

**Education and Young People Overview &
Scrutiny Committee
Friday, 22 November 2024**

ADDENDA

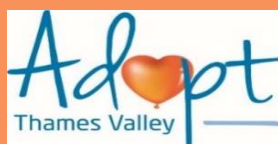
10. Annual Report from Adopt Thames Valley (Pages 1 - 14)

Cllr John Howson, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Young People's Services, Kate Reynolds, Deputy Director of Education, and Teresa Rogers, Head of Service: Adopt Thames Valley, have been invited to present the Annual Report from Adopt Thames Valley.

The Committee is asked to NOTE the report.

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Agenda Item 10



Adopt Thames Valley Update Teresa Rogers Head of Service Education & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee~ 22nd November 2024

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OUR PARTNERSHIP

- Seven Local Authority Partnership
- Regional Adoption Service from December 2017
- Hosted Model (Oxfordshire County Council)



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OUR DELEGATED RESPONSIBILITIES



- Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Adopters



- Non-Agency Adoptions
- Family Finding for Children
- Support of prospective adopters from Match to Adoption Order



- Post Adoption Support
 - Support for adopted children and their families (inc. Adoption Support Fund)
 - Support for Special Guardianship families (Oxfordshire; Wokingham and RBWM only)
 - Indirect Letter Box contact
 - Birth Relative Support
 - Adopted Adult



- Inter Country Adoption **coramIAC**
Intercountry Adoption Centre



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OUR GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS



**Oversight
Board**
Annually



**ATV Partnership
Board**
Quarterly



**Corporate
Parenting
Panels**
Annually each LA

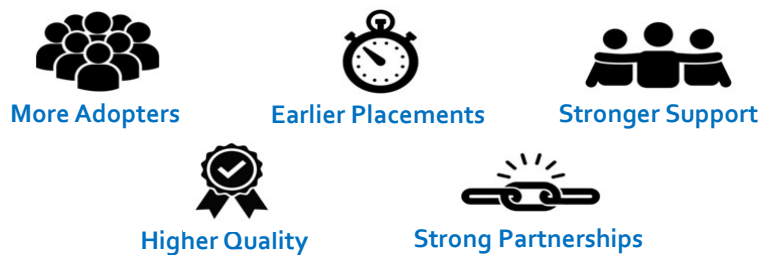


**Service Leads
Meeting**
Quarterly



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OUR PRIORITIES



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ADOPTION THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Children

Over the last five years there has been an overall decline in children leaving care achieving permanence through adoption, special guardianship and child arrangement orders or returning home. However, the highest decline for these children has been in adoption orders.

Adopter Sufficiency

Despite an increase in recruitment between 2020 - 2022 there has been a decline in adopters in the last 18 months, with less registrations of interest to adopt overall, but with regional variations.



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Regional Adoption Agencies

- 32 Regional Adoption Agencies
- 5 local authorities (Cumberland, Westmorland and Furness, Buckinghamshire, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly) are not in an RAA

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| • Adopt Birmingham | • Adoption @ Heart | • Adoption West |
| • Adopt Coast to Coast | • Adoption Central England | • Aspire |
| • Adopt East | • Adoption Connects | • Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Adoption |
| • Adopt London East | • Adoption Counts | • Coram Ambitious for Adoption |
| • Adopt London North | • Adoption East Midlands | • Family Adoption Links |
| • Adopt London South | • Adoption in Merseyside | • One Adoption North and Humber |
| • Adopt London West | • Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool | • One Adoption South Yorkshire |
| • Adopt North East | • Adoption Now | • One Adoption West Yorkshire |
| • Adopt South | • Adoption Partnership South East | • Together for Adoption |
| • Adopt South West | • Adoption South East | • Together4Children |
| • Adopt Thames Valley | • Adoption Tees Valley | |



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ATV UPDATE ADOPTER RECRUITMENT



- 53 new adopter households recruited compared to 48 in 2022/23
- 21(40%) of Adopters approved willing to consider early permanence
- 13 (25%) of adopters approved willing to consider siblings.
- ATV had 46 adopter assessments in progress on 31/03/2024.
- There were 53 adopters approved and awaiting a match on 31/03/2024

Adopt
Thames Valley

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FAMILY FINDING



- The number of children with best interest decisions made in 2023/24 was 68 compared to 92 during the same period last year.
- The number of Placement Orders made in 20223/24 was 55 This compares to 70 Placement Orders during the same period last year.
- At the end of the year there were only 18 children with a Placement Order for whom we had no identified adoptive family or possible match.



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FAMILY FINDING



- 54 children matched
- 36 single children
- 9 sibling groups of 2
- 10 children from BAME backgrounds
- 7 children over 5 years



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CHILDREN ADOPTED



- 61 Children adopted in year
- 49 non- agency adoption orders made (63% increase)



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PERMANENCE SUPPORT

- Special Guardianship Support transferred back to Swindon from April 2024
- ATV now provides Special Guardianship Support to families in Oxfordshire, RBWM and Wokingham only
- Waiting lists for support to adopters and Special Guardianship families have reduced in 2023/24, especially since the Anchor team was set up
- Improved timeliness of post order assessments and applications to the Adoption Support fund
- A wide range of training and support for adopters & Special Guardians.



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PERMANENCE SUPPORT

- 512 applications made to the Adoption Support Fund (value of applications £1,632,665).
- 347 BRS (Birth Relative Support) Referrals received
- 152 AAA (Adults Affected by Adoption) enquiries received of which 124 progressed to access their adoption file
- 74 new Letterbox referrals received



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OUR WORKFORCE

- Almost fully staffed (97 employees)
- Experienced, committed and passionate staff
- Recruitment of staff from partner agencies
- Career progression
- Three managers completed leadership training
- Two managers embarking on leadership training
- Adoption Service Manager recruited
- Additional Adoption Panel Advisor recruited
- Increase hours of dedicated Helpdesk workers to 3 days per week each.
- Adoption FSWs trained as sleep practitioners
- Strong partnership working



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OUR STRENGTHS



- A Regional Adoption Agency that has demonstrated continuous improvement
- Effective Adoption Panels with diverse representation
- Positive feedback about the work of ATV from Ofsted in two recent ILACS inspections
- High number of compliments from a range of stakeholders
- Only 1 complaint received in 2023/24
- ATV representation on national working groups

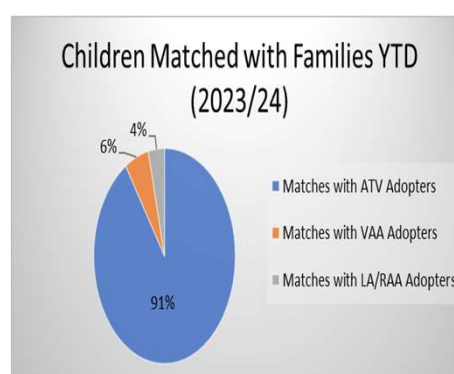


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OUR STRENGTHS



- The increased pool of adopters has enabled ATV to place more children in house
- The surplus of adopters resulted in some children from other RAAs being placed with ATV adopters generating income which offset the cost of purchasing external placements for other children
- Year on year improvements in sufficiency have resulted in significant savings for ATV allowing for further growth



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OUR STRENGTHS



- Improved conversion rate from enquiry to registration of interest
- Systems in place to ensure best use of adopters
- Good support & training for adopters awaiting a match
- Placements of children under early permanence arrangements has increased



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OUR STRENGTHS



- The timely support provided by Help Desk has reduced the number of cases progressing to an Assessment of Need.
- A wide range of training and support for adopters & Special Guardians
- Enhanced offer of support to adopters and Special Guardians in Swindon and Berkshire following the launch of the Anchor team



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OUR FOCUS ON INNOVATION

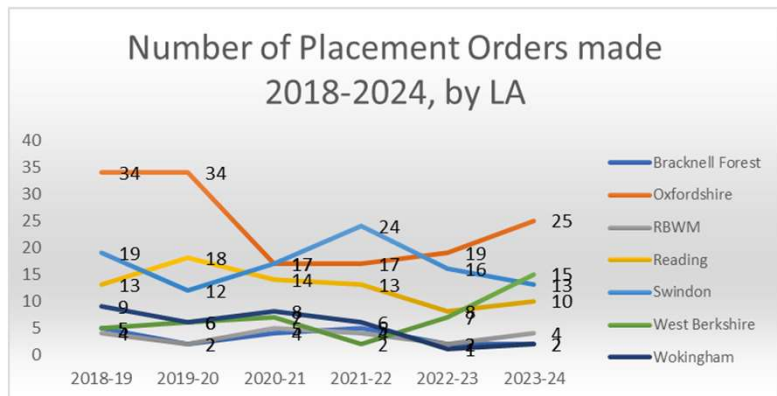
- ATV Enquiry hub
- Early Permanence Children’s book
- Early Permanence film produced by ATV adopters and featuring ATV adopters
- ATV has set up a multi-disciplinary team (The Anchor Team) to enhance the current offer of adoption and SG support and provide a more consistent offer across the region with two -year funding from the DfE.
- ATV has established a multi-disciplinary matching hub to reduce delays in matching children with complex needs (DfE funding received for two years)
- ATV Playdays held twice a year and now being held pan regionally with DfE funding
- ATV Helpdesk
- ATV is piloting a new national data set for Adoption Support
- ATV has trained new buddies for the adopter buddy scheme which now includes specialist buddies for early permanence adopters
- Teens group for adopted children now running in all parts of the region
- Permanence Support team generating income from in house delivery of therapeutic support



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OUR CHALLENGES

There has been a significant drop in best interest decisions during the past five years and the number of Placement orders remains low compared to pre pandemic levels.



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OUR CHALLENGES



- The number of Should be placed for adoption decisions fell significantly from 92 to 68 in 2023/24 (26% decrease)
- Loss of Adoption expertise in partner LAs resulting in increased demands on Adoption Panel & Agency Advisors and Adoption managers.
- Alignment of Adoption Panels and processes
- Despite changes in thinking about post adoption direct contact, there is no resource to support this, and it is a potential barrier to achieving adoption for some children.
- Number of pre order disruptions was high compared to other RAAs but has reduced over the past two years



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OUR CHALLENGES



- The increase in adopters has resulted in people with more vulnerabilities coming forward which makes assessments more challenging
- Assessments of foster carers and connected persons have presented some challenges
- High number of adopter withdrawals in 2023/24 (pre- approval: 9 post approval:11)
- Our pool of adopters is reducing. We need to replenish our adopters as referrals for children are increasing.
- There is a national shortage of adopters which means there is a shortage of adopters for children requiring external placements.
- Increase in ATV adopters being linked to children from external agencies



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OUR CHALLENGES



- Financial pressures in all LAs have led to delays in decision making on budgets and delays in agreeing funding for new posts/initiatives
- Staff recruitment (Impact of recruitment freeze; new recruitment system; Review of OCC operating model)
- The introduction of an Approved Provider List for Adoption & Special Guardianship fund (ASGF) Providers is taking longer than anticipated
- Reconciliation of ASGF for the annual assurance statement is complex and takes up significant staff resources



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KEY PRIORITIES

2024/25

- Recruit sufficient adopters to match the needs of children requiring adoption.
- To increase the number of adopters willing to consider early permanence, siblings, and children with complex needs.
- Provide training to adopters to enable them to broaden their matching considerations, particularly children with additional health and medical needs.
- Introduce virtual profiling events to profile individual children.
- Identify more suitable premises for the Anchor team



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KEY PRIORITIES

2024/25

- ATV legal agreement to be updated following recent review
- Undertake a review of ATV Operating model
- Develop a funded contact service so that Local Authorities and courts have more confidence in agreeing a plan for adoption when direct contact is proposed.
- Commission a new website to represent and support all areas of the service more effectively.
- Increase the involvement of adopters and other key stakeholders in the development and delivery of our services.
- Standardise and centralise Letterbox and pilot digital letterbox system



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