
KENT ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

Making Kent a county that works for all children



2018/19
KENT COUNTY COUNCIL
Adoption

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Foreword

Caroline Smith, Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting



As Corporate Parents, we aspire to provide children in care with the stability and security they need, to reach their full potential during their childhood. For some children, who are not able to live with their birth families, adoption provides them with a permanent and stable home, in which to thrive.

I am extremely proud of the work of the dedicated staff team within Kent Adoption, who work tirelessly to recruit and support adopters who can make a real difference to a child's future. The Annual Report is a celebration of their achievements and the outstanding work undertaken, to ensure children in Kent have the best possible adopters to care for them.

Sarah Skinner, Head of Adoption



Welcome to the annual report for Kent Adoption Service. As Head of Adoption, I am pleased to be able to say that the Adoption Service takes its corporate parenting responsibility extremely seriously whilst aiming to ensure children's time spent in the care system is as brief as possible.

For those children for whom adoption is their care plan, the Adoption Service aims to recruit adopters who can meet the needs of our children in care and provide them with a loving, stable, and supportive family life forever.

In order to do this, we recognise that adopted children and their parents may need support at various times throughout a child's life and during their transition into adulthood; thus, the service provides a range of interventions to meet such needs.

Section 1: Overview

Kent Adoption Service sits within the Children, Young People and Education directorate within Integrated Children's Services, overseen by the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting. The purpose of the annual report is to provide an overview of the service, including information regarding its structure, service model and delivery.

The report includes performance data and analysis of the national adoption scorecard and other local authorities.

Purpose and Objectives of Kent County Council 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 Adoption National Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000).

Kent County Council is committed to ensuring that children and young people remain in the care of their parents and birth families wherever possible. However, where it is not possible to achieve stability for the child or young person within their birth family, we work to achieve alternative permanent arrangements for children or young person 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, their birth families, and adoptive parents. This will include services in relation to those 'looked after' children with an adoption plan, and children adopted via the non-agency route, such as stepparent adoption.

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 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 the adoption process and that there is a recognition of 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.

Section 2: Service Structure

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

- Two Recruitment, Assessment and Support Teams
- One Family Finding Team
- One Adoption Panel Management and Quality Assurance Team
- One Post Adoption Support Team (working in Partnership with Coram)

Recruitment, Assessment and Support Team (RAS)

There are two Recruitment, Assessment and Support Teams in the Adoption Service which has the equivalent of fifteen (full time equivalent) Senior Practitioners/Social Workers.

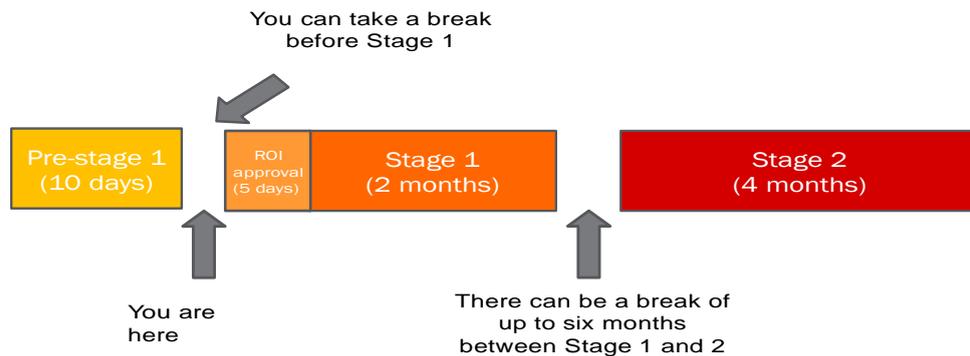
The adoption Social Worker undertaking the initial visit remains responsible for the case during the Stage One process. This stage is overseen by the Team Manager, their Business Support Assistant and the Social Worker in issuing and progressing checks and references. The applicants are invited to attend a three-day preparation course during Stage One and there is an expectation that they complete self-assessment forms as well as eLearning.

Stage One of the application process is adopter led, and the aim is that it takes no longer than two months to complete unless there is good reason, in which case, additional time can be allowed. The Recruitment & Assessment Team Managers, with their staff, can identify potential adopters whose assessment can be progressed more quickly when they appear to have the necessary experiences and qualities needed for children who have complex needs or sibling groups.

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 these days is facilitated by a therapist with emphasis on attachment and therapeutic parenting.

Once approved as Kent adopters and a child is placed, the adoptive parents will be offered a mentor, who is an experienced Kent adoptive parent who can offer informal, and informed support. Mentors are supported by a RAS Team Manager and attend regular support groups.

The two-stage process



Non-agency assessments

This refers to adoption assessments involving families whose children are not in the care of the local authority such as stepparent adoption.

As with agency adoption assessments the two-stage process is followed and robust monitoring through supervision and tracking meetings takes place to ensure a timely service is delivered.

Recruitment strategy

Nationally, there has been a reduction in the number of people coming forward seeking assessment as adopters, but fortunately, this has not been the case in Kent.

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 three years old and above, siblings, and those with a disability or complex needs.

This is clearly outlined in our literature, on the Adoption Service website and during adoption information events. The recruitment strategy focuses on several key elements:

- Continual development of the Adoption Service website and use of social media.
- Consideration of bespoke/targeted advertising when necessary.
- Active engagement with local media outlets during national adoption week in October, 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 radio interviews with approved adopters of siblings and the Head of Service.
- Responsive service – Three Initial Enquiries Advisers take incoming calls from people enquiring about adopting to ensure a quick and responsive service.
- Advertising on the Kent Adoption and First4Adoption websites.
- Monthly information events where members of the public can attend without booking a place. There is always at least one experienced adopter in attendance at the events who shares their experience of adoption, which is a very popular part of the presentation.
- Active promotion of the extensive post adoption support that is available to Kent adopters from when a child is placed and beyond the adoption order being granted.

Foster to Adopt Scheme

A key aim of all those involved in securing permanence for children is to place them 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. Most children placed under foster to adopt go on to be adopted.

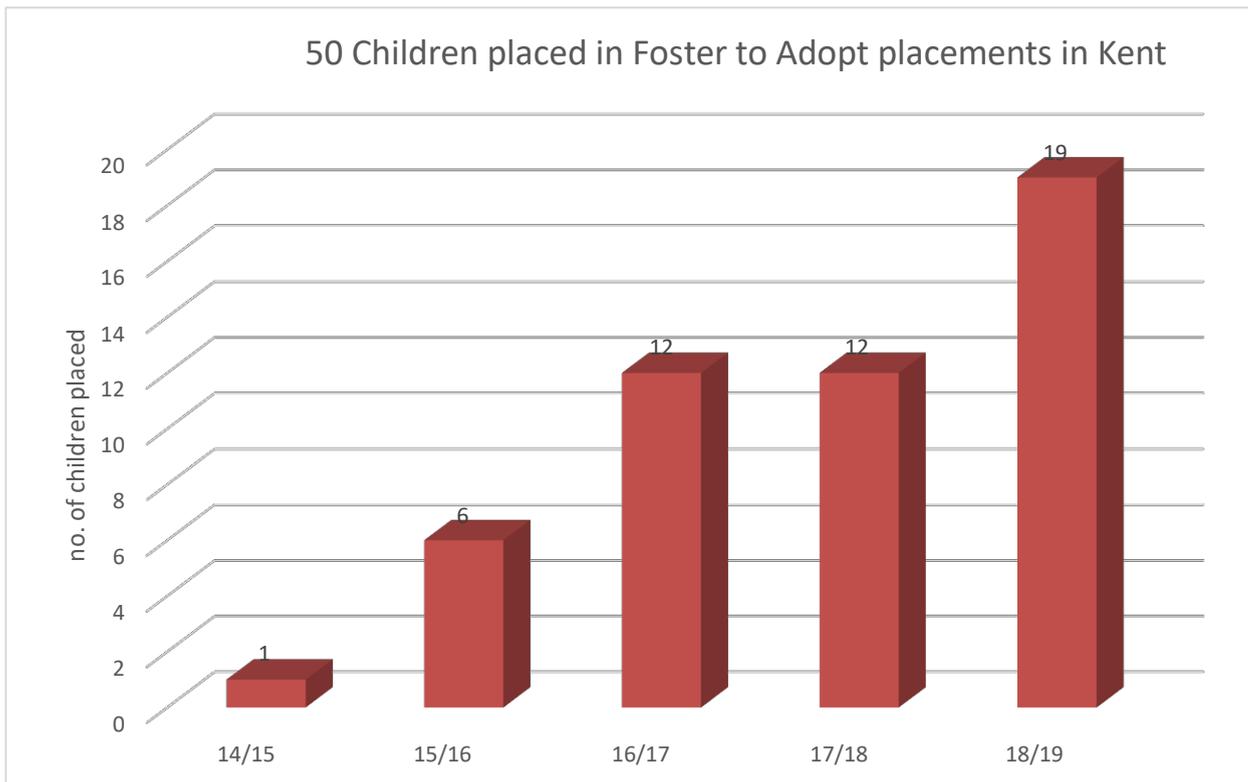
Foster to Adopt protects children from experiencing multiple moves within the care system. It provides children with good quality, uninterrupted and consistent care whilst detailed assessments of their birth family are completed, and the Court decides on the plan for the child.

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 them.

Foster to Adopt carers provide day to day care for the child and work with the child's Social Worker to ensure that the child has all their needs met. At the same time, their 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 and if it decides that it should be adoption, the case will be presented to the adoption panel and if panel agree that this is a suitable 'match', the foster to adopt carers will become the prospective adopters for the child and will ultimately apply to the court for an adoption order. Alternatively, if the Court decides that the child should be returned to their birth family then the child is returned.

As of 31st March 2019, there had been 50 Foster to Adopt placements made in respect of Kent children to Kent carers. Kent Adoption Service subscribes to the Coram Early Permanence Network Scheme. The service 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 the judiciary.



Family Finding

The Adoption Service works in partnership with district social work 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, seven Senior Practitioners/Social Workers. One of the Senior Practitioners is a designated Permanency Planning Lead worker who is invited to attend Permanency Planning Meetings (PPMs) across Kent to offer guidance on such matters as sibling assessments, identification of potential Foster to Adopt cases, post adoption contact options, life story and identity needs, achievable plans, current Kent adopters along with guidance on the adoption process.

Adoption Panel Team

The Panel Team consists of one full time Team Manager and two Panel Advisers. There are four panels established, one of which considers cases of prospective adopters wishing to be considered as foster carers, with a view to foster to adopt as well as seeking approval of them as adopters. A further panel has been identified to offer dual approval shortly. It is also proposed that during 2019/20 all adoption panels will offer dual approval for applicants.

Paperless panels have been introduced to all four adoption panels with varying degrees of efficiency and the team are working with ICT to improve this further. Independent Panel Members and Panel Chairs have all been provided with iPads to access papers electronically.

The panel members, including the Social Worker members employed by Kent County Council (KCC) are selected based on their capacity to work cooperatively with each other and professionals within the Adoption and wider Children in Care Services. The current membership of the Central List is 36, 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 ADMs to agree children's adoption plans. This is regarded as a high priority; performed in a timely, thorough manner and is evidenced in writing. An annual report is produced by the Panel Chairs which 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. These reports are shared with Agency Decision Makers (ADM) and the feedback from the Panels has been used to improve services and practice.

Panel members are offered two training days per year. The training offered is tailored to topics that arise in discussion throughout the year. Panel training held in November 2018 focused on practice within the adoption agency, including fostering to adopt, family finding, adoption support and working with LBGQT families. This was followed in March 2019 by the Adoption Conference, which panel members attended. The theme of the conference was 'Identity.'

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

Post Adoption Support Team

The Post Adoption Support Team's (PAST) vision is to ensure families in Kent have access to excellent adoption support and to ensure that the support offered to families at every stage of the family life, is informed and tailored to their needs. Threaded throughout the work is a developing therapeutic network which supports the family to thrive. The team values a service delivery that can provide layers of support to families both pre and post order.

Of significance, is that the Kent approach was noted as a practice example in the RAA Adoption Support Audit undertaken by an Independent Adviser to the DfE. His report highlights "In particular, the audit found that multi-disciplinary teams like Kent are best placed to draw on both social work and clinical perspectives when assessing and meeting adoption support needs effectively and without delay."

The Kent Post Adoption Support Team is a unique partnership between a statutory and a voluntary agency, led by a social work Team Manager, who is employed by a local authority (KCC) and a Clinical Lead, employed by a voluntary agency (Coram). There are three (full time equivalent) Social Workers and four clinical posts within the team.

The team is funded primarily by the local authority but also utilises government funding via the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) to support the costs of the clinical staff and any therapeutic intervention offered by the Social Workers. This enables creativity and the ability to provide a range of therapeutic provisions, dependent on the support needs identified during assessment and therapy. Kent was visited by officers in the DfE earlier in the year to share information about its use of ASF and the multi-disciplinary service model of the Post Adoption Support Team.

The multi-disciplinary model allows for swift problem solving on a case work level as well as at aggregate level - which then allows us to think about how to shape the service moving forwards. This includes frequent liaison with commissioning and senior managers in KCC and Coram (and in turn their combined resources).

Data is collected and collated to identify needs and inform service design and delivery. If gaps in the skill set of clinicians and Social Workers are identified, a strategic approach is taken and training is accessed to develop staff and enhance their skill set, or the work force expands to include other disciplines. The aim is for the team to meet the needs of adopted children and their families internally as much as possible, but if this is not possible, external providers of services will be commissioned.

The provision offered includes:

- An extensive Learning & Development program which includes parenting programmes such as Non-Violent Resistance (NVR), Incredible Years and the STOP parenting programme.
- Bespoke therapeutic groups on learning how to be the parent your child needs. In this group, one of the team's therapist will help parents build therapeutic parenting tools and strategies tailored to the needs of their child.
- Parent workshops on life story work and other adoption related topics.
- A new group will be offered in the coming year called Attaching Through Play which will use a combination of Theraplay and Sensory Integration approaches to support parents and children to bond and attach.
- Variety of support groups - Parents can also have quick access to a variety of different support groups. Some are led by parents while others are led by professionals.
- Some families will receive planned monthly telephone support with an experienced Post Adoption Support Team Social Worker, to assist and hold them through a planned period time.
- Other families will receive a program of direct social work family support. This support might help with life story work, network connection, and behaviour management.
- Some children and families will receive a package of sensory integration or sensory attachment integration with one of the team's two occupational therapist. In addition to this some families will also receive parental support in regulating with their child. We call this co-regulation therapy.

The team of therapists can also provide therapeutic parenting, family therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Threaded throughout the work we do is developing therapeutic network which supports the family to thrive.

Section 4: Adoption data

The Child's Journey

Indicator	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Agency decision makers best interest decisions	93	111	118	112	77*
Placement Orders	79	90	92	86	81
Matches approved	145	84	89	107	80
Children placed	143	89	84	107	80
Adoption orders granted	182	108	80	104	96**

* includes 1 who did not become a looked after child

** includes 1 private adoption

Agency Decision Maker Best Interest Decisions

Between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, the Agency Decision Maker agreed the plan for adoption for 77 children, 31% fewer than in the same period last year (112).

National data produced by the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) is not available for the most recent year, but it indicates that nationally the number of ADM decisions decreased by 4% from 5,180 in 2016/17 to 4,970 in 2017/18.

Kent's numbers also decreased over this period. Children aged 0-7 are most likely to be adopted. Possible reasons for the reduction in the number of adoption plans being made may include an 8% decrease in children entering care aged 0-7 from 258 in 2017/18 to 237 in 2018/19 alongside a 17% increase in SGOs being granted for 0-7 from 41 in 2017/18 to 48 in 2018/19.

Children Placed for Adoption

Between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, 80 children were placed with an adoptive family, 25% less children than in the previous year (107 children). 5 (6%) of the children had their placement provided by agencies other than Kent.

Of the 80 children placed in 2018/19, 34 were a part of a sibling group where adoption was the plan. 17 of these children were planned to be placed apart from siblings:

- 6 were placed on their own
- 11 were placed with 1 sibling, albeit separate from other siblings

Of those children placed apart from siblings, 3 children were not originally assessed to be separated.

23% of children placed during 2018/19 were placed under fostering for adoption, which exceeds the national target of 20%.

Of the 95 Kent Adoption Orders granted, 41 were placed in this 12 month period, with the others placed in previous years.

Placement Orders

81 Placement Orders were granted in 2018/19 which was 5 fewer than in 2017/18. 10 of the children granted placement orders in 2018/19 were aged 5 or older. None were aged over 7.

Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) national data shows that placement orders decreased by 7% from 4,310 in 2016/17 to 4,010 in 2017/18.

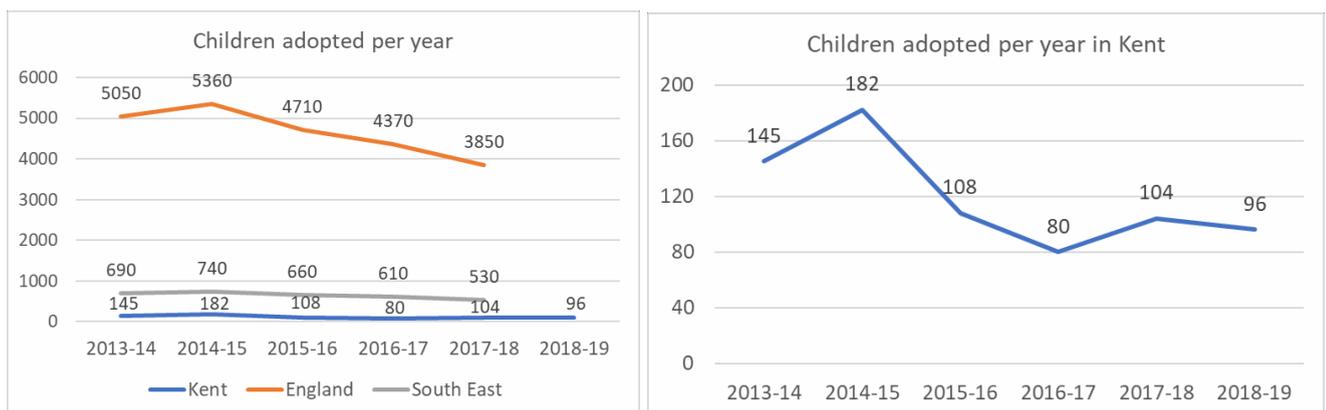
Matches Approved

Between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, 80 children were matched with an adoptive family, 25% less children than in the previous year, totalling 107 children.

Children with a plan that has changed away from adoption

Between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019, 19 children's plans were changed from adoption, including 1 who was never in care. This was 9 less than in 2017/18, 28 children. 52% of the reversals were due to the child's needs changing.

Adoption Orders granted



96 adoption orders were granted in 2017/18, including 1 private adoption. This was an 8% reduction compared with the 104 granted in 2017/18, following the national trend.

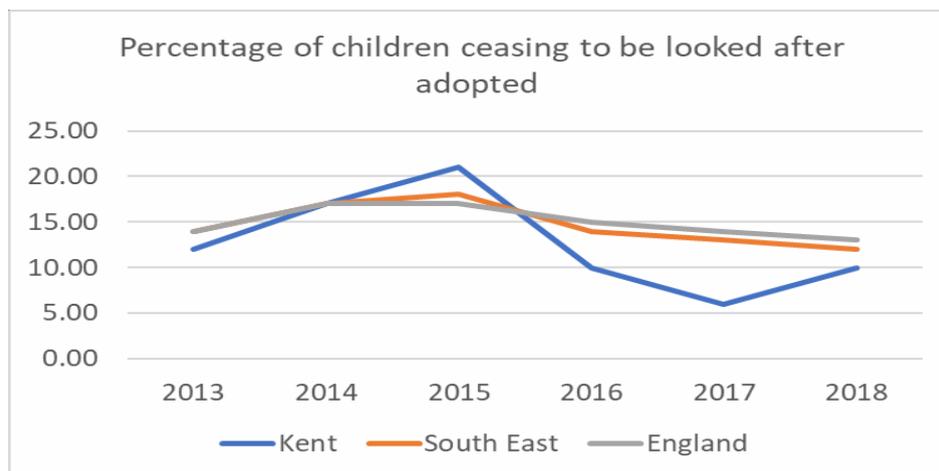
This included 3 relinquished babies in 2018/19, no placement orders, compared to 2 in the previous year.

The national picture saw a decline in adoptions. In 2017/18 there were 3,850 adoptions; a decrease of 12% compared to 2016/17 when there were 4,370 adoptions.

The Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) states there has also been an increase in the number of children awaiting adoption. There were 2,630 children waiting to be placed on 31st March 2018, which was a 6% increase compared to 31st March 2017 when there were 2,470 children waiting with a placement order but not yet placed with an adoptive family. Nationally, 33% of children waiting at 31st March 2018 had been waiting 18 months or more.

In contrast the number waiting in Kent has reduced. 20 children in Kent were waiting with a placement order and not yet placed with an adoptive family as of 31st March 2019, compared with 22 on 31st March 2018.

Kent has consistently been amongst the highest local authorities in terms of adoption numbers. In 2017/18 Kent was the 1st of all authorities in England, and Kent's 2018/19 figure would also put Kent 1st if comparing to national 2017/18 data.



%	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Kent	12	17	21	10	6	10
South East	14	17	18	14	13	12
England	14	17	17	15	14	13

Kent County Council show as being below the national and South East averages in terms of the percentage of children adopted. Kent's percentage of children ceasing to be in care who were adopted is impacted by significant numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. In 2018/19, the percentage of children leaving care who were adopted was 16% (excluding UASC). This would place Kent higher than the England and South East averages for the year.

Children placed who are not yet adopted

On 31st March 2019, 38 children were placed for adoption but not yet adopted (58 at the same time last year). Most children had been placed less than 6 months (34 children, 89%), 3 children had been placed between 6 and 12 months, and 1 child had been placed for more than 12 months (down from 2 the previous year).

Children waiting to be matched at the end of March 2019

As of 31st March 2019, there were 12 children with a placement order who had not yet been matched (down from 14 the previous year); 7 boys and 5 girls.

9 of these children (75%) had at least 1 hard to place factor, and 4 of the children had more than 1 hard to place factor.

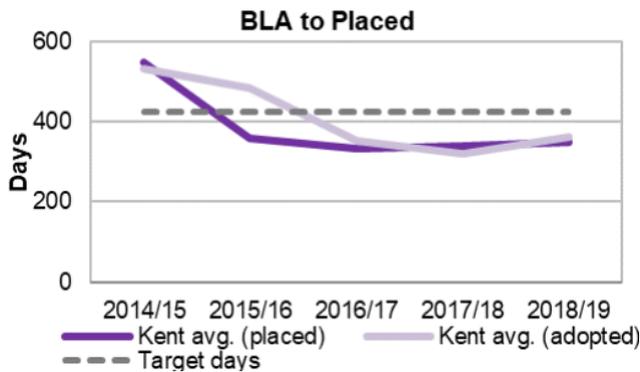
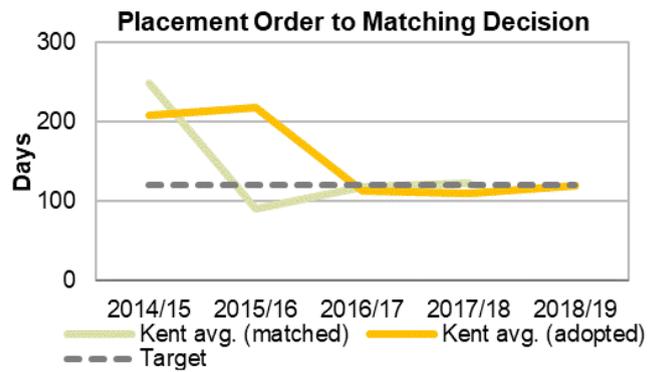
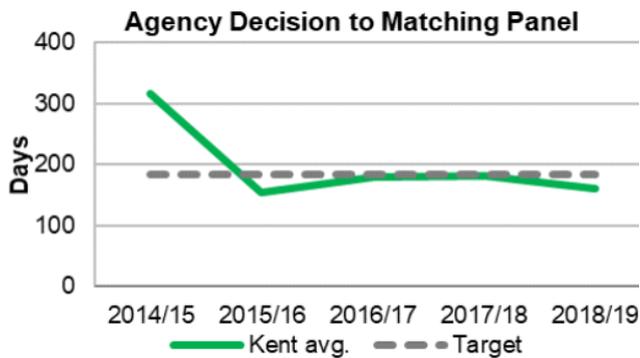
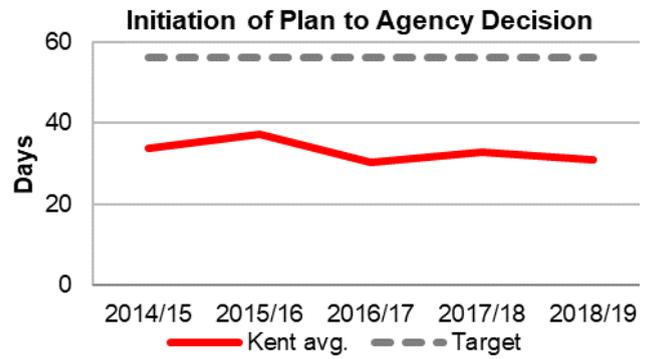
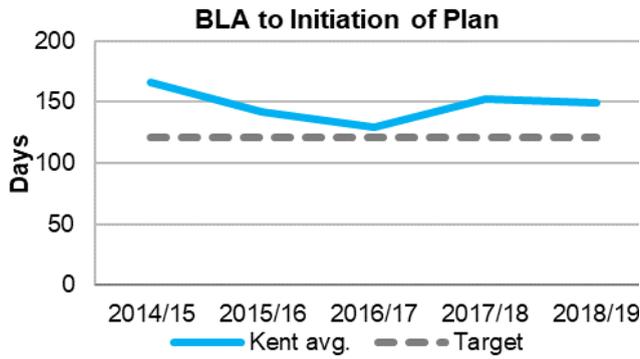
The group included 4 children aged 5 or over, 1 child from a black or minority ethnic background and 8 children being considered as part of a sibling group.

Children without a Placement Order

As at 31st March 2019, there were 6 children with an agency decision for adoption but no placement order. None of these children had been waiting 6 months or more for their placement order.

Timescales and Improvements

Timescale indicator	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	From target 2018/19 (days)
Became Looked After (BLA) to Initiation of Adoption Planning (children with an initiation in year)	142.1	129.7	152.3	149	-3.3
Initiation of Adoption Planning to Agency Decision (children with ADM in year)	37.3	30.2	32.7	30.8	-25.2
Agency Decision to Matching Panel (children matched in year)	153.4	178.6	181	160.9	-22.1
Placement Order to Matching Decision (children matched in year)	91	117.8	122	91.3	-29.7
Placement Order to Matching Decision (children adopted in year)	218.3	113.5	110.3	120.3	-0.7
Became Looked After (BLA) to Placed for Adoption (children placed in year)	358.7	333.1	340.9	350.0	-76
Became Looked After (BLA) to Placed for Adoption (children adopted in year)	485.7	351.4	320.7	363.4	-62.6



Became Looked After to initiation of Adoption planning

The target time between a child becoming in care to the adoption plan being initiated is 121 days (4 months).

For children in Kent with a plan initiated in the year, this time decreased to an average of 149 days compared to 152 days in the previous year.

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 4 years and was 30.8 days in 2018/19.

84.8% 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 agency decision maker 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 decreased by 11% to 160.9 days in 2018/19 compared to the previous year.

70% of children with a matching decision in the year had a period of less than 6 months from the agency decision to their matching decision.

Placement Order to Matching Decision

The target time from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption to the approval of a match with an adoptive family is 121 days, 4 months, for children adopted. In 2018/19 Kent's figure increased to 120.3 days, however remained below the 121 day target.

Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) data shows that nationally the timescale was 171 days in 2017/18, remaining consistent with the previous year.

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 in Kent matched in 2018/19, the average time between placement order and match was 91.3 days.

The complexity of children to be placed can influence this measure. Of the 81 children matched in 2018/19, 36 had at least 1 hard to place factor, with 10 children having more than 1 hard to place factor.

Of the 36 children with at least one hard to place factor:

- 30 children were matched belonging to a sibling group
- 9 of the children matched were aged 5+
- 9 were from black and minority ethnic backgrounds
- 0 children were disabled

Became Looked After to Placed for Adoption

The current DfE threshold for children becoming looked after to placement is 426 days (14 months) for children that were adopted.

This has increased by 13% to 363.4 days in 2018/19, albeit is still well below the target. However, there were 2 cases which affected the measure predominately.

Children are not always placed in the same year as they are adopted. Timescales for children placed in the year provides an indication of more recent performance. Using this measure, Kent's performance was 350 days in 2018/19, which is now 76 days below the target.

Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) data shows that nationally there was an 8% reduction in timescale for this measure from 457 days in 2016/17 to 420 days in 2017/18.

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 adoption order granted in 2018/19 was 204 days. This was a 5% reduction compared to 2017/18, when it was 215 days.



Section 5: The Adopter Journey - Adoption Data

Adopter Activity

Adopter activity	Number of families in 2016/17	Number of families in 2017/18	Number of families in 2018/19
Enquiries in year	261	275	281
Stage One starts in year	90	82	93
Stage Two starts in year	74	86	77
Stage Two ends in year	50	88	81
Adoptive families matched in year	54	77	73
Adoptive families with placements in year	53	77	71
Adoptive families with adoption orders in year	68	70	77

Approval Timescales

18 of the 81 adoptive families approved in 2018/19 were fast tracked (foster carers and repeat adopters).

67 of the 81 adoptive families that were approved were assessed within the Stage Two; 4 month timescale.

Average timescales for newly approved adopters in the 2-stage adopter recruitment process, excluding fast tracks

Timescale	Target	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Enquiry to Stage One Start (days)	N/A	106	83	75
Stage One Start to Stage One End (days)	61	50	63	96
Stage One End to Stage Two Start (days)	N/A	36	51	35

Stage Two Starts to Stage Two End (days)	121	106	88	97
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There has been a reduction of 10% in the average time between enquiry and Stage One start. This was 75 days during 2018/19, compared to 83 the previous year, so a reduction. The target duration for Stage One, pre-assessment, is 2 months, 61 days.

2018/19 figures indicate that Kent was outside this timescale with an average of 96 days. However, Stage One is adopter led, during this stage we complete checks and references.

The prospective adopters also complete their own home learning and attend a three day preparation course. The delays are often caused because of delays in receiving medical reports from applicant's general practitioner surgeries or for the results of DBS checks.

Prospective adopters can take a break of up to 6-months between Stage One and Stage Two. Kent's figures for 2018/19 show that the average time between Stage One ending and Stage Two starting was 35 days.

Priority is given to assessing prospective adopters who can provide homes for our harder to place children.

This is part of our sufficiency strategy to reduce the time children are waiting for adoptive families and to ensure we are approving families that match the needs of Kent children with adoption plans.

This is translated in to practice by identifying in Stage One, prospective adopters who are considered as potentially a good match for a child/child that requires an adoptive placement, and, in such circumstances, the assessment of the prospective adopter(s) will be fast tracked.

This does not always result in the match with the child progressing, as information exchanged during the assessment, may result in a different view being reached, but it has resulted in some very outcomes for children and adopters.

The target duration for Stage Two, assessment, is 4 months, 121 days. Kent's duration increased by 10% to 97 days in 2018/19 from 88 days in 2017/18. This is still well within the target duration for Stage Two.

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 12 children with a placement order waiting to be matched and 44 adoptive families approved and waiting for a match, adopter gap of -32.

Kent's performance has improved despite a negative trend nationally. Adoption leadership board data indicates that nationally the adopter gap had increased as there were 1,600 approved adoptive families waiting to be matched at 31st March 2018 and 2,630 children waiting to be placed for adoption with a placement order.

Post Adoption Support Data

- 285 requests for assessment for post adoption support were received from families
- 442 interventions were funded via the adoption support fund
- 90 training days for adopters were held
- 314 cases open to the team

Section 6: Disruptions

From the 81 children placed during 2018/19, 3 children's placements disrupted during 2018/19.

One child went on to be adopted by another adopter and a sibling group of 2, are currently having their needs re-assessed and a review of their care plan is taking place.

Disruption meetings were held within timescale, as per Kent County Council's policy in respect of both placement breakdowns. The meetings were chaired by an experienced independent person whose findings and recommendations were shared with relevant Social Workers and their managers and with colleagues in the social care teams and 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.

The disruption meetings of both placements concluded that the adopter assessments had been thorough, and the adopters felt they had been well prepared, and the children concerned were in no way at fault.

There were issues of unresolved loss in both cases, one particularly so for the adopters and the other for a child. As a result of these two cases the adoption agency is developing the use of therapeutic support packages for families post placement-pre-order, which will be outlined in the support plan and presented to the adoption panel at the point of matching.

The adoption service is also seeking to expand its remit in relation to life story books, in order to ensure adoptive parents, have this tool, which encompasses a child's early years experiences, as early as possible.

Adopters will then add to this book, so it provides a whole picture for the child and helps them understand where they sit in relation to their birth family and their adoptive family early in placement.

Section 7: Commissioned Services

Kent County Council commission Coram in a contracted partnership to jointly provide post adoption support services to adopted children and adopters living in Kent. The team focuses on timely assessments and interventions undertaken whenever possible by team members.

If a Kent child and their family reside outside of Kent but remain the responsibility of Kent County Council 3 year rule, services will be commissioned outside of Kent, to allow a more localised service.

Kent adoption service commissions through a contract Barnardo's (CAFIS: Connecting Adoptive Families Independent Services) for independent adoption and SGO Support Services.

This includes four services covering independent support for birth parents; contact both direct and letterbox; access to birth records and intermediary services for adult adoptees.

Section 8: Participation and Engagement

Kent's Adoption Service actively promotes participation and engagement from adoptive parents and adopted children. The service facilitates an adoption advisory board, which is chaired by an adoptive parent.

Membership includes a range of people including adopters, adoption Social Workers, Team Managers, and a deputy head from Virtual School Kent.

The voices of adopted children are heard through a variety of ways including age appropriate fixed term groups but also fun activities for children who have been adopted, so they can meet other adopted children.

The adoption service has collaborated with Virtual School Kent, by funding apprentice time, equivalent to 1 FTE, for the coming year. Two young people have been appointed, both of whom have adoption in her family and network.

They will work together to support the participation of children and young people in the adoption service, whilst sitting with other apprentices in Virtual School Kent and supporting other Virtual School Kent workstreams.

Event description	Number of attendees
Younger Children's Participation Event	11 children
April & October LGBT Family Day	47 children & 30 Adults
Adoptable Participation Event	9 children
Christmas Family Event	107 children & 98 parents
Adoption Conference. Topic was Identity and Sense of Belonging (March 2019)	60 adopters attended (total 126 attendees)
Canterbury Pride (June 2019)	8 children & 13 parents
Parent led Support Groups	7 groups in operation

Section 9: Compliments, Feedback and Complaints

Compliments

Compliments are received from across the adoption service, which are very welcome.

The adoption service hosts annual thematic conference for adoptive parents, Social Workers, teachers and other professionals, the most recent one focused on issues of identity as this was a recurring theme in case work.



The guest speaker was Julie Young, Senior Research Associate, Centre of Research for Children, University of East Anglia. The theme of the conference was 'Identity.'

Feedback received about the conference from attendees included:

- "As an adoptive parent I really value this annual event. It always provides lots of valuable information, insight, things to think about and do that will help our family/daughter. This year was no exception."
- "Really helpful to have research evidence around contact to back up practice. Very balanced presentation, extremely helpful to have voice of birth parent being shared."
- "Excellent conference and packed out. High quality speakers. It was useful to have the leaflets that were available."
- "I value the opportunity as an adoptive mother to attend this conference."

[Adoption Conference Programme of Events](#)

[Conference 2019 - Developing On e's S e lf : I de n t i t y a n d B e l o n g i n g i n A d o p t i o n](#)

Feedback

There are several forums for receiving feedback about the services:

- Adopters are asked for their 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 and development training.

Complaints

- Most 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 2018/19 the Adoption Service received three formal complaints, two of which were upheld.
- The issues of concern raised related to a delay in the provision of support in one case and the need for provision of information in the other.
- The learning from complaints has been shared with the relevant team and a support and advice line call system has been introduced to ensure enquiries are able to book in to have a detailed telephone conversation with a Social Worker within 2-5 working days, followed by an assessment if required.
- This service has been very well received and should the need arise, an urgent response can be provided.

Section 10: Regionalisation

Regionalisation Agenda

Kent is working with London Borough of Bexley and Medway Local Authorities in a Regional Adoption Agency model.

All three Local Authorities presented to their respective Cabinet Committees in September 2016, 2017 and more recently in July 2019.

Cabinet endorsed the decision for a full business case for regionalisation to be completed with presentation and sign-off by Cabinet in October 2019 and to formulate a detailed design of the RAA model in collaboration with LB of Bexley and Medway Council.

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.

Conclusion

The current report demonstrates a dynamic adoption service, which is always seeking to improve performance whilst developing in line with national initiatives and being at the forefront of innovative practice.

A business plan has been drafted for the coming year to consolidate the areas of good practice noted and to further develop the service. (Appendix 2). The adoption support fund is due to end in March 2020, and the DfE have a pending submission as part of the Spending Review to seek the continuation of adoption support fund funding. Results of the review are due to be reported at Autumn Budget 2019.

The hope is this will continue in some form to allow the continuation of this fund being used to supplement the post adoption services provided to adoptive families.

The aspiration too is that regionalisation will enable adoption service across the region to improve outcomes for children and adopters both pre-and post the granting of an adoption order and Kent will be integral to such developments.

Sarah Skinner

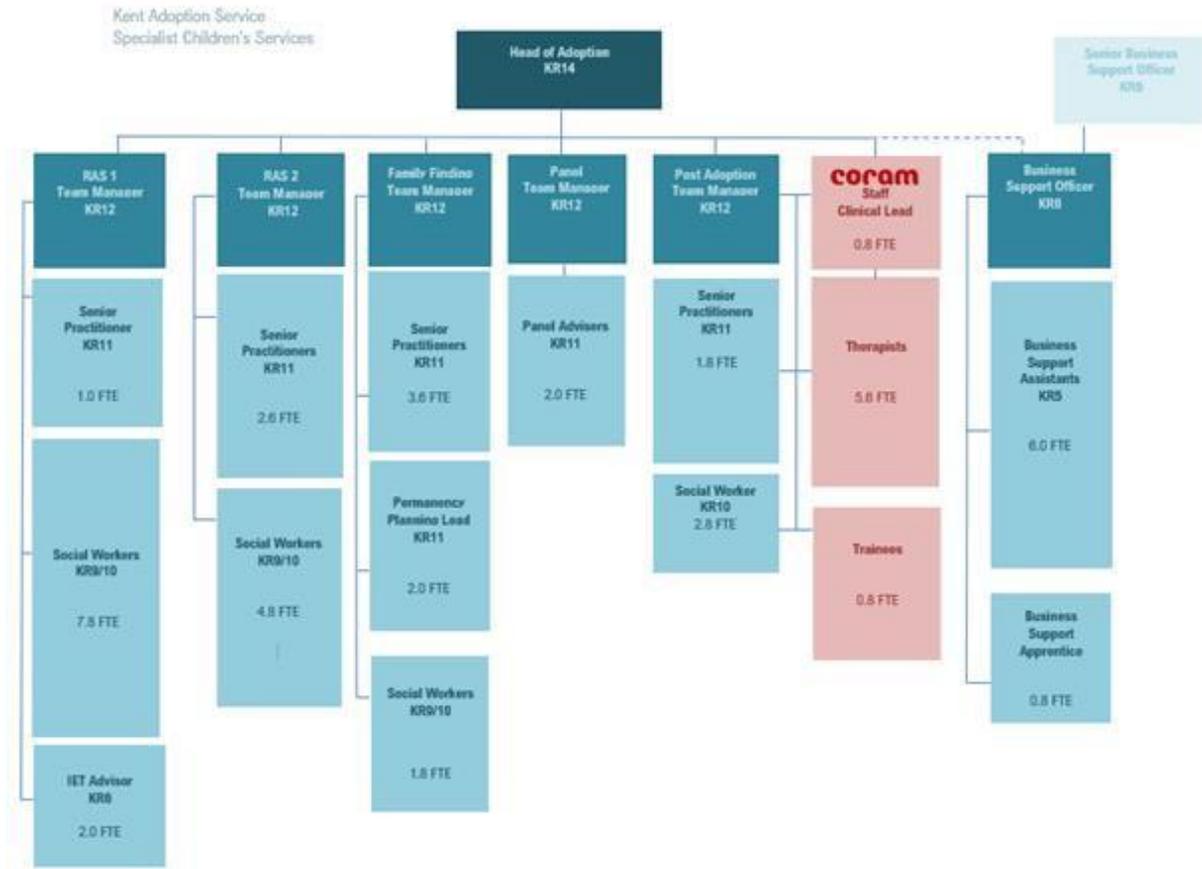
Head of Adoption

Kent Adoption Service

August 2019

Appendix 1

Staffing structure



Appendix 2

Business Plan 2019-20



Adoption Business
Plan 2019-20.pdf