory framework for Adoption services, delivered under a Regional Adoption Agency model, is provided by:

- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (revised 2011).
- National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2014.
- The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012.
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services. (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013.
- Children and Families Act 2014.
- The Adoption and Care Planning Regulations 2014.

- The Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2018
- The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The Education and Adoption Act 2016.

During 2020-21 the RAA has been delivered in accordance with the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations, as amended and dated 24.4.20; 25.9.20; 30.3.21.

The Statement of Purpose is made available to any person working for the purpose of the agency; children and adults who have been adopted; their parents or guardians; prospective and approved adopters and those individuals receiving counselling for the disclosure of adoption information.

Children's Guide

A Children's Guide is also available to all children who have an adoption plan, and are in the process of matching, and for children who are provided with post adoption support.

Vision and Values

Vision

Adoption Tees Valley has a clear vision; "To achieve the best possible adoption outcomes for children and adopters, through provision of high quality and timely services delivered by an effective and financially sustainable organisation."

Values

- The needs, rights and views of the child or young person are at the centre of all practice and provision.
- We will listen to children and explain things to them in a way they can understand.
- We will work together in partnership with adopters, children and wider service providers.
- We will work transparently, honestly and openly.
- We value diversity and equality and will promote this with children, families and in all of our work.
- We will aspire to do the very best for children and will support adopters and services to help them achieve their potential.
- We will work with respect for each other in all of our work with children, adopters, birth families and across professional services.
- We will do things differently where needed and value learning, development and enrichment through experience and reflection.

2. Aims and Objectives

In accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 all local authorities have a duty to establish and maintain an adoption service in their area, to meet the needs in relation to adoption of children who have, or may need to be adopted; of adults who have been adopted; parents and guardians of such children; and persons who may have or may adopt a child. The 5 Local Authorities of the Tees Valley region have delegated those functions to Adoption Tees Valley, which is a Regional Adoption Agency.

2.1 *Aims*

Adoption Tees Valley aims to ensure that children who are unable to live with their birth family, and for whom adoption has been agreed as their plan, can live in a permanent, stable and loving family, in which their needs will be fully met throughout their lives. This can only be achieved if all of those touched by adoption are also supported, including adoptive parents and family members, adopted adults and birth relatives of those who have been adopted.

Adoption Tees Valley aims to provide timely and accessible support to adopters and children, throughout their childhood and beyond where needed, to help maintain stable family life and positive relationships for good emotional wellbeing for children; adoptive parents and families; and birth relatives.

2.2 *Objectives*

2.21 Better outcomes for children and families

i. To improve timeliness of adoption for children, through early permanence planning and effective recruitment of adopters.
ii. To ensure that more children can be adopted, including older children; siblings together; children from ethnic minority groups; children who have complex health or emotional needs; children who have waited.
iii. To recruit sufficient adopters to provide choice of family who are well matched to meet children's needs.
iv. To establish effective partnership working with regional Voluntary Adoption Agencies, and Regional Adoption Agencies, to plan strategically for children's needs and recruitment of adopters.
v. To reduce adoption breakdowns, through effective matching and adoption support.
vi. To make sure that children's views, feelings, wishes and, where possible contributions, are central to decision-making processes.
vii. To ensure that children's identity and diversity are valued, and to work with Local Authorities to ensure that they provide a Life Story resource in a timely manner, which is unique to each individual child.
viii. To ensure that children are safe, and that recruitment and assessment of adopters will encourage safe parenting, while recognising the importance of proportionate risk taking in parenting.

ix. To provide an open, transparent recruitment and assessment service to adopters, whereby their aspirations to adopt children can be met in a timely way.
x. To work in partnership with others in the voluntary and independent sector, and with health and education services, to meet children's needs and promote better outcomes, through high quality, targeted post adoption support.

2.22 A strong and sustainable service

i. To have a strong and skilled staff team who can deliver excellence and innovation in adoption practice.
ii. To develop staff skills and expertise through high quality training and supervision, and to attract and retain the best staff.
iii. To be financially sustainable.

3. Management and Staffing

The Responsible Officers for Adoption remain in each of the 5 Local Authorities and are detailed in Appendix 3 of this Statement of Purpose.

3.1 Head of Service

The Head of Service for Adoption Tees Valley is Louise Addison who was appointed 01/07/25 and works full time.

Qualifications:

BA Social Work – July 2009

ILM Leadership & Management Level 5

Teesside University

Louise Addison has over 25 years' experience in adoption work, having worked as an unqualified support worker, and then having undertaken her social work qualification. Louise has extensive experience in adoption practice as an assessing social worker for a Local Authority. She transferred to the RAA when it commenced and has worked since 2018 as the Recruitment and Assessment Manager, before being appointed as temporary DSM in August 2023.

Louise Addison is the Agency Decision Maker for Adoption Tees Valley, with respect to approval of adopters.

Agency decisions for the children's plan for adoption will remain with the ADM in each of the 5 Local Authorities, and the agency decision for the match will be made in each Local Authority.

Where, for any reason, Louise Addison is not available to undertake the agency decision on approval of adoptive parents, within the timescale required, any one of the

5 Local Authority Agency Decision Makers within the 5 partner Local Authorities, will be designated as deputising ADM for adopter approvals.

3.2.1 Team Managers

Lisa Whitehead- Family Finding Team Manager

Qualifications:

Dip SW - 2013

Lisa has completed level 5 qualification in Management Studies 2024/25

Dianne Cox- Recruitment and Assessment Team Manager

Qualifications:

DIPSW- 1998

Certificate in Child Care studies

Dianne has completed level 5 qualification in management Studies 2024/25

Alyssa Dale - Adoption Support Team Manager

Qualifications:

DIPSW– 2004

Northumbria University

Kirsty Taylor – Enquiry Hub Team Manager

Qualifications:

BA Honours Social Work – 2007

University of Central Lancashire

ILM Leadership & Management Level 5

a) Panel Manager and Agency Advisor

Joanne Stoddart is the panel manager and Agency Advisor to the adoption panel, in respect of panel business and all matters presented to it, under AAR (2005) 8(1).

Joanne is a qualified and experienced social worker, who has also previously managed a Local Authority Adoption team. Joanne has worked as Head of Service for a Local Authority in respect of safeguarding and care planning.

3.3. Organisational Structure

The Organisational Structure is in Appendix 2.

The Organisational Structure was further reviewed by the Board in July 2025, and a restructure was signed off by the Board, to address the modernisation of adoption, demand increases, and sufficiency needs for adopters.

4. Governance and Accountability

Adoption Tees Valley is led and managed by Louise Addison, who is directly accountable to Majella McCarthy, Director for Children's Services (DCS), Stockton BC.

There is a Board of Directors for Adoption Tees Valley, which is chaired by Danielle Swainston, DCS, Redcar & Cleveland BC.

The Board comprises:

- Danielle Swainston, DCS, Redcar & Cleveland BC
- Jane Young, Assistant Director, Hartlepool BC
- Chris Bell, Assistant Director Darlington BC
- Jon Doyle, Assistant Director, Redcar and Cleveland BC
- Majella McMarthy, Director, Stockton BC
- Annabel Bates, Director of Childrens Services, Middlesbrough BC

The Board has one Non-Executive Director positions who is an adoptive parent and adopted children through ATV. The Non-Executive Director was appointed through a selection process inclusive of members of the Adopter partnership Forum within ATV, in September 2023.

The Non-Executive Director (NED) is:

- Kelly Nugent

The Terms of Reference (TOR), for Board includes designated responsibilities when a Board member is unable to attend. The role of NED is equivalent to that of Executive Directors, under the TOR.

The Board meets quarterly, and Louise Addison attends all Board meetings.

The 5 Responsible Officers for Adoption in the Local Authorities (referred to as Adoption Leads) meet quarterly with the Head of Service to enable consistent and collaborative partnership practice and responsive service development within Tees Valley, in respect of adoption, and care planning for children with an adoption plan.

There are 4 Team Managers who manage the operational social work teams, of Assessment; Family Finding; Adoption Support and Enquiry Hub.

Each Team Manager is further supported by at least one Senior Social Worker who has progressed to the senior grade, and has additional responsibilities and duties. The senior social workers undertake some managerial responsibilities, and support the management and development of services.

All Team Managers are experienced in adoption practice and have worked operationally within the adoption teams which have come together as the Regional Adoption Agency. They have all contributed to the practice development groups for Adoption Tees Valley and are experienced in all areas of the adoption work.

There is 1 part-time Panel Manager who is designated as the Agency Advisor to the Panel. The Panel Manager is an experienced social work manager, with significant expertise in adoption practice, and wider children's social care.

There are 19.2. FTE social workers, all of whom are experienced social workers in adoption work. All social workers are qualified and are registered with Social Worker England and have undertaken professional development within the field of adoption. Social workers are accountable to their line managers, as per the organisational structure.

There are 4.0 FTE Adoption Support Workers who provide service and support to adopters and children, including support to Keep in Touch arrangements, adopter support groups, information events, preparation training, duty, and direct work with children and young people, and post-adoption support.

There is 1 full time Business Services Manager who is responsible for overseeing business operations, information delivery, data reporting and contributing to performance management within ATV. There are 1.5 Senior Business Support staff and 1.4 FTE Business Support staff and a business support apprentice who collectively contribute to service delivery and provide the first point of contact for customer enquiries.

There is 0.5 FTE Marketing and Recruitment Officer, to support the marketing and growth of the ATV, including its promotion to internal and external stakeholders and the wider community.

There is 0.8 FTE Keeping in Touch Co-ordinator, to manage the Keeping in Touch Service between birth families and adoptive families.

There is a 0.9 FTE Education Support Worker, who is funded by the 5 Virtual Schools of the Tees valley, and who is employed within ATV. This post holder is a qualified teacher and has significant educational experience.

All staff are based in the Adoption Tees Valley service building, which is at the Grangefield Academy site, Oxbridge Avenue, Stockton on Tees, TS18 4LE.

The office is staffed daily, by at least a minimum staffing ratio of one manager, 2 social workers, and one business support worker each day. However, in practice, there are more staff available within the office environment within working hours.

5. Services Provided

5.1 Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Adopters

Adoption Tees Valley recruits, trains, and assesses prospective adopters from initial enquiry, through to approval.

Applicants may make an enquiry to ATV via telephone call, online, or letter. Additionally, the service holds twice monthly Information sessions which prospective adopters may wish to attend in the early stages of finding out more about adoption, and from which an enquiry and request for initial visit may be undertaken.

Adoption Tees Valley aims to ensure that enquirers and applicants receive a swift response, and timely decision making about progression through each stage.

ATV will respond to all enquiries on the same working day (or next working day if online or at the weekend) with a telephone call. Initial calls are undertaken to enable enquirers to gain more information about adoption, and the services that ATV offers, including needs of the children who require adoption, and about the process.

Initial visits to enquirers will be scheduled within 5 days of the enquiry, and the Registration of Interest (ROI) process is explained to enquirers at this time. Decisions to enter Stage 1 of the assessment will be within 48 hours of the ROI.

For Stage 1, Adoption Tees Valley will aim to meet the nationally agreed timescales of 8 weeks, and for Stage 2 to approval, the aim is to be within 4 months.

Second time adopters, and foster carers who have been approved under Fostering Regulations since 2013, are eligible for fast-track assessment, which should be completed within 4 months of Registration of Interest.

All applicants will be allocated a Social Worker, who will assess and support them through Stage 1, Stage 2, and during matching and placement.

All applicants are required to undertake 4 days of preparation training within the period of assessment, and the aim is to undertake these within Stage 1.

The service uses the Coram BAAF Prospective Adopter report and associated tools and templates to provide the framework for assessment.

See below for Panel processes.

5.2 Early Permanence

Adoption Tees Valley seeks to provide opportunity for early permanence for children who have an adoption plan, or are likely to have an adoption plan, but for whom the Court has not yet authorised placement for adoption, through granting of a Placement Order. Adoption Tees Valley works with full recognition that before a Placement Order

is granted, the plan of adoption is not confirmed and that all prospective adopters undertaking such a placement will be fully prepared and supported to understand the nature of this placement. Prospective adopters wishing to consider early permanence will be assessed for this role, during their adoption assessment process. All prospective adopters wishing to undertake early permanence will complete a dedicated 2-day preparation for EP course, in addition to the 4-day Preparation for Adoption training. This is a 2-day training course and is led by a Senior Social Worker (Early Permanence), and a further Adoption Social Worker, who are now qualified as Trainers in early permanence under the Coram BAAF EP training certification.

Their suitability to adopt, including preparedness and suitability for the role of EP, will be considered by the Panel, and Adoption ADM, when considering the full PAR. For the purposes of approval as foster carers, EP carers will be approved under Regulation 25(a) of the care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2013) and will be approved as temporary foster carers for a named child. The assessment is completed by the adoption social worker, and the child's social worker together and the approval decision as temporary foster carers is made by the Local Authority Agency Decision Maker. The temporary foster carer will be provided with a supervising social worker by the relevant local Authority Fostering Team. The Adoption Social Worker will remain involved as the key adoption placement social worker.

Early Permanence carers are supported in the role, including with access to a peer led EP support group, the STEP group, which runs every 6 weeks.

5.3 Supporting Adopters, Linking and Matching with children

Each prospective adopter will receive a matching certificate following agency decision to approve, and ATV will set out to match adopters with children in the local region wherever possible. It is a clear aim for ATV to recruit sufficient and suitable adopters for the children referred by the 5 Local Authorities.

A key objective is to enable approved adopters to be matched with children as quickly as possible, to reduce delay.

Adoption Tees Valley will seek to provide a range of support and information to adopters waiting. ATV knows this is an important emotional time for adopters, and will aim to provide the very best of support and information, to enable adopters to consider those children for whom they are most suitably matched.

5.4 Permanence Planning and Early Notifications for Children with an Adoption plan

Adoption Tees Valley is responsible for family finding for all children within the Tees Valley area, as defined by the 5 Local Authorities it serves, who have an adoption plan. In this region this is called ADM plan for adoption, although may be known as Best Interests Decision (BID).

In order to promote the goals of the Regionalisation of Adoption (Regionalising Adoption, June 2015, DFE) Adoption Tees Valley has early notification processes established within the region, for early notice of children who may have an adoption

plan. This enables closer monitoring of all children, and consideration of their needs, matched against adopters waiting and in stage 2 assessment.

Adoption Tees Valley has 5 “Permanence Champions” who have a role of supporting effective permanence planning for children, linked to each of the 5 Local Authorities. They have a role in tracking the progress of children’s plans, for all children who are referred via early notification to ATV, and where applicable will ensure that options for an early potential match are considered, and early arrangements made. The Permanence Champion has responsibility for early Family Finding, pre- Placement Order (PO).

ATV is responsible for family finding for children prior to, and following the Agency Decision for an adoption plan being made. The Agency Decision for an Adoption plan is made within the child’s Local Authority.

The role of Family Finder is allocated to the ATV social worker who has assessed the proposed prospective adopters, where it is an internal match.

A Family Finder will be allocated by ATV at the point of Placement Order, if an internal link has not yet been identified, and responsibility for seeking and pursuing links and providing potential suitable links to the child’s social worker will be undertaken.

ATV has an established operation forum with 4 Regional Voluntary Adoption Agencies, to enable early identification of suitable families for children, who are likely to have an adoption plan, at the earliest time possible. This forum meets bimonthly, and supports local link maker searches and regional discussions around individual children.

5.5 Link Maker

The expressed position of Adoption Tees Valley is that every effort will be made to find a family for children within the Tees Valley region unless there is a clear assessed reason why this is not appropriate. Where ATV has no suitable match, or prospect of a match, ATV will seek a link via other regional agencies, including VAA’s and RAA’s.

All children for whom no suitable link has been identified within ATV will be referred to Link Maker for a wider search. Regional Family Finding is supported through a Link Maker NE and Cumbria regional group.

Adopters will be provided with the Link Maker service, however, ATV requests that adopters work with the principle of ATV that our priority is for “Tees Valley adopters for Tees Valley children”, and that they work in partnership with ATV and their local community needs to seek links within this region as a first priority. Where no suitable link with a Tees Valley child has been made within 3 months, ATV will discuss approved adopters seeking a child from outside the region, via Link Maker. The NE and Cumbria regional group allows for regional exchange of information about approved adopters, to reduce delay for all children, within this region.

5.6 Matching and Placing Children

Adoption Tees Valley has responsibility for matching children and will work closely in partnership with the child's social worker to seek the best possible match for each child.

ATV will check each child has a life story book completed to the point of placement, by the second adoption review. ATV Adoption Support workers will provide support to children's social workers where required, however, responsibility for the book is with the child's social worker.

The Adoption Support Plan (ASP) plan is the responsibility of the child's social worker, and the ATV social worker. There will be an ASP for each child and family. Any financial assessment and package of financial support will be met by the Local Authority for the child, and will be agreed prior to matching panel. The agreed Adoption Support Plan will be presented to the Matching Panel. ATV will provide guidance to social workers on assessment for post adoption support.

The match is presented to Adoption Tees Valley panel for consideration and recommendation. The Agency Decision for the match will be made by the Local Authority ADM, with the recommendation of the ATV panel.

Placement planning meetings, and introductions are the responsibility of ATV, working closely in partnership with the child's social worker.

ATV will support the placement of the child and their adopters, post placement, including the application for the Adoption Order. Reviews of the placement remain the responsibility of the Local Authority for the child.

The ATV social worker who assessed the adopter will provide one year's adoption support post Adoption Order, through periodic telephone calls, to assist adopters with accessing the wider adoption support offer available through ATV.

5.7 Non-Agency Partner Adoption

Adoption Tees Valley is responsible for all requests for a partner adoption (sometimes referred to as stepparent adoptions), by families living within the Tees Valley area. Once an enquiry has been made, and subject to the stepparent having been resident for 6 months or more in the family, an initial information and assessment session will take place, followed by a full assessment.

5.8 Consensual Adoption

Consensual adoption (previously referred to as relinquished) remain the responsibility of the Local Authority for care planning. ATV will provide a counselling service to the birth parent under section 19 of the Adoption of Children Act (2002) as requested. However, relinquished babies and other children may be subject to planning processes of Foster to Adopt, and early permanence planning. Relinquished babies may be placed for Adoption where the birth mother has consented to the adoption. Where she has received counselling and continues to wish to place the child for adoption, the consent must be witnessed by a CAFCASS officer, and this may not take

place before the child is 6 weeks old. The LA plan for adoption will be put before the ATV panel, for a recommendation to the LA Agency Decision Maker.

5.9 Adoption Support – Adopters and Adopted children and young people

ATV provides the post adoption support services for adoptees and adopters within the Tees Valley region, who have adopted through ATV, or the Local Authority, and/or adopted a child who was placed by one of the 5 Local Authorities within the last 3 years, and/or was placed by another LA and adopted over 3 years ago.

ATV will directly provide the following services:

- Post adoption support groups for adopters
- Adoption Support groups for adopted children and young people
- Voice and Influence group for young people
- Activities and Events for adopters and adopted children and young people
- Therapeutic parenting training courses
- Peer support
- Access to CATCH (PACT UK)
- Assessment for specific post adoption support needs
- Application for ASF funding
- Keep in Touch arrangements for indirect contact plans between adopted children, birth families and adopters. These follow the arrangements made in the Contact Plan (see below)
- Support, in some cases to direct contact plan for the child with birth parents/family
- Post adoption support to the child via direct service, based on assessment of need
- Therapeutic Life Story work with children
- Training in attachment; adoption; permanence planning, to children's social workers, and others as required
- Education support for adopted children within school or nursery, through advice, information and guidance, to adoptive parents, and to schools.

ATV commissions work from a Framework of Approved Specialist Therapeutic Service Providers, for the following services:

- Therapeutic services to adopted children and young people, to include counselling, psychological support as assessed.
- Non-Violent Resistance Training and Support
- Specialist assessments, where required.

ATV is responsible for assessments and applications to the Adoption Support Fund, for post adoption support/specialist provision.

ATV has delegated responsibility from each of the 5 Local Authorities for ASF applications and has 5 Administrators and 5 ASSA's for this purpose.

Adoption Tees Valley promotes this service with Local Authorities, IRO's, CAFCASS, and through the LFJB.

ATV is responsible for Intercountry adoption, where enquirers wish to pursue this. Where such a request is received, ATV will commission the Inter Country Adoption Centre to undertake the assessment and placement service. Prospective adopters are required to pay a fee to IAC for this service.

5.10 Keep in Touch (previously called Letter Box)

Adoption Tees Valley will provide guidance to the child's social worker during permanence planning, to ensure appropriate and specific arrangements and plans are made for indirect contact with birth parents, siblings and others as assessed. The final care plan for the child, agreed at Final Hearing will detail the Court Directed Contact arrangements, and these will form part of the basis of the selection and matching process.

ATV will manage these arrangements on an ongoing basis and will ensure that all correspondence is provided to the relevant parties, in accordance with the plan.

ATV will provide support to birth parents to write letters when requested and will provide a regular contact point for birth parents.

ATV has a Keeping in Touch Co-Ordinator to carry out the administration of the Keeping in Touch service, and maintenance of records.

Adoption tees valley is currently implementing a pilot phase over the next 12 months to support the digitalisation of Keeping in touch arrangements via use of the platform Virtual Memory Box. This will offer more creativity and flexibility in KiT arrangements.

5.11 Provision of Access to Information, and Birth Records Counselling:

5.11.1 Birth Relatives

Adoption Tees Valley is responsible for facilitating the provision of independent support to birth relatives. This may be requested directly via contact with ATV, duty system or telephone, or by email or post.

5.11.2 Adopted Adults

Adoption Tees Valley is responsible for the provision of counselling to adopted adults (over the age of 18) wishing to access birth records. Where a request is made by an adopted adult, ATV will provide counselling services and assistance to access records

and will provide support and counselling to the individual through this process, or will facilitate the provision of this service by Arc Adoption, who are contracted to provide this service.

6. Adoption Tees Valley Adoption Panel

ATV operates an Adoption Panel constituted in accordance with Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005) and Statutory Guidance (2013). There are 5 Panel meetings per month, one each week for half a day. Additional panels will be convened to manage business in a timely way, where required.

Each Panel meeting is chaired by an Independent Chairperson, and there are 2 Independent Chairs appointed, both of whom have significant experience of social work and adoption. Both Chairs are registered social workers and are Social Work England registered. Additionally, there are 2 members of the Central list who are Vice Chairs, and who contribute to the smooth planning and continuation of panel work, by chairing panels as required, and no less than annually.

Adoption Tees Valley has developed a Central List of panel members, with a range of experience and expertise in the adoption journey. Many members have applied from the prior LA Adoption Panels. All central list members are recruited to the ATV panel through safer recruitment processes. There is consideration to equality and diversity in recruitment of Central List membership.

There is a minimum of 5 members required for the Panel to be quorate.

There are 5 Medical Advisors able to provide the medical advice to Panel, as required under regulations. Medical Advisors are appointed by each of the Local Authorities, in accordance with Adoption Agencies Regulations (2005), and RCPCH Safeguarding Children and Young people, Roles and Competencies for Health Care staff (2019). The Medical Advisors will operate on a rota basis and will continue to be responsible for the adoption health assessments of children in their area; meetings with adopters to provide advice on future health needs of the child; summary of adopter medicals, and health issues related to the task of adoption.

The Panel Manager and Panel Advisor attend all Panel meetings to provide agency advice to the Panel. This person also provides a second quality assurance function to all panel paperwork.

The Panel has access to legal advice as required, through a senior and experienced local solicitor, based in a Law company experienced in Child and Family Law, and adoption, Cygnet Family Law.

There are 2 Panel Administrators who will administrate the provision of panel papers in advance of the meeting; take records/minutes of the meeting; and who will ensure that timescales for provision of papers, minutes and agency decisions are met.

The functions of the ATV panel are:

- To recommend whether prospective adopters are suitable to adopt a child, and when considered appropriate to give advice about the number, age range, sex,

likely needs and background. Also, to give advice on suitability for early permanence.
- To consider any brief report presented by the Agency, in respect of prospective adopters in Stage 2.
- To recommend whether a proposed match between adopters and a child(ren) is a suitable one.
- To be notified of any Reviews of Approval; Disruptions, and any other matters which the Agency wishes to request panel give advice on.

The Panel has a role in quality assurance of the assessment of adopters; reports presented; timeliness of adopter assessment and approval; quality of child permanence reports; timeliness of planning for children; quality of information provided on which their recommendations will be based. The Panel will also consider the prospective adopters' experience of the assessment process.

The Panel has a consultative role in the policies and procedures of the agency, and in monitoring the outcomes of adoptions. A 6-monthly Panel report will be provided by the Panel Chairs, giving an overview of the panel business, and quality of adoption work presented to it.

The Adoption Tees Valley Panel commenced on 01/08/18.

6.1 Agency Decision Maker

ATV is responsible for the Agency Decision in respect of adopter approval, taking account of the recommendations of Panel, and any legal advice sought.

The ADM is Louise Addison.

Agency Decisions for the Child's Adoption Plan are made by the relevant Local Authority ADM. See Appendix 4 for details of each LA Agency Decision Maker

The match is considered at the ATV Panel, however the Agency Decision on the match is made by the relevant Local Authority ADM, following receipt of the minutes of the relevant panel.

7. Systems for Monitoring, Quality Assurance, and Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Services

Adoption Tees Valley will operate a range of mechanisms for quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation, to seek to continuously improve, and to learn from things that go well, and not so well. In accordance with its values, the agency will also include the voice of the child, the adopter and birth parent, and other stakeholder feedback into the systems for review and evaluation.

- Data on key indicators of performance and quality will be collated and reviewed monthly, and action taken where required.
- Tracking systems are in place, to ensure regular monitoring of children and adopter journey, timeliness, and outcomes.

- A balanced scorecard is in place which provides details on key performance data, user feedback/satisfaction measures; complaints/compliments; finance. The Board are presented with exception reporting and key headline performance data at quarterly Board meetings. The Board has a role in challenge, scrutiny and governance in relation to performance of ATV.
- The Scorecard has been updated, to align the performance measures to the ASGLB measures, for consistency and clear benchmarking.
- ATV Head of Service provides a report to the Board under NMS 25 on at least a 6-monthly basis detailing outcomes and financial state of ATV.
- The Adoption Panel operates a quality monitoring mechanism for assessments/matches presented, which are monitored by the Panel Advisors and Chairs, for improvement.
- The Adoption Panel Chairs provide a bi-annual report to the Head of Service, which is presented to the Board; Panel; and to the team, for learning and improvement where required.
- Staff performance is monitored via supervision, and case audit and review.
- All staff have an annual appraisal, and Personal Development Planning will be aligned to appraisal and review.
- All Central List members and Panel Chairs have an annual appraisal.
- Team meetings take place monthly and are used to convey policy and practice information, involve staff in developments and any quality improvements that are required.
- Service user feedback will be sought on an annual basis, or more regularly, via a Consultation Survey. This applies to adopted children and adopters. User feedback is used to inform improvements or consolidate areas of good practice.
- The ATV Head of Service monitors outcomes of work undertaken by external agencies for post adoption support, to ensure that work supports outcomes and delivers best value.
- ATV is working alongside other regional adoption agencies to develop an outcomes framework for adoption.
- The Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board data is monitored and provides a measure of quality and effectiveness.
- A process is underway to understand what each LA requires for reporting and monitoring purposes, to satisfy Elected Members and the Council as to the quality and outcomes of adoption services provided to the children through ATV. The ATV Annual and Bi-Annual report is provided to each LA Council Scrutiny and/or Corporate Parenting Boards, bi-annually.
- The Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide will be updated annually and presented to the Board for monitoring and review.

8. Complaints

ATV operates a Complaints Procedure, linked to the Stockton BC Complaints Procedure. It is the aim of ATV to seek to address concerns through effective communication and exchange wherever possible.

Where any person has a cause for concern or complaint about any aspect of the service provided by ATV, whether that is a child; adopted adult; adopter; prospective adopter; birth family member; or professional, this may be communicated to ATV directly, to a Team Manager, or the Service Manager, who will seek to resolve the cause for concern quickly and to the satisfaction of the person raising that concern, or will provide an explanation as to why the service cannot resolve the concern.

Where the complaint is not addressed to the satisfaction of the complainant or the complainant states they wish to raise a complaint without speaking to Adoption Tees Valley first, the formal complaints process will be initiated. The Complaints Officer of Stockton Borough Council will be informed or can be accessed directly by the complainant. Complaints will be addressed within the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure, or the Children's Statutory Complaints Procedure (as appropriate).

Contact details are: FOIandcomplaints@stockton.gov.uk
Tel number: 01642 527521

The procedure can be found at: https://www.stockton.gov.uk/Customer-feedback-and-complaints

The Council's Information Governance Team will keep a record of all complaints and the outcome. Adoption Tees Valley will make a record of all concerns and complaints and the outcomes, and these will be monitored on a quarterly basis. Customer feedback is seen as an opportunity to review, learn and improve.

9. Children's Guide

A Children's Guide to Adoption, and Adoption Tees Valley is available to all children at the time of the Placement, and to the Local Authority responsible for that child's placement.

A Children's Guide is available on the ATV website and is aimed at all adopted children, including those for whom Adoption Support Services are provided, detailing the support available, how and who will help them, and details of key contacts; Ofsted; and the complaints procedure.

10. Details of Ofsted

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

11. Details of Arc Adoption

Arc Adoption Northeast

Unit 29, Northeast Business and Innovation Centre (BIC)
Wearfield, Enterprise Park East
Sunderland, Tyne and Wear
SR5 2TA

Tel 0191 516 6466

Appendix 1 – Roles and Responsibilities

Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT		
Marketing and Recruitment Strategy	√	
Adopter Recruitment and Enquiries	√	
Assessment of Prospective Adopters – all Stage One and Stage Two functions	√	
Pre-approval training	√	
Completion of Prospective Adopter Report	√	
Panel	√	
Agency Decision Maker for approval of adopters	√	
Post approval training	√	
Matching	√	
Post Placement training for Prospective Adopters	√	
PERMANANCE PLANNING		
Consensual Adoption	√	√
Early identification of a child possibly requiring adoption		√
Tracking and monitoring the child possibly requiring adoption	√	√
Support and advice to childcare social worker on the adoption process	√	√
Sibling or other specialist assessments if commissioned by LA		√
Direct work to prepare child prior to placement		√
Preparation of the Child Permanence Report		√
Agency Decision Maker for "Should be placed for Adoption" decisions		√
Case management prior to the point agreed by the LA ADM		√
Case management from point agreed by the LA ADM		√
Identification of children who may require an early permanence placement		√
Approval of EP carers as foster carers for a named child		√
Supervision of the EP carer during fostering	√	√

MATCHING AND PLACEMENT		
Family finding	√	
Looked After Child reviews		√
Shortlist and visit potential families	√	√
Organising child appreciation day	√	
Ongoing direct work to prepare child prior to placement		√
Adoption Panel administration and management, and Matching Panel	√	
Agency advisor role	√	√
Agency Decisions Maker for Matching prospective adopters and child		√
Placement Planning meeting administration and management of introductions	√	
Support to family post placement and planning and delivery of adoption support	√	
Ongoing life story work and preparation of Life story book		√
Independent Review Officer monitoring of quality of child's care and care plan		√
Support prospective adopters in preparation and submission of application for Adoption Order – including attending at court	√	
Preparation of later life letter		√
ADOPTION SUPPORT		
Assessment for adoption support	√	√
Developing and delivering adoption support plans	√	√
Agree and administer financial support to adoptive families pre and post Adoption Order		√
Adoption support delivery including: • Support groups • Social events • Post adoption training • Independent Birth Relative services • Support with ongoing birth relative contact • Specialist Life Story practitioners • Adoption counselling and training • Access to records • Education support	√	
Financial support to adopters including adoption allowances		√
NON-AGENCY ADOPTIONS		
Partner/parent adoption assessments	√	
Intercountry adoption assessments and post approval and post order support	√	

Appendix 2: Organisational Structure

Head of Service

Louise Addison

Recruitment & Marketing Officer

Beth Hudson

Team Manager
Adoption Support
Alyssa Dale

Team Manager
Family Finding
Lisa Whitehead

Team Manager
Recruitment & Assessment
Di Cox

Team Manager
Enquiry Hub
Kirsty Taylor

Panel Manager
Joanne Stoddart

Social Workers

Chioma Unigwe
Emma Howarth
Hannah Winspear
Sarah Brabbam
Vicky Johnson
Nichola Boggon
(Vacancy)

Social Workers

Glynis Horner
Jenna Perry
Kath Bishop
Laura Lenaghan
Maria Devine
Becca Heward

Social Workers

Carly Tomkins
Helen Shaw
Jo Keen
Sam Addison
Lindsey Thirkell
Rheannon Davies
Dotty Harris

KIT Co-ordinator
Katie Poppleton

Business Services Manager

Chris Corden

Social Workers

Angi Simmonds
Cassy Holce
Mike Blackburn
Sarah Brabbam

Senior Business Support Officer

Amanda Cunliffe

MDT Team

Education Advisor

SALT

Psychologist

Tony Kerr
Partner Adoptions

Adoption Support Workers

Liz Talbot
Amy Macmillan
Abi Hogarth
Yasmin Ellahi

Business Support Officers
Lucy Wall
Zoe Wheatley

ATV Apprentice
Katie Cox

Appendix 3

Local Authority Responsible Officers (Adoption Leads)

Darlington BC: Suzanne Nelson,

Hartlepool BC: Rachel Hatton

Middlesbrough BC: Diane Millward (Interim Post Holder)

Redcar and Cleveland: Jayne Bulmer

Stockton BC: Heidi Scott Neilson

Appendix 4

Local Authority Agency Decision Makers

Darlington BC: Chris Bell, Assistant Director, Children's Services

Hartlepool BC: Jane Young, Assistant Director, Children's Services

Middlesbrough BC: Chris Rooney, Assistant Director of Children's Services

Redcar and Cleveland BC: Jon Doyle, Assistant Director

Stockton BC: Jan Edwards, Head of Service , Children's Service