

The logo for Adoption Partnership South East is contained within a light blue circle. It features a white heart icon above the text. The text 'Adoption Partnership' is in a large, bold, white sans-serif font, and 'South East' is in a smaller, white sans-serif font below it.

**Adoption  
Partnership**  
South East

The slogan 'By your side' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font and is centered within a light blue circle. The circle is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page, with several white diagonal lines crossing it from the top right towards the bottom left.

**By  
your  
side**

# **Performance Update**

(1st November 2020 – 31st May 2021)



**Introduction**

This paper provides an update on the progress made since the development of Adoption Partnership south east, a Regional Adoption Agency consisting of the London Borough of Bexley, Kent County Council and Medway Council. The formation a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) is in line with Government’s expectations for Adoption Services nationally.

The RAA was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020 and a legal partnership agreement, signed off by all three local authorities, is in place and outlines in detail the arrangements.

This report provides an overview of child and adopter activity in the first seven months and outlines practice developments which have taken place or are in progress.

**Governance**

An Executive Board has been established, which is Chaired by one of the Partner’s Director of Children’s Services, and attended by the other two, alongside the Assistant Directors, and other Managers from each local authority. There are agreed terms of reference and the Board provides oversight and scrutiny of the RAA.

Regular meetings of the Operational Managers Group provide an opportunity to develop relationships and share best practice across the RAA and the partner local authorities, and to ensure all Partners view Adoption Partnership south east as the delivery arm of adoption services.

A Business Plan has been agreed by the Executive Board, which outlines the work plan for 2021-2022, which is kept under review. (Appendix 1).

KCC’s Internal Audit Team commissioned an external company to audit the Governance of the RAA. The overall Audit Opinion is **Substantial** - *Internal Control, Governance and management of risk are sound overall. The arrangements to secure governance, risk management and internal controls are largely suitably designed and applied effectively.*

**Achieving permanence for children – Pre-Order placements**

**Child level data**

Below are two tables showing the number of children who have had an adoption plan decision agreed and the number of children who have been matched since the RAA was launched.

Decision that adoption is the plan for	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	TOTAL





the child 20/21								
Bexley	0	0	1	0	0	3	1	5
Kent	0	0	4	10	12	9	3	38
Medway	4	0	3	2	1	2	4	16

Data Source: Performance and Information, Adoption Partnership South East

Children Placement Order 20/21	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	TOTAL
Bexley	5	1	0	2	0	0	1	9
Kent	7	3	1	3	3	1	8	26
Medway	3	2	2	2	1	3	1	14

Data Source: Performance and Information, Adoption Partnership South East

Children Matched 20/21	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	TOTAL
Bexley	0	1	3	0	1	1	0	6
Kent	9	5	4	6	5	3	4	36
Medway	3	2	3	2	4	3	3	20

Data Source: Performance and Information, Adoption Partnership South East

- Children’s adoption plans – the data shows that in total 59 children between November – May had adoption plans agreed by one of the Agency Decision Makers across the three areas.
- Placement orders - Between November 2020 - May 2021 - 49 children had Placement Orders granted:
- Children achieving permanence – The data shows that 62 matches with prospective adopters were made during the seven-month period since the RAA was launched

**Disruptions**

Between November 2020 – May 2021, two Medway children had an adoption disruption. A disruption meeting was held for both children, which informed future care planning, in line with procedures.

**Adopter data**

**Recruitment Activity**





The RAA has a recruitment strategy which focuses on ensuring there is a ‘sufficient’ number of prospective adopters for the children with adoption plans across Bexley, Kent, and Medway. **All but one of the children placed between November 2020 – May 2021 have been placed with adopters within the RAA.** The child placed with an external adoption agency had his placement order granted prior to November 2020.

The RAA have held three virtual Information Events, these have been well attended and generated many enquires. The table below show the logins to these events; the number of initial enquiries that were generated from them and the number of initial visits that took place.

Month	Number of logins for Virtual Event	Initial Enquiries completed	Initial Visits booked
November	0	55	54
December	0	9	8
January	93	4	4
February	0	8	7
March	0	33	29
April	0	4	3
May	89	16	16
June	0	20	12
<b>Totals</b>	182	149	133

Below is a table showing adopter approval activity within the RAA between November 2020-May 2021.

Panel decisions 20/21	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	TOTAL
Adopters approved by APSE	8	9	7	5	3	13	8	<b>53</b>

Data Source: Performance and Information, Adoption Partnership South East

### Adoption Panels

Weekly adoption panels are held virtually via Microsoft Teams due to COVID, and they are working very well. Each Panel has a designated Chair and Vice Chair and is supported by a Panel Adviser. Panel Members are committed and extremely diligent.

The Panel Chairs report attached, (National Minimum Standard 17.2), covers the work of Adoption Partnership’s four adoption panels for the first 6 months since going ‘live’ from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020 until 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021. (*Appendix 2*)

### Achieving permanence for children – post-placement





**Adoption Support**

Adoption Partnership south east has a comprehensive adoption support service for all those affected by adoption. The adoption support service provides adoption support services in line with the “Adoption Passport” according to individual circumstances. This includes individual support, accessing support groups and a Learning & Development programme. It has a mailing list which is regularly updated, so that parents can be kept informed of internal events and services available.

As well as the internal offer of local support networks the RAA also provides support to families via other specialist organisations, e.g., membership to the Adopter Hub, run by the charity Parents and Children Together (PACT), an online platform providing support to adopters. Adopters can also access support from the National Association of Therapeutic Parenting (NATP) and the RAA subscribes to New Family Social, a charity which provides support to LGBT+ adoptive families.

Access to a support and advice line

Parents can request support easily by contacting the RAA’s Initial Enquiries Team and they will be offered a support & advice line call with a social worker in the adoption support service within 5 working days. This is a scheduled call in which they can discuss their concerns and the appropriate follow up action can be identified. Sometime this results in the issue being resolved on the call, or signposting to another service, or agreement that an adoption support assessment is required, which will be completed by a social worker in the adoption support team.

The data below show the number of calls received by the Initial enquiries Team for support between November 2020 – May 2021:

LA	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	TOTAL
Bexley	3	1	3	1	3	2	3	16
Kent	21	15	14	14	24	19	26	133
Medway	3	7	1	4	8	2	3	28

Data Source: Performance and Information, Adoption Partnership South East

141 of these calls progressed to a S&A line call from Adoption Support

82 Adoption support assessments were carried out between November 2020 – May 2021:

Local Authority	Number of adoption support
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	<b>assessments</b>
Bexley	9
Kent	65
Medway	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>82</b>

### Participation & Engagement

The RAA commissions the Participation & Engagement Team within KCC's Virtual School, to provide a service to all adopted children and young people across the region. This was in place for Kent's adopted children and young people prior to the RAA being formed. It has since been rolled out and the team is working hard to encourage new membership.

Between November 2020 – May 2021, VSK Participation have facilitated 49 Virtual Activities via Microsoft Teams (including arts and crafts, science experiments, dance, animal encounters, bingo, gaming and much more). These have taken place after school and during the school holidays.

522 spaces have been booked in total across the 49 activities.

Breakdown (based on the address of their current home provided by the parent)

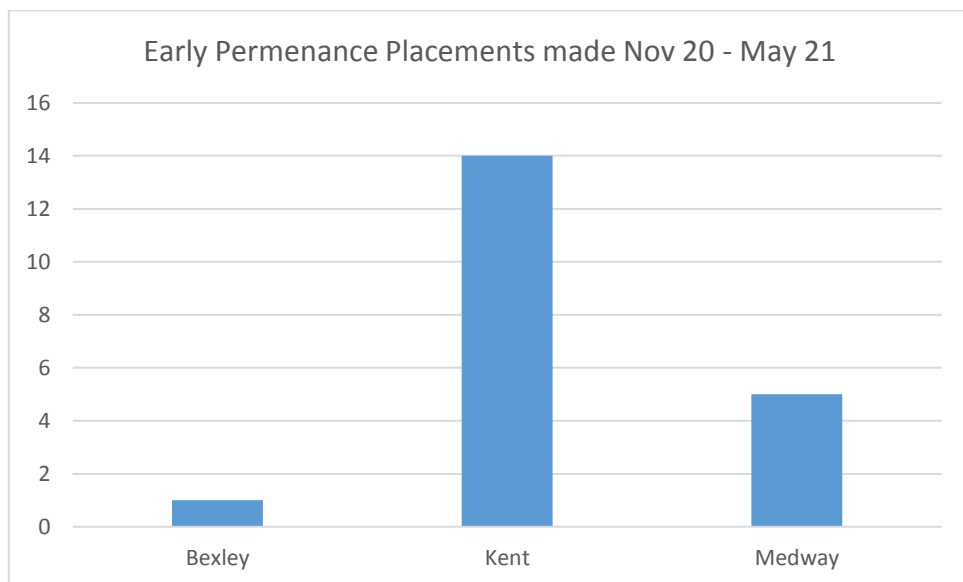
<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Number of Spaces Booked</b>
Kent	458
Medway	41
Bexley	18
Greenwich	4
Bromley	1

The VSK Participation Team facilitated 6 'Adoptables' Meetings since November 2020. 16 young people aged between 12 and 18 have joined at least one meeting.

### Practice Development

- Adoption Plans - Child Permanence Reports - robust independent adoption agency advice is provided to Medway's social worker's and Agency Decision Maker (ADM) to ensure adoption care plans comply with regulations and all the necessary information is available for a Decision to be made in a timely way. Any concerns are fed back to the Child in Care Service Manager, and the ADM.

- Timely decisions regarding 'matching' and securing permanence for children - Adoption Panels are held weekly (previously every four weeks in Medway) and proposed 'matches' for children can be booked on the first available panel, which results in plans progressing to matching panels in a timely way.
- A dedicated Early Permanence team is part of the service, of which the PPM leads are part of. This team specifically recruits and assesses early permanence carers. These carers are assessed and received specialist preparation training so that they can be approved to foster a child prior to adoption being confirmed as the plan. Once the order is granted by the court agreeing the child is placed for adoption the child remains with the carers and the placement is progressed as an adoption placement the usual way. Since the launch of the RAA, 20 children have been placed in these types of placements. The chart below show the areas the children placed in an early permanence placement were from.



- Permanency Planning Matching (PPM) leads have been created in the RAA to ensure a dedicated focus on permanence planning; each PPM Lead has a specific link to either Bexley, Kent, or Medway; ensuring good connections are made with children's Social Workers, Team Managers, and the Child in Care Service Managers.
- The PPM Leads track children, to help her identify the children requiring permanence. The PPM Lead provides adoption oversight and consultation when the teams are care planning for children, by attending permanency planning meetings and professional meetings. The PPM Leads offer support and advice to Social Workers and managers when they are planning for adoption and is the link to the Panel Team.
- Robust Family Finding – the two Service Managers within the service robustly track and monitor children who have a plan of adoption with their Team



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Managers and together, on a weekly basis. A Family Finding Social Worker is allocated a child as soon as the Agency Decision Maker agrees the plan of adoption and they will work with the child's Social Worker from this point to become familiar with the child's needs, and to identify potential adopters, so that if a Placement Order is granted, the plan of adoption can progress as quickly as possible. They will also undertake 'early family finding' where the court have given consent, and they will seek agreement to recruiting nationally for adopters, when a child has complex needs and there are no internal matches.

- A sense of identity – is advocated for children who are placed for adoption and the RAA follows the Joy Rees model for life story books, (LSB) and undertakes to draft a LSB for a child prior to them being placed, and the adoption social worker will then work with the prospective adoptive parents to complete this ahead of the adoption order being granted.
- The children's guides to adoption are being reviewed and the same book will be provided to all children across the region.
- The provision of independent counselling for birth parents, as per statutory guidance - this is a new commissioning arrangement with Barnardo's CAFIS in respect of the RAA, previously just provided to Kent birth parents. This service has been well received by the Social Care teams and since 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020, 22 referrals have been made; 2 from Bexley, 14 from Kent and 6 from Medway.
- Alignment of Policies and Practice has identified where differences exist or did exist and the RAA has worked with Bexley, Kent, and Medway to ensure consistency of service delivery, taking the best practice from each and sharing these. The Adoption Partnership Service Managers have attended the Child in Care Service meeting to update and advise the service on these.

### **National Adoption Strategy**

The Government have recently published an Adoption Strategy, Achieving excellence everywhere, July 2021. It can be accessed via:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1006232/Adoption\\_strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1006232/Adoption_strategy.pdf)

The document contains a summary as follows (page 3 of the strategy)

*“This adoption strategy document sets out a bold vision to deliver excellence in adoption services across England.*

*The government will work with adoption agencies to ensure that best practice becomes the norm. This will help to ensure that every adopted child and their family can access the services and support they need wherever they live and maximise children's outcomes in the short and long term.*

*The strategy sets out how we will fulfil our vision so that:*





- *All adoptive children are found permanent loving families as quickly as possible where they will be safe and secure.*
- *Adopters are recruited from all communities so that we have a range of approved parents able and well prepared to meet the needs of children waiting to be adopted.*
- *Prospective adopters are never deterred from pursuing an opportunity to adopt because of their ethnicity, sexuality, age or social background.*
- *Prospective adopters from every walk of life are warmly welcomed and supported in a system that is never threatening or judgemental.*
- *Unnecessary barriers and bureaucracy placed in the way of those seeking to adopt are removed, systematically, across the country.*
- *Children are supported to bond with their adopted parents from the first time they meet.*
- *Professionals understand the profound impact of care and adoption on children's physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.*
- *All adoptive children are supported to achieve their full potential.*
- *Children and families get the support they need when they need it*

The strategy outlines how the Government will support the RAA Leaders Group to deliver the vision set out in the document through the RAA Leader Group. It describes this group as “*a collaborative group bringing together experienced, dynamic and engaged professionals who work collegiately together. Over the past two years, leaders from the RAAs have come together to share good practice, influence national policy and to solve common problems*”

The strategy concludes by stating that it is supported by additional funding of £48.1m in 2021-2022 this year, as set out below:

- Boosting adopter recruitment
- Providing £1m to RAA leaders to improve the recruitment of adopters and drive a consistent approach to the approval process.
- Matching children with families
- Providing £500k to improve Early Permanence arrangements in RAAs to increase the number of children put forward for Early Permanence placements.
- Post adoption placement support
- Continuing to support families through a £46m investment in the Adoption Support Fund
- Research



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- Funding to commission a feasibility stage for a large-scale, longitudinal piece of research to investigate the needs, experiences and outcomes of children who left care on an adoption or Special Guardianship Order.
- Regional Adoption Agencies
- Funding the RAA Leaders Group with £500k to employ a full-time National RAA strategic leader and a support team of two project workers to progress collaborative working on agreed priority areas.

The document also sets out the longer-term proposals for adoption post 2021-2022.

The Head of Adoption Partnership south east is a member of the RAA Leaders Group and sits on several sub groups, including the Governance Group, and she will ensure the Executive Board is kept informed of developments.

### **Conclusion**

Moving to the RAA during a pandemic has been challenging, but Adoption Partnership south east is successfully delivering adoption services across the region. It enjoys a relatively stable workforce and staff have adjusted to the changes well and are positive and feel part of their team and the service.

The Service is looking to consolidate the developments it has made thus far and work towards making further improvements, to ensure children's adoption plans progress as swiftly as possible and they are secure in their adoptive families for the duration of their childhood and beyond.

Sarah Skinner  
Head of Adoption Partnership south east

### Appendix 1



Adoption  
Partnership Business

### Appendix 2



AP Panel Chairs  
Report 20-21.pdf