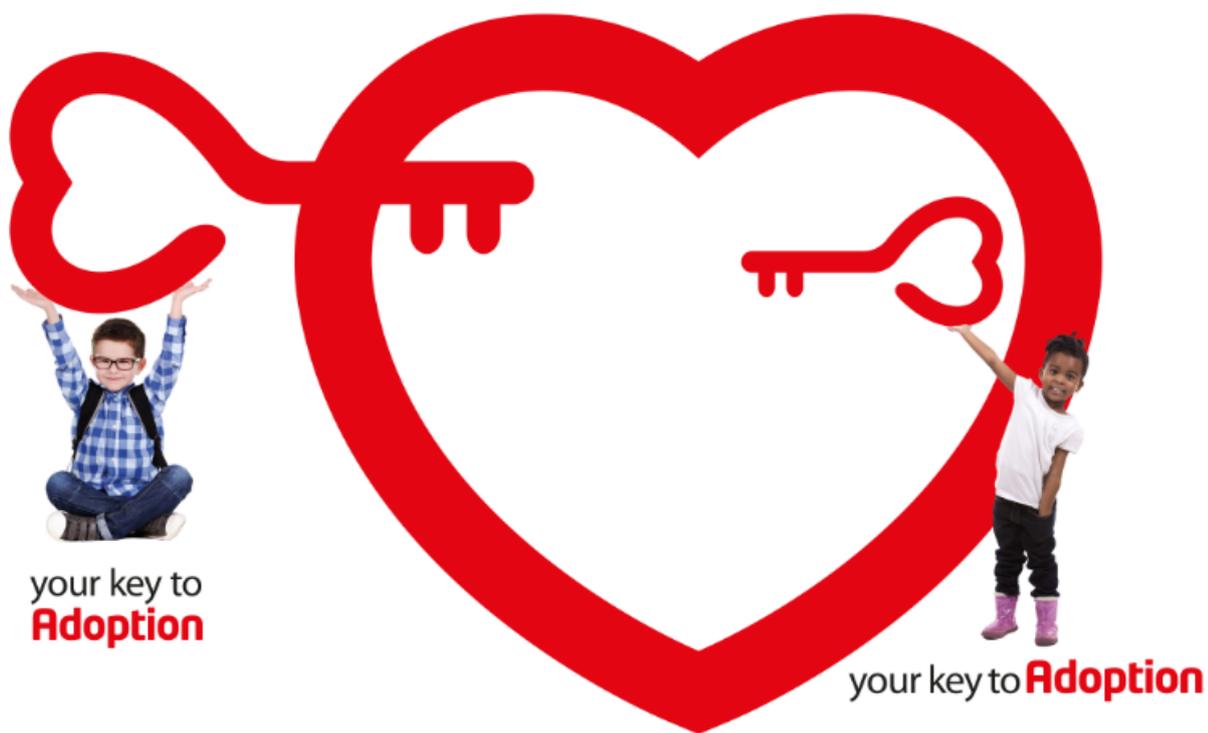


# Kent Adoption Service Annual Report



**April 2016 - March 2017**

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## Section 1: Overview

### Purpose and Objectives of the Kent County Council (KCC) Adoption Service

The work of Kent County Council's Adoption Service is governed by the Adoption & Children Act 2002, the Adoption Agencies Regulations and Guidance 2013 and the Adoption National Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000). KCC is committed to ensuring that children are able to remain in the care of their parents and birth families wherever possible. However, where it is not possible to achieve stability for the child within the birth family, we work to achieve alternative permanent arrangements for the child within a family setting and these include adoption.

The purpose of the Adoption Service is to provide a comprehensive service to meet the needs of children who have been or may become adopted, birth families, and adoptive parents. This will include services in relation to those 'looked after' children with an adoption plan, and also in relation to the non-agency adoption service.

In order to achieve its aims the Adoption Service will:-

- Ensure that the needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.
- Welcome those people, who are interested in becoming adoptive parents without prejudice, respond to them promptly and provide them with clear information about recruitment, assessment and approval.
- Ensure that services are provided to all involved in adoption that recognises the lifelong implications of adoption.
- Assess and prepare prospective adopters who can offer children a stable and permanent home.
- Provide help and support to achieve a successful and lasting placement.
- Monitor children through the process to minimise delay.

All those involved in adoption will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

This report provides details of the outcome of the recent Ofsted Inspection (March 2017), plus detailed analysis of the performance of Kent's Adoption Service in relation to children's and adopters adoption journeys between 1 April 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 in line with the National Minimum Standards and Statutory Guidance. The report includes information about post adoption support, non-agency adoptions; inter country adoptions, work with birth parents and adoptive parents and the work of the Panels team for this time period. It provides feedback received from adopters.

## Section 2: Ofsted Inspection Findings 2017

Ofsted rated Kent County Councils' Children's Services as 'good' following the inspection that they carried out in March 2017. Within the Ofsted inspection, Adoption is inspected and rated in its own right. Adoption was rated '**GOOD**'. The full report can be [accessed here](#).

Comments from the inspection report relating to adoption with relevant page numbers:

- Children who need to be adopted benefit from timely decision-making and effective planning. Good assessment, training and support is available for prospective adopters. Children enjoy stability and thrive in their adoptive families. (Page 15)
- The large majority of children live with their brothers and sisters, benefiting from stable local placements, with access to a wide range of educational, social and recreational opportunities. Comprehensive assessments inform decision-making regarding whether children should be placed with their brothers and sisters. A helpful in-house supervised contact service ensures that children are able to maintain regular contact with family members. (Page 18)
- For those children coming in to care in the last 12 months they have achieved timely adoptive placements and adoption orders. The head of the adoption service, supported by experienced managers and teams, scrutinises all performance and drives improvements effectively. (Page 19)
- Children are well prepared for adoption. Child permanence reports are thorough, focus on the child and inform their plans well. Adopters report positively about how well they are informed about children and prepared for introductions. Wherever possible, birth parents are involved in meeting prospective adopters and supporting their child's plan. A number of adopters noted that their child had recognised them when they arrived for a first visit, which demonstrates the effectiveness of how well prepared children are to meet them. (Page 19)
- Children have colourful and individual life-story books and direct work to help them understand their history. Adopters receive helpful training to support their child's ongoing life-story work. Children receive informative and sensitively written later-life letters to help them make sense of their identity and history when they are older. (Page 20)
- The local authority has made steady progress since 2012 in reducing the time it takes for children to be matched with, and move to live with, their adoptive families. The local authority's data demonstrates that performance continues to improve, with a reducing number of children waiting to be linked with families or to be placed for adoption. (Page 20)
- Children benefit from timely adoption orders once they are placed and make good progress in their adoptive families. Adopters are very positive about their experiences of contacting the service. They consistently told inspectors that they had received clear information and prompt responses to enquiries, and that the quality of the training prepared them well. Prospective adopter assessments are thorough; reports are analytical and child-centred, with clear rationales for supporting the recommendations to approve prospective adopters. A number of adopters had

already successfully adopted with Kent. This demonstrates their confidence in the experience they will have in adopting their second or third child. The local authority has a well-promoted policy for fostering to adopt and this has successfully supported children to form early attachments and not experience further moves when adoption becomes the plan. The capacity to offer fostering-to-adopt placements continues to increase, with six carers due to be considered for dual approval at adoption panel at the time of inspection. (Page 20)

- The adoption panels provide effective scrutiny, focus on children and test information to carefully consider their recommendations for approving adopters and matching children. The panel quality assures all presenting information and regularly reports to the agency its findings on the quality of practice. This has supported improvements, for example in the quality of prospective adopter reports. The agency decision makers (ADMs) make timely decisions, and challenge on the rare occasions that information is insufficient. The ADMs meet regularly with panel chairs and undertake appraisals to maintain oversight and accountability. Panel members receive regular appraisals and comprehensive training to ensure that their contributions are informed by current practice and developments in the service. (Page 20)
- The local authority works closely with two neighbouring local authorities to ensure that a wider resource of potential adopters can be considered for the needs of children. At the time of inspection there were 14 Kent adopters approved and waiting for a link. The local authority utilises all local, regional and national events to link adopters and children. (Page 20)
- If no matches can be identified at an early point, the local authority promptly refers to the adoption register and adoption link. (Page 20)
- The quality of post-adoption support is excellent. There is an effective and innovative range of options and services provided by a multi-disciplinary team under partnership arrangements. The support offered is flexible, and options include group workshops, training, specific and tailored support groups for adults and children, mentoring of newly approved adopters, and individual and family therapeutic interventions. There is creative and very successful use of the adoption support fund to support adoptive families. The team members are intuitive and use their expertise well. The capacity of the team has recently been increased to ensure that it can provide the full scope of therapeutic assessments and interventions. Adopters are extremely positive about the post-adoption support they and their children receive. For example, one adopter described the support as 'phenomenal, so pertinent to what we need'. (Page 21)

## Section 3: Adoption Service

Kent Adoption Service is led by a Head of Service and has five Teams. It is structured as follows: (*Appendix A*)

- Two Recruitment & Assessment Teams
- Family Finding Team
- Adoption Panel Management and Quality Assurance Team
- Post Adoption Support Team – working in Partnership with Coram

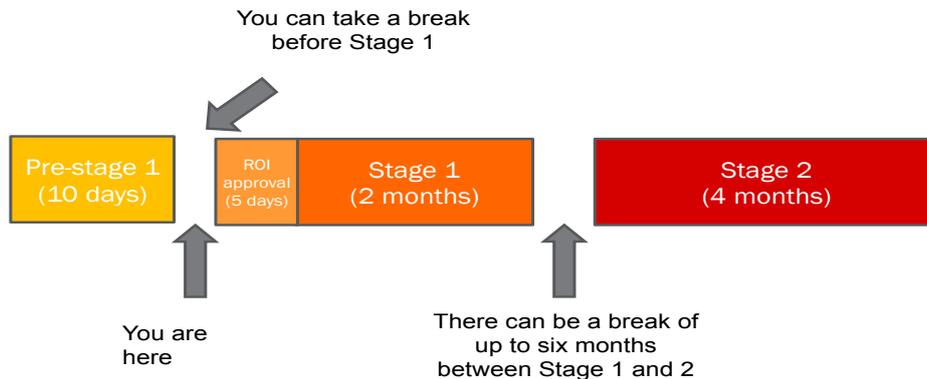
### Recruitment & Assessment Team (R&A) and Non-Agency Adoptions

In 2012 the government outlined an Action Plan that set out its proposals for tackling delay in the adoption system. One of those actions was to radically speed up the adopter assessment process so that two months are spent in training and information gathering – a pre-qualification phase – followed by four months of full assessment. They introduced a “fast-track” process for those who have adopted before or who are foster carers wanting to adopt a child in their care:

There are two Recruitment & Assessment Teams in the adoption service which has the equivalent of ten full time social workers. The adoption social worker undertaking the initial visit remains responsible for the case in stage one. This stage is overseen by one of the Recruitment & Assessment Managers and one administration officer supports the social worker in issuing and progressing checks and references. There are weekly tracking meetings to ensure that each case is progressed in a timely manner and difficulties are resolved promptly. The applicants are invited to attend a 3 day preparation course during stage one and there is the expectation that they complete self-assessment forms as well as e-learning. Stage one is adopter led although the aim is that it takes no longer than two months unless there is good reason for this. The Managers also identify cases that can be progressed more quickly especially if applicants are highly motivated, experienced etc.

Most prospective adopters who enter stage two retain the same social worker to offer continuity. They are invited to attend a two day preparation course during this stage; one of the days is facilitated by a therapist with emphasis on attachment and therapeutic parenting. This day has been very well received by prospective adopters. Each case is carefully tracked and progressed through supervision as well as monthly tracking meetings to ensure that there is a timely progression as well as quality assurance.

## The two-stage process



## Recruitment Strategy

In March 2015 the recruitment of adopters was put on hold because of the number of existing approved adopters and the fall in the number of children being granted a Placement Order. The Adoption Service started recruiting again from March 2016. The focus of the recruitment work during April to June 2016 was to complete initial visits to enable applicants to go through stage one (2 months) in preparation of stage two (4 months); this inevitably led to first time adopters being approved in from October onwards. This had an impact on the number of adopters approved during the year 2016/17.

Whilst there is a consistent flow of interest from people enquiring about adopting, there is a focus in the service on recruiting adopters willing and able to consider adopting children aged 3 years of age and older, siblings and children with disabilities/complex needs. This is clearly outlined in our literature, on the adoption service website and during adoption information events.

During 2016/17 the service focused on its recruitment; which has led to several developments; all of which will be progressed during 2017/18. These include:

- Development of a comprehensive recruitment strategy
- Re-branding of adoption leaflets
- Continual development of the adoption service website
- Development of the use of social media, including the creation of a Facebook Page for 2017/18.
- Bespoke/targeted advertising – the Adoption Service delivered bespoke recruitment and advertised outside of Kent to recruit adopters to meet the needs of complex children, which included The Metro and London Evening Standard. A recruitment campaign is in progress for 2017/18 including a press release, a bespoke information

event for prospective adopters who might be interested in finding out more about adopting siblings or children with complex needs and plans for a radio interview with approved adopters of siblings to take place.

- Responsive service – it is vital that a responsive and efficient service is provided to potential adopters. An Enquiries Adviser post is therefore established to ensure this is achieved.
- Monthly information events - advertised on the Kent Adoption and First4Adoption websites; members of the public are able to attend without booking a place. The attendees interested in taking their interest in adoption further are able to book a home visit at the event to explore their interest and suitability further. There is always at least one experienced adopter in attendance at the events who shares his/her experience of adoption; this is a very popular part of the presentation.

Non-Agency assessments – This refers to adoption assessments involving families whose children are not in the care of the Local authority such as Step Parent adoption. During 2016/17 the Non- Agency Team which was previously a separate team transferred under the Management of the two Recruitment & Assessment Team Managers. This resulted in saving costs but also a more streamlined service that mirrors that of the agency adoption process. As with agency adoption assessments the progress of each case is monitored through supervision and monthly tracking meetings. There is a transition to a two phase process so that all references and checks are completed in phase one to identify whether there are reasons that the adoption order is unlikely to be granted.

## Fostering to Adopt Scheme

A key aim of all those involved in securing permanence for children is to place children in their potentially permanent placement at the earliest possible stage. 'Foster to Adopt' is used for babies and children who are in local authority care where the plan is likely to be adoption, but who still have a chance of being reunited with their birth family. The majority of children go on to be adopted. Foster to Adopt protects children from experiencing multiple moves within the care system. It provides children with good quality, uninterrupted and consistent care whilst detailed assessments of their birth family are completed and the Court decides on the plan for the child. Consistent care for the child reduces possible future harm and it supports the child in developing healthy attachments. Babies and children are placed with approved adopters who have been assessed and approved as temporary foster carers for the child.

The Foster to Adopt carers provide the day to day care for the child and work with the child's social worker to ensure that the child has all of their needs met. At the same time, the child's social worker will continue working with and assessing the child's birth parents to see if they have made the changes needed to have the child returned to their care. The Court will make the final decision on the plan for the child. If the decision is that the child should be adopted then Foster to Adopt carers can go to an adoption matching panel and if panel agree, will become the adopters for the child. Alternatively, if the Court decides that the child should be returned to their birth family then the child is returned.

To date there have been 20 Foster to Adopt placements made in Kent, 18 using Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 25A (2010) and two through the Dual Approval Panel which became functional in January 2017. Kent Adoption Service attends a Foster to Adopt Steering group attended by other stakeholders which is chaired by Coram. Kent provides additional training for prospective carers within the stage two assessment process and holds a monthly support group for Foster to Adopt carers. The service provides training for social workers across Kent and has raised awareness with partner agencies including health, social care, CAFCASS and as stated above the judiciary.

## Family Finding

The Adoption Service works in partnership with district teams to promote early permanency for children; it advocates the benefits of this to achieve the best possible outcomes for children. Within the Adoption Service there is a Family Finding Team which consists of one team manager, 8 senior practitioners/social workers and one administrator. Social workers from within the Family Finding Team are invited to attend Permanency Planning Meetings (PPMs) across Kent to offer guidance on such matters as sibling assessments, post adoption contact options, life story and identity needs, achievable plans, current Kent adopters, along with guidance on the Adoption process. This has been successful and there has been an increased demand for Family Finding to attend these meetings, consequently, resources creatively redirected in 2016/17 to develop a Permanency Planning Lead (senior practitioner) who ensures there is appropriate Family Finding attendance at PPMs. Family Finding social workers have a central role in supporting relinquishing birth parents and case holding the children.

The Family Finding team has increased links with the Independent Reviewing Service to further consider how to jointly improve timeliness and tracking across Kent. Similarly, the links between Children with Disabilities (CWD), Fostering and Family Finding have continued to strengthen. Active consideration is given to how children with disabilities can have their needs for permanence met and ensure that adoption is always considered as an option. The CWD team continues to engage in preparation groups for adopters in order to encourage interest in children with disabilities. The group also plan more joint interface training workshops to take place during 2017.

The continued focus of robust tracking systems across Kent supports the early identification of children for whom the plan is likely to be adoption. This in turn creates early identification of matches and has reduced the time taken for children moving to their adoptive placement following a placement order. The Head of Adoption works in partnership with the Children in Care Service Managers and reviews the process and tracking to ensure that the decision making is robust and the Adoption Service is impacting on permanency planning meetings to reduce delay and speedily progress plans for adoption. Robust tracking takes place from the point a decision is made by an Agency Decision Maker (ADM) that adoption is the care plan for a child. Where children are at home through proceedings there is consideration given to whether (if a Placement Order is granted by the court), the child can move directly into adoptive placements where assessment considers this is an appropriate match.

There continues to be a close working relationship between the Recruitment Assessment Team and the Family Finding team in the matching process. There are weekly linking

meetings, chaired by the Head of Adoption and attended by the three managers from the two teams. Every approved adopter and those being assessed in stage two (unless they have expressed a preference to wait until after approval) are considered for the children identified as needing adoptive parents. Possible links are followed up by the Family Finding and Recruitment & Assessment social workers with a sense of urgency to avoid delay. Approved adopters and those in stage two are regularly sent profiles of children so that they can self-select and express an interest. This is in addition to being invited to profiling events and having the possibility of arranging a meeting with a Family Finding social worker. There is an emphasis on making sure that all Recruitment & Assessment and Family Finding social workers have a good awareness of the families and children coming through the adoption process as early as possible.

## Adoption Panel Team

The panel team establishment comprised of one full time Team Manager/Agency Adviser and one Panel Adviser and 3 administrative staff during 2016/17. There are four panels established including one Dual Panel, which considers assessments of prospective adopters who wish to be considered as Foster to Adopt carers as well as adopters. A fourth panel was introduced in 2016/17 in order to respond in a timely way to ensure adopter assessments and 'matches' for children with adopters were considered in a timely way.

Panel composition - The panel members, including the social worker members employed by Kent County Council (KCC) are selected on the basis of their capacity to work cooperatively with each other and professionals within the Adoption and wider Children in Care Services. Their performance is monitored through annual appraisals. Although there is no longer a requirement or limit to the number of independent members that should be in an adoption panel, the majority of the members of the Kent Adoption Panels are independent. The current membership of the Central List is 35, including Kent Social Work members. Together they have a combined pool of professional and personal knowledge, experience and skills as adopters and adoptees including background in adoption and fostering work.

Agency Panel Advisers quality assure and provide advice on all cases being presented at panel and then subsequently to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), plus on all requests for ADM's to agree children's adoption plans. This is regarded as a high priority; performed in a timely, thorough manner and is evidenced in writing. Two six monthly reports are produced by the Independent Panel Chairs and these are shared with the Agency Decision Makers and the Director of Specialist Children's Services These include a quality assurance and scrutiny role of the cases presented. The reports identify issues including the quality of adopter's assessments, child permanency reports, progress on life story work, birth relatives' support and the voice of the child. This feedback from the Panels has been used to improve services and practice.

Communication - The Agency Decision Makers, Head of Adoption, Agency Advisers, Medical Advisers, Panel Chairs have regular meetings to review service delivery and discuss issues arising.

## Post Adoption and SGO Services

For four years, until January 2016, Coram managed the Kent Adoption Service. The Coram vision for the multi-disciplinary Post Adoption Support Team (PAST) model practised in Kent, developed since 2014, was based on recognition that adopters and adopted children require timely skilled clinical and social work expertise in-house. The approach was developed in conjunction with adopters and the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. Coram has produced a paper for the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies VAA outlining the model, how it works, its potential effectiveness and how it can be replicated. It is an ambitious model and continues to develop. It consists of a Clinical Lead appointed through the Tavistock and a Social Work Team Manager. The team has 3 therapists, (family, child and adolescent and adult therapist) 1 systemic therapy practitioner, (0.8), (a second is being recruited), and 1 music therapist (0.6) and 2 experienced social workers.

The model of post adoption support has been expanded to include an SGO support work stream and the vision will be developed further in the coming year. Currently, there is one Senior Social worker who provides an advice and consultation service to social workers and 'drop in clinics' to support with ASF applications and she provides advice with support plans for children who are the subject of care proceedings. The post holder signposts enquirers to Kent's extensive early help services that are available when appropriate and she is developing links with these services and other teams.

## Post Adoption Support Offer

The PAST provides a range of services to adopted children and their families including:

- Provision of information, advice and guidance to adopters and professionals through the advice line.
- Consultation, Assessment and intervention to adopters and their families through initial telephone or face to face consultation, brief therapeutic intervention (up to 6 sessions) and therapeutic life story work.
- Intensive family interventions to bring a deeper understanding of children and young people's state of mind, mental health and wellbeing; and to support adoptive parents in parenting their children to bring about their social and emotional development.
- Group and workshop programme including:
- Incredible Years Parenting programme for adopters with children under 9 years. The partnership has delivered four Incredible Years Parenting Programmes.
- STOP parenting programme for adopters with adolescents - first delivery of the STOP programme took place in December 2016/January 2017 and a second started in March 2017. PAST social workers and clinicians continue to be trained to deliver future programmes and a mixed delivery will continue depending on the need/programme.
- The development of a Parenting Programme (on-going) specifically geared for adoptive parents with autistic children was piloted in March 2017 led by a PAST

clinician and a Kent educational representative. It is an attachment based course so it benefits from a clinician.

- Intensive Adoptive Parent Support Groups (ongoing) - 2 Groups, one in East Kent and one in West Kent, facilitated by clinical staff, each running for 8 weeks for 2 hours.
- Learning and Development workshop programme for adopters, and their families – (Rolling programme running from September to the following July each year). Includes topics such as explaining adoption, 'Who's in charge', Transitions, Social media, siblings and parenting adolescents. The full programme is available via the website: <http://www.kentadoption.co.uk/support-after-youve-adopted/post-adoption-support-team>
- Supporting education - Education conference held on 7th October 2016 attended by adopters, Senior Managers, social workers, teachers and educational representatives focusing on educational issues for adopted children and the support needed. Out of this will be developed 2.5 hour seminars for schools provided by a clinician and an adopter focussing on attachment for adopted children and links with behaviour and emotional needs. The first one was held in February. Links are also to be strengthened with Virtual School Kent and there were two jointly led education workshops delivered to adopters on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2017 and 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017.
- Information workshop for adopters and young people to promote employability – an initial workshop was held in March 2017 and this work stream is progressing.
- Adopter mentoring scheme - to support adopters in early placement. Learning is being incorporated into the continuous development of the scheme.
- Young people's participation group - Strengthening adopted children and young people's voices, developed by a family therapist and senior social worker from PAST, in conjunction with Coram 'Adoptables', who have trained three ambassadors, been involved in running theatre workshops and have presented to Kent Corporate Parenting Group.
- Advisory Board - Strengthening the voice of adoptive parents. This group has Terms of Reference and quarterly meetings are chaired by the PAST Team Manager. It serves as an advisor and critical friend to the service. Members of the group have assisted in a variety of ways including presenting at the education conference, the development of the PAST leaflet, development & implementation of the mentoring scheme and participation on staff interview panels.

## Section 4: - The Childs Journey - Adoption Data

Indicator	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-17
ADM Best Interest Decisions	179	93	111	118
Children Placed	170	143	89	84
Placement Orders	164	79	90	92
Matches Approved	172	145	84	89
Adoption Orders Granted	145	182	108	80

### ADM Best Interest Decisions

Between 1 April 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 the Agency Decision Maker agreed the plan for adoption for 118 children, 6% more than in the same period last year (111).

National data produced by the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) indicates that nationally the number of ADM decisions increased slightly from 4,310 in 2014/15 to 4,750 in 2015/16. ADM decisions remained lower than in previous years and were 42% lower in quarter 1 of 2016/17 than in quarter 2 of 2013/14.

### Children Placed for Adoption

Between 1 April 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, 84 children were placed with an adoptive family, 6% fewer children than in the same period in 2015/16 (89 children). 29 of the children were placed outside Kent.

Of the 80 Adoption Orders granted only 33 were placed in this 12 month period, with the others placed in previous years.

### Placement Orders

92 Placement Orders were granted in 2016/17 which was two more than in 2015/16. 11 of the children granted placement orders in 2016/17 were aged 5 or older.

Adoption Leadership Board national data shows that placement orders increased slightly from 3,590 in 2014/15 to 3,840 in 2015/16, but that they remained 43% lower than in 2013/14. There were 890 placement orders granted in the first quarter of 2016/17.

### Matches Approved

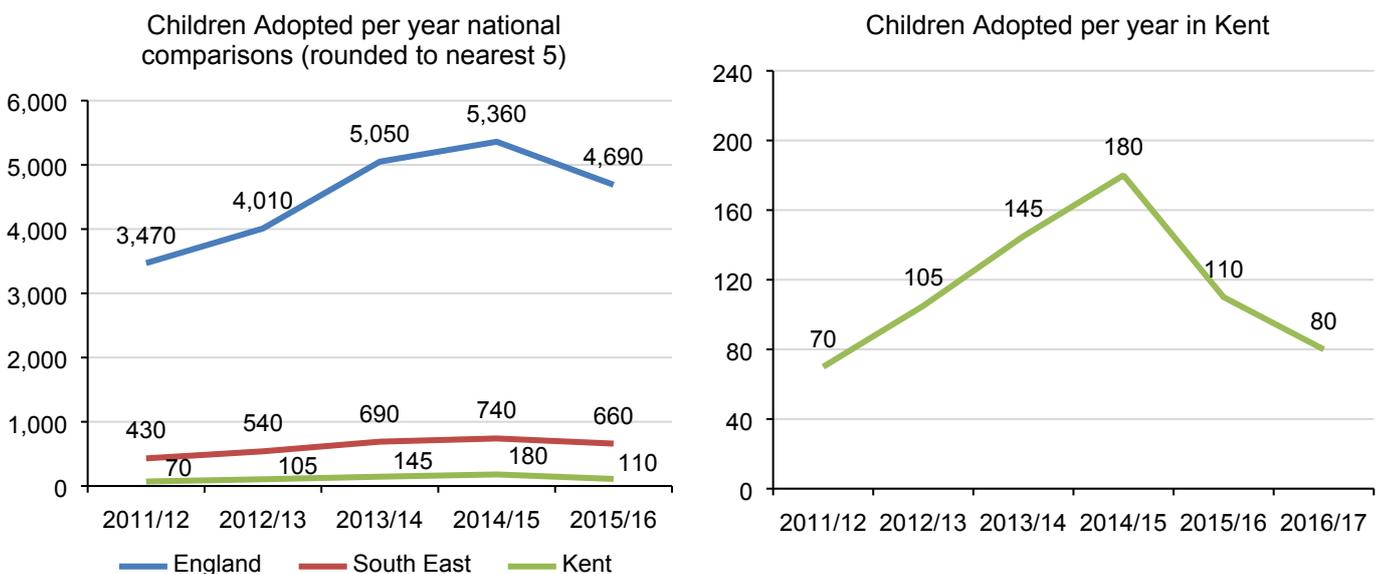
Between 1 April 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, 89 children were matched with an adoptive family, 6% more children than in the same period in 2015/16 (84 children).

## Children with a Plan that has Changed Away from Adoption

Between 1 April 2016 and 31st March 2017, 20 children's plans were changed from adoption, which was one less than in 2015/16 (21 children).

Adoption Leadership Board national data indicates that 31% of decisions reversed in 2015/16 were as a result of the court not making a placement order (32% in the first quarter of 2016/17). There has been a reduction in the number of plans changed because adopters could not be found.

## Adoption Orders Granted



Source: SFR Local Authority Table LAE1 available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2015-to-2016>

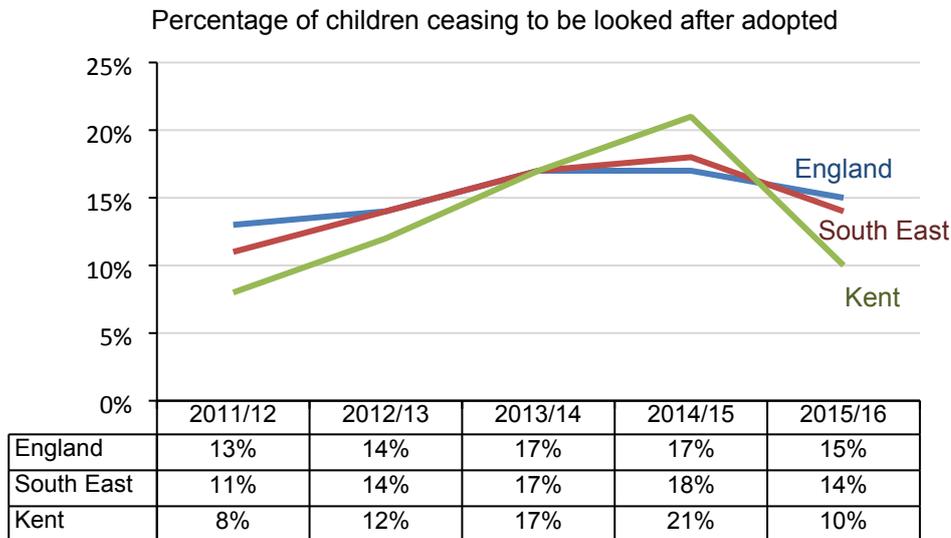
80 Adoption Orders were granted in Kent in 2016/17, which was a 35% decrease on the 108 granted in 2015/16. This included 4 relinquished babies (no placement orders) in each year.

The national picture has also seen a decline in adoptions. There were 4,690 adoptions in 2015/16, which was a 12% decrease from 2014/15. The Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) states there has also been a reduction in the number of children awaiting adoption. There were '2,000 children waiting at 30 June 2016', which was 'a 10% decrease from 31 March 2016 when there were 2,210 children waiting with a placement order not yet placed with an adoptive family'.<sup>1</sup>

Kent has consistently been amongst the highest local authorities in terms of adoptions numbers, with 108 adoptions in 2015/16, which was second only to

<sup>1</sup> Adoption Leadership Board (2017). *Adoption Leadership Board headline measures and business intelligence: Quarter 1 2016 to 2017 Update*. Online, available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/584616/ALB\\_Business\\_Intelligence\\_Quarter\\_1\\_2016\\_to\\_2017.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/584616/ALB_Business_Intelligence_Quarter_1_2016_to_2017.pdf) (accessed 05-Jun-2017).

Lancashire.<sup>2</sup>



Source: Department for Education (2016), Statistical First Release. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2015-to-2016> (accessed 22/05/2017)

In 2015/16 Kent was below national and South East averages in terms of the percentage of children adopted. Kent's percentage of children ceasing to be looked after who were adopted is impacted by significant numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children. In 2015/16 the percentage of children leaving care who were adopted rises from 10% to 16% when UASC are excluded from the calculation. This would place Kent higher than the England and South East averages for the year.

In 2016/17, the percentage of children leaving care who were adopted was 12.8% (excluding UASC).

## Children Placed Who Are Not Yet Adopted

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, 55 children were placed for adoption but not yet adopted (52 at the same time last year). The majority of children had been placed less than 6 months (43 children, 78%), 7 children had been placed between 6 and 12 months, and 5 children had been placed for more than 12 months.

## Children Waiting at the End of March 2016

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education (2016). *Statistical First Release Local Authority Tables*. Online, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2015-to-2016> (accessed 05-Jun-2017)

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 there were 31 children with a placement order who had not yet been matched; 21 boys and 10 girls.

23 of these children (74%) had at least 1 hard to place factor, and 6 of the children had more than 1 hard to place factor.

The group included 5 children aged 5 or over, 5 children from black or minority ethnic backgrounds, 12 children being considered as part of a sibling group and 1 child with a disability.

At the time of writing this report (25<sup>th</sup> May 2017) 13 children had been subsequently matched or had a matching panel booked. This included 2 sibling groups of 2.

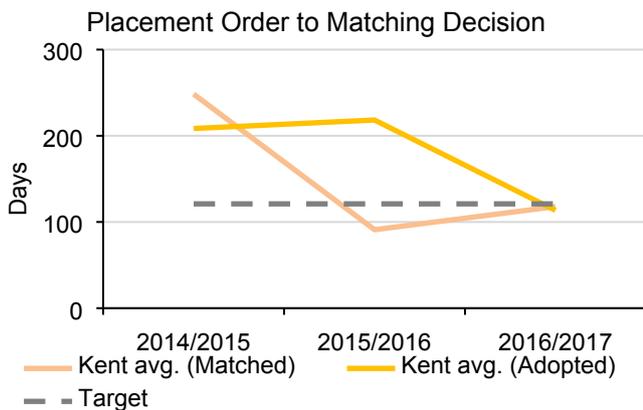
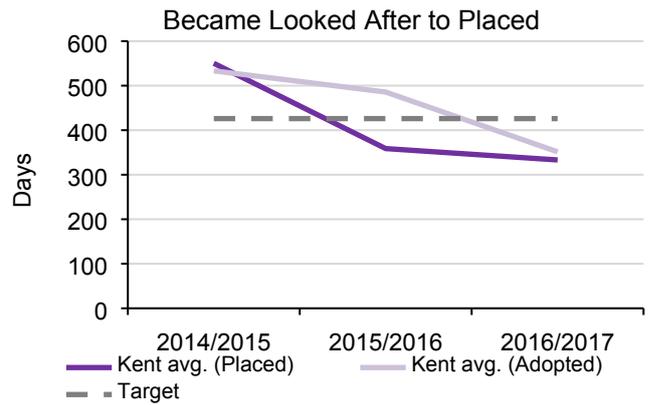
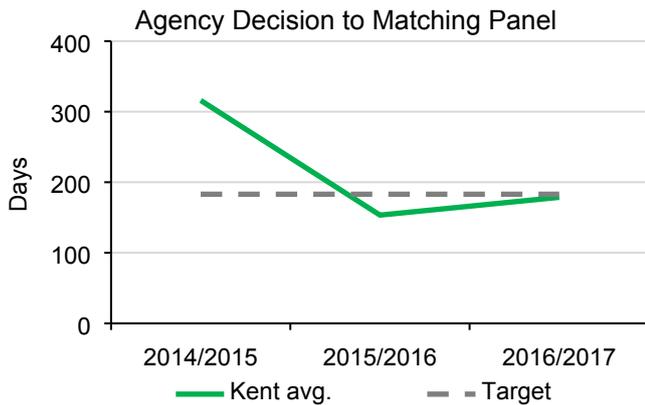
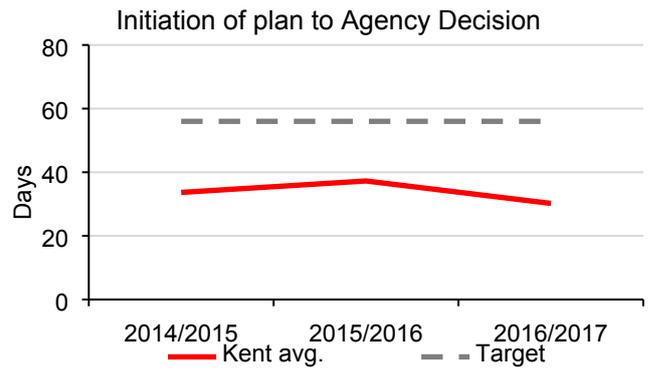
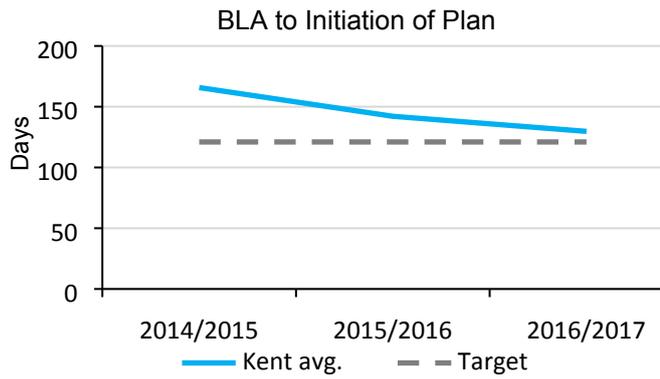
For the children not yet matched 5 children had been linked to adopters, 11 children had active family finding taking place (3 sibling groups of 2 children, and 5 single children), 2 children had family finding put on hold awaiting appeal (consisting of one sibling group).

## Children without a Placement Order

As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 there were 28 children on an interim care order with an agency decision for adoption but no Placement Order.

## Timescales and improvements

Timescale Indicator	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	Distance from target 2016/17 (days)
Became Looked After to Initiation of Adoption Planning (children with an initiation in year)	165.8	142.1	129.7	+8.7
Initiation of Adoption Planning to Agency Decision (children with ADM in year)	33.7	37.3	30.2	-25.8
Agency Decision to Matching Panel (children matched in year)	316.0	153.4	178.6	-4.4
Placement Order to Matching Decision (children matched in year)	248.4	91.0	117.8	-3.2
Placement Order to Matching Decision (children adopted in year)	208.4	218.3	113.5	-7.5
Became Looked After to Placed for Adoption (children placed in year)	550.2	358.7	333.1	-92.9
Became Looked After to Placed for Adoption (children adopted in year)	533.3	485.7	351.4	-74.6



## Became Looked After to Initiation of Adoption Planning

The target time between a child becoming looked after to the adoption plan being initiated is 121 days (4 months). For children with a plan initiated in the year, Kent's performance on this measure has seen steady improvement, and in 2016/17 Kent's average of 129.7 days narrowly missed the 121 day target.

## Initiation of Adoption Planning to Agency Decision

The target time from the adoption plan being initiated to the ADM Best Interest decision is 56 days (8 weeks). Kent's performance on this measure has remained below the 56 day target in each of the last 3 years, and was 30.2 days in 2016/17.

83.1% of children with an agency decision in the year had a period of less than 8 weeks from the adoption plan being initiated to the ADM Best Interest decision.

## Agency Decision to Matching Panel

The panel should consider a match with an adoptive family within 183 days (6 months) of the Best Interest decision being made. Kent's average time increased to 178.6 days in 2016/17. There are a variety of reasons for this which includes contested court proceedings, parental appeals following the granting of a Placement Order and delays in family finding due to the needs of the child/sibling group. Despite the increase, Kent remained below the 183 day target on this measure.

62.9% of children with a matching decision in the year had a period of less than 6 months from the adoption plan being initiated to the ADM BI.

## Placement Order to Matching Decision

The target time from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption (PO) to the approval of a match with an adoptive family for children adopted is 121 days (4 months). In 2016/17 Kent's figure reduced to 113.5 days, which surpassed the 121 day target.

Children are not always matched in the same year as they are adopted, therefore the time taken historically to place children impacts upon this measure. For children matched in 2016/17, the average time between placement order and match was 117.8 days. This also surpassed the 121 day DfE threshold.

Of the children matched in 2016/17, 40 had at least 1 hard to place factor, with 4 children having more than 1 hard to place factor. 30 children were matched as part of a sibling group, 9 of the children matched were aged 5+, 4 were from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and one child was disabled.

Adoption Leadership Board data shows that nationally there was no reduction in timescale for this measure. 8 months was the average timescale in 2014/15, 2015/16 and in the first quarter of 2016/17.

## Became Looked After to Placed for Adoption

The current DfE threshold for children becoming looked after to placement is 426 days (14 months). In 2016/17 Kent surpassed this target for children adopted in the year, with an average of 351.4 days.

Children are not always placed in the same year as they are adopted. Timescales for children placed in the year provides a more accurate indication of current performance. Using this measure, Kent has also shown continuous improvement from 550 days in 2014/15 and 359 days in 2015/16 to 333.1 days in 2016/17.

Adoption Leadership Board data shows that nationally there was no reduction in timescale for this measure between 2014/15 and 2015/16, remaining at an average of 18 months. The first quarter of 2016/17 suggests there was a slight improvement to 17 months.

## Placed to Adoption Order Granted

It is the responsibility of the Adoptive parents to apply for the Adoption Order. Therefore the performance timescales of Adoptive Agencies end at the time the child is placed. The average time from the child being placed to the adoption order granted in 2016/17 was 249 days. This was slightly higher than in 2015/16 when it was 220 days.

The adoption service is closely monitoring the timeliness of the submission of adoption applications to reduce delay and provide support where necessary. There is an expectation that the social workers prepare the court application early so that it can be submitted after the child has been placed for ten weeks, which is the legal timescale for applications to be made. If this is not felt to be appropriate the reasons will be discussed in the child's Looked after Review and if necessary support will be provided.

## Section 5: - The Adopter Journey - Adoption Data

### Adopter Activity

Adopter activity 2016/17	Number of families
Enquiries in 2016/17	261
Stage 1 starts in 2016/17	90
Stage 2 starts in 2016/17	74
Stage 2 ends in 2016/17	50
Adoptive families matched in 2016/17	54
Adoptive families with placements in 2016/17	53
Adoptive families with adoption orders in 2016/17	68

### Approval timescales

23 of the 50 adoptive families approved in 2016/17 were fast tracked (foster carers and repeat adopters).

7 of the 27 adoptive families who were not fast tracked were approved within 6 months of registration (29.5%).

40 of the 50 (80%) adoptive families were approved within the 4 month timescale.

### Average timescales for newly approved adopters in the 2 stage adopter recruitment process (excluding fast tracks)

	2016/17
Enquiry to Stage 1 Start (days)	106
Stage 1 Start to Stage 1 End (days)	50
Stage 1 End to Stage 2 Start (days)	36
Stage 2 Starts to Stage 2 End (days)	106
Stage 1 Start to Stage 2 End (days)	193
Enquiry to Stage 2 End (days)	299

Source: ALB return 2016/17

The average time between enquiry and stage 1 start was 106 days for Kent.

The target duration for stage 1 is 2 months. 2016/17 figures indicate that Kent was within this timescale with an average of 50 days.

Prospective Adopters can take a break of up to 6 months between stages 1 and 2. Kent's figures for 2016/17 show that the average time between stage 1 ending and stage 2 starting was 36 days.

The target duration for stage 2 is 4 months. Kent's year to date figures indicate that Kent was within this target, with an average of 106 days (3.5 months).

The total time between stage 1 start and stage 2 end was 193 days. The total time from enquiry to stage 2 completions in Kent was 299 days.

## Adopter gap

The latest data on the Adopter gap indicates that Kent had more Adopters waiting for a match than children with a placement order waiting to be matched. There were 36 children with a Placement Order waiting to be matched and 45 adoptive families waiting (adopter gap of -9 or -25%).

ALB data indicates that nationally the adopter gap had closed in 2015/16 and there were more adoptive families than children waiting. The number of adopters approved fell by 31% between 2014/15 and 2015/16 (decreases of 34% for LAs and 17% for VAAs). This increased slightly by 1% in the first quarter of 2016/17.

## Post Adoption Information Events

### Learning and Development Programme

Title	15/16		16/17	
	attendees	households	attendees	households
adolescence and identity	24	18		
apprenticeship event			25	9
ASF seminar			9	8
becoming a family through adoption			19	6
CAFIS on contact	13	12	21	17
explaining adoption	60	45		
impact of neglect	12	10	10	7
managing contact with birth families			7	7
managing transitions	20	18	17	11
non-verbal communication	28	23	29	24
sibling rivalry	25	20	8	8
social and emotional development	27	21	37	33

Impact of social media			45	42
Talking with children and life story book			38	33
Thinking about adoption	16	8	17	10
Supporting education - Virtual school			21	20
Who's in charge? p1	15	11	38	35
Who's in charge? p2	15	11	38	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>305</b>

## Intensive Therapeutic Parent Support Groups

Six intensive therapeutic parent support groups were facilitated in 2015/16 and a further three in 2016/17, with a total of 54 attendees across the two years (plus an additional 11 in early 2015).

## Incredible Years

Four incredible years' programmes have been run in total; two in 2015/16 and the same number in 2016/17. These had 48 attendees from 24 families.

## STOP

The STOP parenting adolescents programme is now on its second cycle, with a total of 22 attendees in 2016/17

## Autistic Parenting Programme

The partnership is also running an autistic parenting programme that was attended by 12 people but for some sessions this fell to nine attendees after one couple withdrew due to serious sudden ill health.

## Parties

Two parties were held in 2016/17. 162 (82 adopters and 82 children) people attended the Summer Party on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2016 and 245 people (120 adopters and 125 children) attended the Christmas party on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016. These are regarded as being an excellent opportunity for adopted children and adoptive parents to meet others who have similar experiences and they facilitate informal support networks.

## Post Adoption Support

In 2016/17, Kent adoption service received 241 requests for post adoption support. Following assessment, 162 of these requests resulted in the provision of support and 4 assessments were still being carried out at 31<sup>st</sup> March. The remainder were signposted to other more appropriate sources of support or their request was resolved within the initial consultation.

Kent adoption service provided post adoption support to 410 families during the year, 85 of which were funded by Kent and 325 funded by another route (such as the Adoption Support Fund).

## Section 6: Disruptions

From the 84 children placed during 2016/17; one placement disrupted in March 2017 after the child was placed for two months. The plan for this child is now long term fostering.

Learning from these placement breakdowns is shared at operational meetings with colleagues in the social care teams and within the adoption service. The information and analysis is also discussed at the Adoption Panels that recommended approval of the match for the child with the adopters.

## Section 7: Commissioned Services

Coram remains in a contracted partnership with Kent and have been commissioned to help further develop Post Adoption Support Team and it's the multi-disciplinary model in 2017/18. The team developed between Kent and Coram focuses on timely assessments and interventions undertaken primarily 'in house' unless the children and their family reside outside of the Kent area and therefore a more localised service is required or if their requirements cannot be met within the PAST.

Kent adoption service commissions through a contract Barnardo's (CAFIS: Connecting Adoptive Families Independent Services) for Independent Adoption and SGO Support Services. This includes a range of services covering: independent support for birth parents; contact both direct and letterbox; access to birth records and intermediary services for adult adoptees.

## Section 8: Compliments, Feedback and Complaints

The majority of concerns or issues raised in relation to the service provided by the Adoption Service are resolved through a problem-solving approach within the service and the service aims to respond quickly and with sensitivity. If however, concerns remain unresolved Kent County Council has a comprehensive Complaints Procedure. During 2016-17 the Adoption Service received three formal complaints at Stage 1. The last complaint received was in July 2016. The Adoption Service values the views of those it is providing a service to and their feedback is used to inform service delivery and design. There are several forums for receiving feedback which include:

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

A detailed report produced by Coram specifically focusing on feedback received in relation to services provided by the Post Adoption support Team is attached (*Appendix B*).

## Section 9: Regionalisation

### Regionalisation Agenda

In June 2015 the government published a paper setting out proposals to move to regional adoption agencies. It stated the government believed they will help: speed up matching and markedly improve the life chances of neglected and damaged children; improve adopter recruitment and adoption support; and reduce costs. The paper stated the government's intention that by the end of this Parliament, all local authorities would be part of regional agencies. Since the policy was introduced there has been a general election and changes within the government, but the policy remains unchanged. Whilst there was some initial start up funding for those local authorities/adoption agencies wishing to proceed in 2016, there is currently no government funding being offered for 2017/18 to assist local authorities/adoption agencies yet to formalise their regional adoption agency.

Kent is working with London Borough of Bexley & Medway Local Authorities in a Regional Adoption Agency model. All three Local Authorities presented to their respective Cabinet Committees in September 2016 and there has been agreement for the RAA progression. An Executive Board has been established under which sits an Operational Board to ensure progression to closer partnership working with a view to forming a Regional Adoption Agency.

## Section 10: Conclusion

The annual report for 2016/17 demonstrated an improvement in the performance in relation to both 'the child's Journey' and 'the Adopters Journey' during that year. The current report demonstrates continued improvements in performance during the last financial year despite a fall in the number of Adoption Orders granted. The service is very pleased with the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection and it is now striving to be 'Outstanding'. A business plan has been drafted for the coming year to consolidate the areas of good practice noted and to further develop the service.

Sarah Skinner  
Head of Adoption  
Kent Adoption Service  
June 2017