

Adoption Tees Valley

Bi-Annual Report 2023-24

Period- 1.4.23-30.9.23



1. Introduction

This report will provide performance information on adoption activity for the period of 1.4.23-30.9.23. Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) is the Regional Adoption Agency for the 5 Local Authorities of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton.

The report will focus on an overview of adoption activity and performance for the first half year of 2023-24 (Q1 and Q2). The full year progress in all areas of the Adoption Agency was last reported in the Annual Report for 2022-23, and will be reported on again, in the full year Annual Report for this current year-2023-24. The ATV Board has agreed that a more concise report will be presented for the bi-annual report, which will detail key performance information in relation to adoption activity, with comparisons with national performance over the same period.

The performance data is that which has been reported to the ASGLB by all 5 Local Authorities, and by Adoption Tees Valley, and is now published information. Where a different time period is reported on, this will be noted.

2. Governance

The RAA is governed by a Board, which comprises the 5 Directors for Children's Services, or Assistant Directors of the 5 Local Authorities within the partnership. There are 2 non-Executive Directors, who were recruited to the Board in 2020, and 2023, and who are adoptive parents who have adopted through ATV. There is a Virtual School Head who is now a member of the ATV Board. Plans are underway to recruit a strategic health partner representative on the Board.

The Service Manager for ATV attends all Board meetings and presents information to enable oversight of the performance of the RAA, strategic direction and operational practice. The Board has a role in being assured of the quality of adoption work in Adoption Tees Valley, and receives information on quality, outcomes, and proposed improvements.

Board meetings are held quarterly. Strategy, performance, finance, and overall delivery of the adoption service are considered at each Board meeting.

The Chair of the Board during this period was Sally Robinson Director of Children's Services, Hartlepool BC.

In each of the 5 LA's there is an Adoption Lead Officer who is responsible for ensuring that the RAA is delivering effective and high quality adoption

services for the children in its area. Adoption Leads meet with the Deputy Service Manager and Team Managers of ATV monthly.

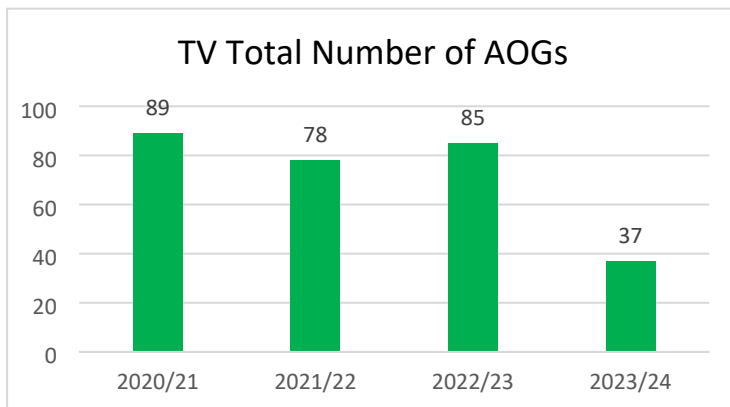
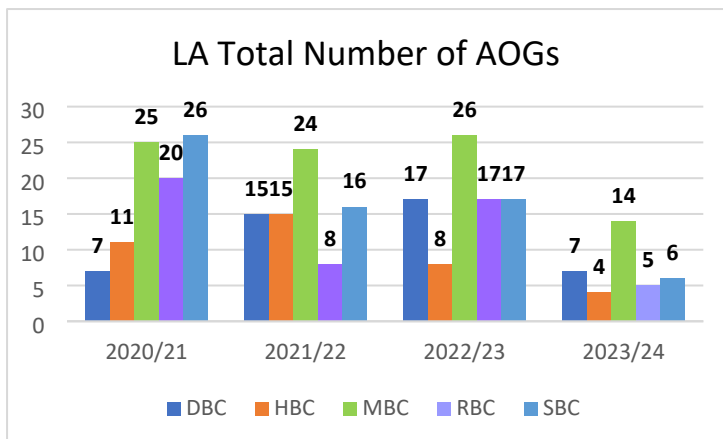
Adoption Activity and Performance

The adoption activity will be presented for ATV overall, followed by each Local Authority's individual performance.

A comparison with England national data will be included.

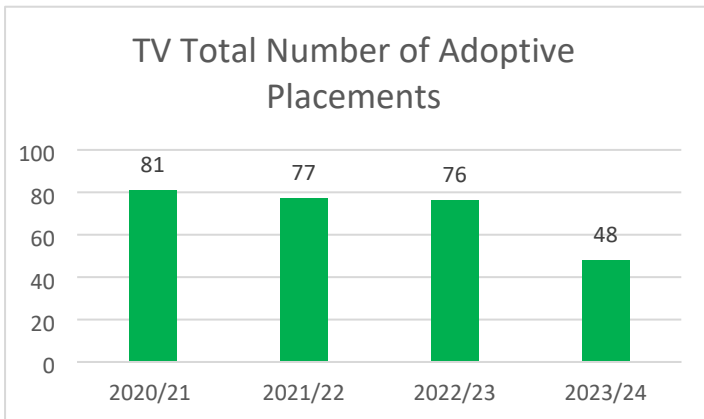
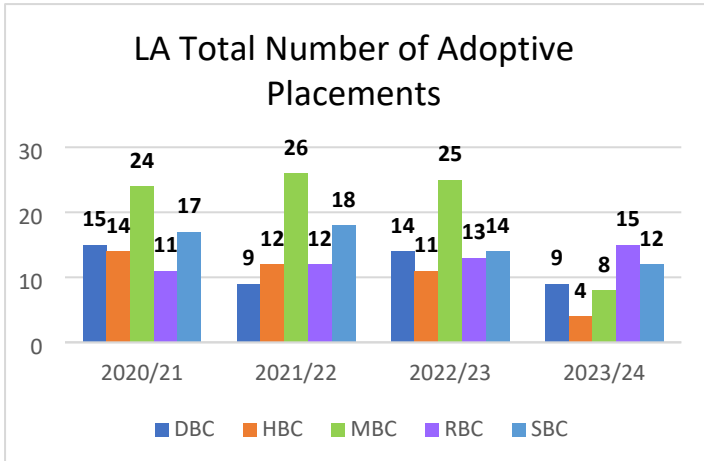
The period for the data is Q1 and Q2 2023-24 which is 1.4.23-30.9.23. and is year to date.

Adoption Orders



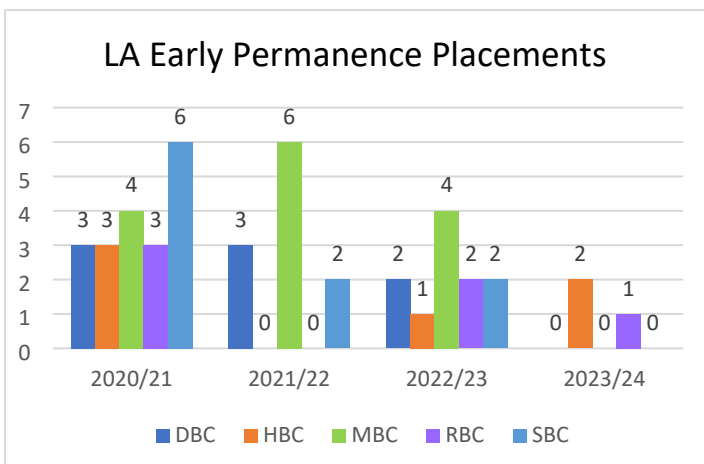
Overall rate of adoption orders is at a considerably lower rate than in the previous year. At the same point in time 2022, there had been 49 adoption orders granted.

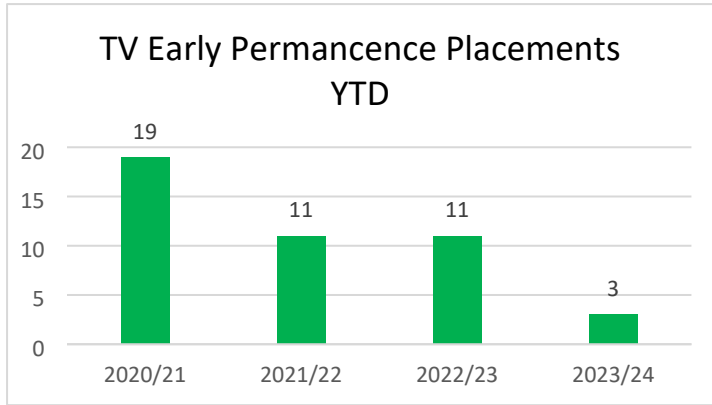
Children Placed for Adoption



The rate of adoption placements has increased on previous year. At the same time in 2022 there were 46 children placed for adoption.

Early Permanence



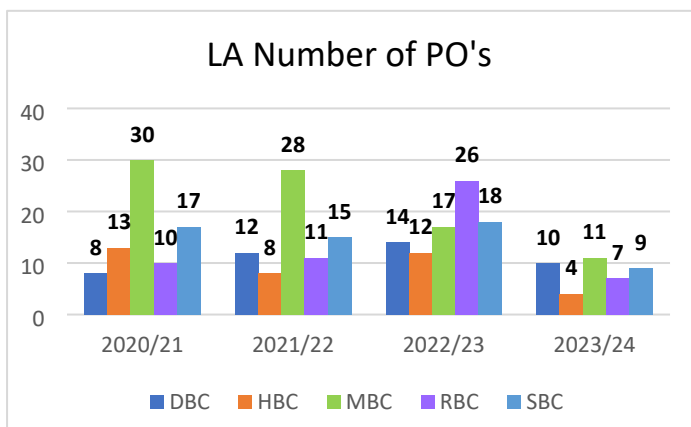


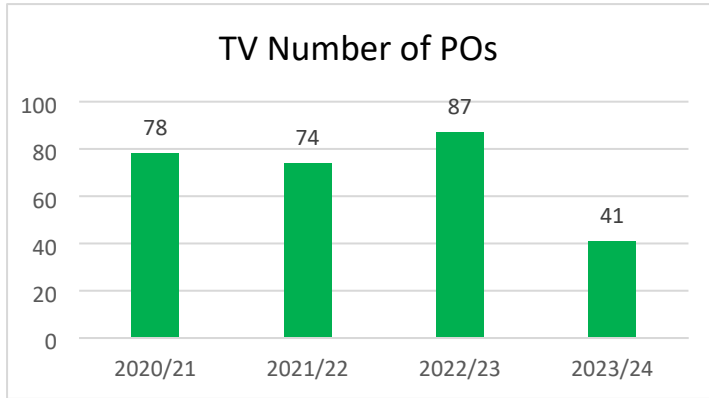
There is a drop in EP placements. There were 8 placements at this time in 2022, compared with 3 currently.

The drop in EP placements is a concern as this is a key strategic priority for ATV. ATV has followed practice developed following the “Blackburn with Darwin” model as presented at the national EP Conference in February 2023. This is to involve a manager/senior practitioner from ATV in LA Legal gateway meetings where children are being considered in the PLO period for commencement of care proceedings. ATV has attended Legal Gateway in Middlesbrough and Stockton during this period; however, no children have followed through with a planned EP placement from either Local Authority in this period. The clear aim of investing this resource from the RAA into Legal Gateway is to enable more consideration of early permanence at the earliest stage of care planning. Currently, reasons for not progressing to EP placements are being reviewed.

There is a pan regional project underway, involving ATV, Adopt North East, Adopt Coast 2 Coast, and Arc Adoption. the aim is to increase numbers of children who can access early permanence. Compared with regional and national RAA's ATV is not performing well.

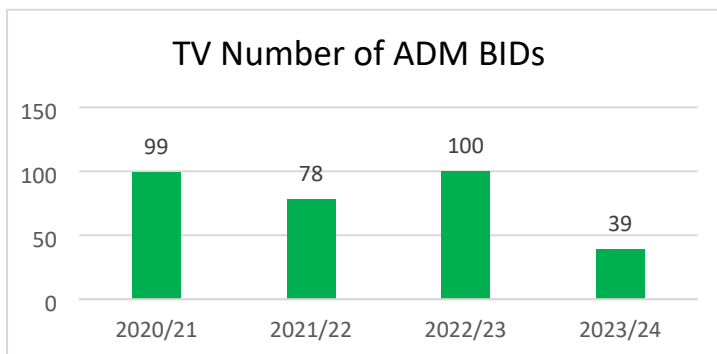
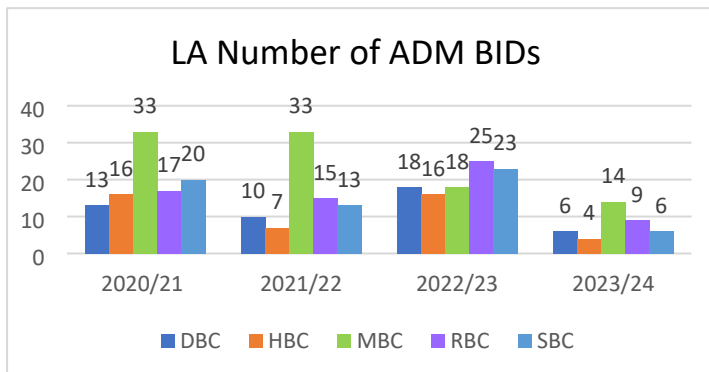
Placement Orders





Placement Orders granted are at a slightly lower rate than the previous year. At the same time in the previous year there had been 44 PO's granted over the Tees Valley.

Agency Decisions that Adoption is the Child's Plan (ADM Best interests Decision)



While Placement Orders granted through the Court have reduced slightly, the number of children with a Local Authority plan of adoption (ADM) has reduced significantly in this year compared with the same point last year. Middlesbrough's rate of ADM has increased, back to expected levels compared with recent years, however, Darlington, Hartlepool, Redcar and Stockton all show significantly reduced levels of ADM plans for adoption.

Disruptions

There have been an uncharacteristically high number of children who have had a placement disruption in this period. ATV has had relatively few disruptions historically and was the RAA with lowest numbers until 2023-24.

This period has seen 6 children leave their planned adoption placement, pre-order, with a further 2 having not been placed due to an “interruption” – adopters withdrawing prior to placement.

All were in sibling groups, with the exception of 1 child, and all were seen as “older” children. Additionally, the children were placed some distance from the home area, with VAA’s, or a Council Local Authority adoptive family.

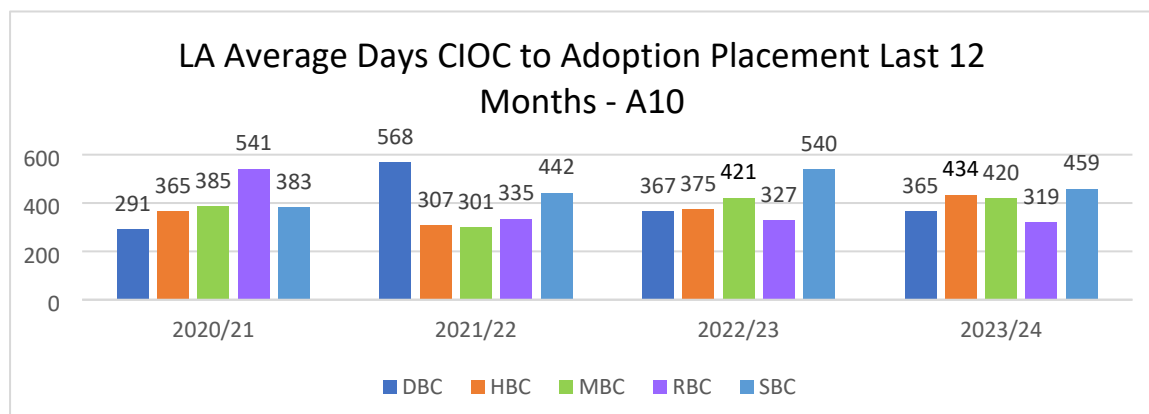
Disruption meetings have been convened for all of these placement endings and will be reviewed both individually, and as a whole. ATV and Local Authorities want to learn from what went wrong, or what was missed, in terms of matching and placement. The ATV Board has had oversight of this information, and it is planned to spend time as a Board considering learning for Childrens’ permanence planning, selection and matching, and for what supports are needed for the children.

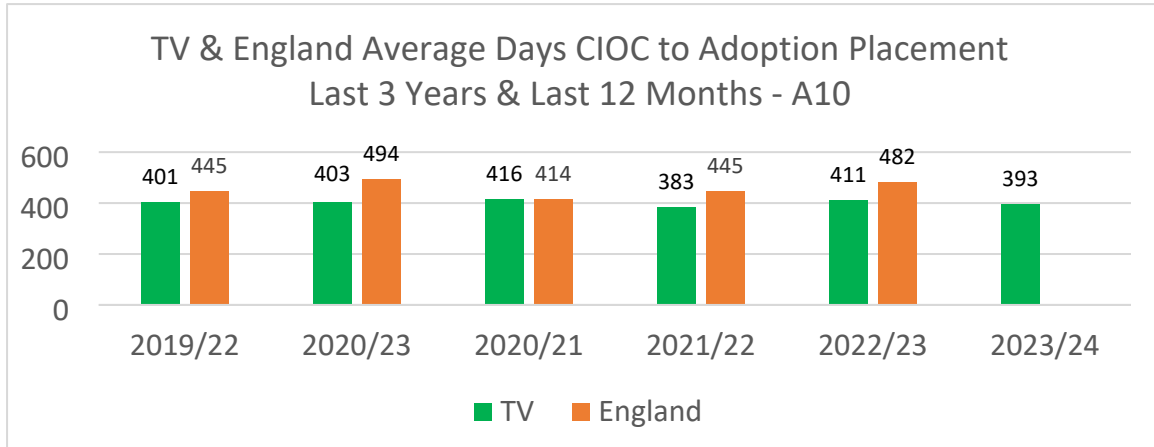
A summary of this learning, and any actions to support better stability for children will be reported within the ATV Annual Report for this year.

Timeliness of Adoption for Children

The A10 figures are for the time between a child becoming a Child in our Care and being placed for adoption. The government expected timescale is 426 days.

Timescales for children in securing an adoption placement and being adopted are drawn from the Local Authority returns to the ASGLB and are for children that have been adopted within that period. So, for example, the information for Darlington Borough Council will be based on 7 children’s data because 7 children have been adopted in that period. The overall data is based on 37 children who have been adopted in this period.

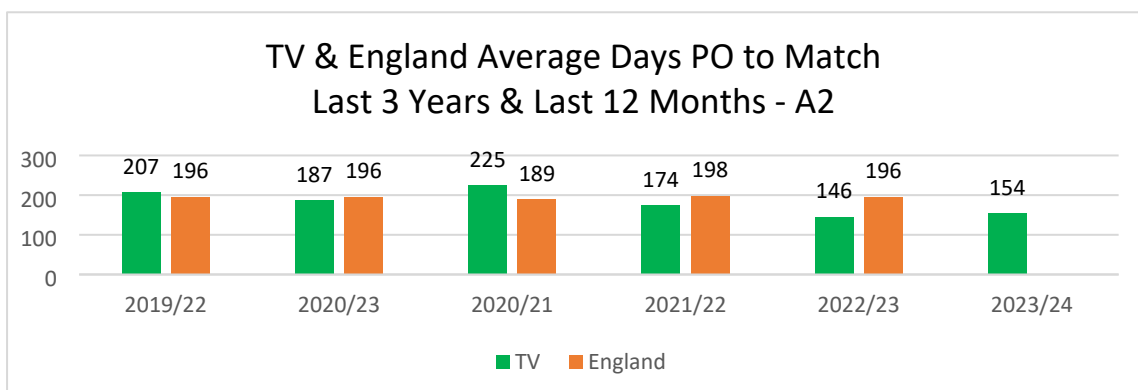
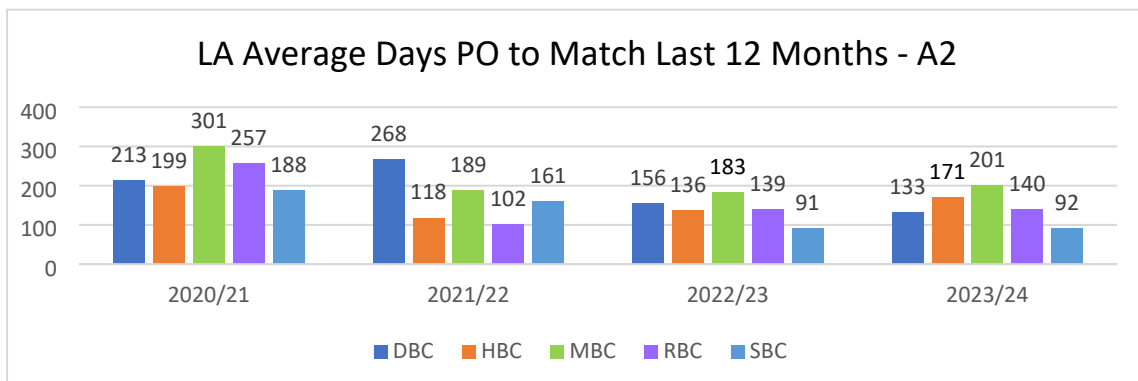




For Tees Valley overall, the average timescale is 393 days, which is below the government expected target. Current timescales have reduced slightly from the end of 2022-23 timescales, of 411 days, however, the data is based on a smaller group. The most notable changes are Hartlepool where the average days has increased (but based on just 4 children) and Stockton where the average days has reduced. Stockton and Hartlepool are currently at a higher average than government expected timescales.

Placement Order to Match- A2

The expected timescale for a child from Placement Order to being matched with their permanent adoptive family is 121 days. This data is based on children adopted in the period, or previous 3 years as detailed on the chart.



The data shows that for ATV Local Authorities there has been a downward trend in the time between PO and placement for adopted children, however in this 6 month period it has increased.

Individual Local Authority performance data- numbers of children at key milestones, and timeliness

Darlington

	Q1- Q2 2023-24 (YTD)	Full year 2022-23	Q1- Q2 2022-23
AO's	6	17	11
Placements for Adoption	9 (2 x sibling groups)	14	11
Early Permanence	0	2	2
PO	10	14	8
ADM	6	18	10
A10	365	367	492
A2	133	156	200
Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%	15%		

Darlington are placing a similar number of children for adoption as in the previous year. There have been no EP placements and ATV had not yet started attended Darlington Legal Gateway at the time covered in this report. Placement Orders are at a similar level as in the previous year, but Local Authority plans for adoption are lower. It would be useful to understand whether this is a greater use of family based placements for permanence, or whether this compares with a reduced number of Children in our Care during this period.

Timescales for Darlington children being matched and placed are improved considerably on the previous year, and past few years which is very encouraging. The timescales from bringing a child into our care, to placing for adoption has improved considerably with the average being around 60 days less than the governments expected timescale.

Darlington's rate of children leaving care by adoption is 15% over the previous 12 months, which is above the local and national average.

Hartlepool

	Q1-Q2 2023-24	Full year 2022-23	Q1- Q2 2022-23
AO's	4	8	4
Placements for Adoption	4 (1 sib group, 1 joined sib)	11	4
Early Permanence	2	1	1
PO	4	12	5
ADM	4	16	8
A10	434	375	303
A2	171	136	117
Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%	11%		

Hartlepool has had comparative numbers of children placed and adopted compared with the previous year, although this is lower than has historically been the case. Use of early permanence has improved with 2 children having an EP placement in this period. The current adoption activity, based on children with a Local Authority plan for adoption and Placement Order granted has reduced on the previous year, compared with a similar period. The average timescales provided are for a very small cohort of just 4 children and these include children with more complex needs; caution should be taken in drawing conclusions around timeliness of adoption, based on this data.

Hartlepool's rate of leaving care via adoption is 11% which is higher than England average, for the previous 12 months.

Middlesbrough

	Q1-Q2 2023-24	Full year 2022-23	Q1-Q2 2022-23
AO's	14	26	17
Placements for Adoption	8 (1 sib group)	25	15
Early Permanence	0	4	3
PO	11	17	10
ADM	14	18	6
A10	420	421	383
A2	201	183	130
Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%	9%		

In 2022-23 Middlesbrough went through a dip in adoption planning activity compared with the historical trend data. There were unusually low numbers of ADM decisions that adoption is the LA plan, and low numbers of Placement Orders. This dip is now evident in lower numbers of placements for adoption, within the current period, with just 8 placements, compared with 15 at the same period in the previous year. The reasons for this dip are not clear, however, the LA underwent considerable change during 2022-23, with workforce change at senior and practitioner level, including ADM. The LA will review the reasons for decline in adoption activity, and how this relates to permanence planning for children overall.

Early permanence has declined in this period, even though ATV has been represented at Legal Gateway.

Timescales for children have remained around similar levels, for the time between becoming a Child in our Care and moving in with the adoptive family. The time between Placement Order and Matching for adoption is increasing.

Redcar and Cleveland

	Q1-Q2 2023-24	Full year 2022-23	Q1-Q2 2022-23
AO's	5	17	6
Placements for Adoption	15 (sib groups)	13	7
Early Permanence	1	2	2
PO	7	26	14
ADM	9	25	20
A10	319	327	341
A2	140	139	107
Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%	6%		

The numbers of children adopted compares similarly with the numbers at the same period in the previous year. Placements of children for adoption have increased significantly, with Redcar seeing a high number of siblings placed in this period. This is reflective of a high number of local Authority plans for adoption, and Placement Orders in the previous year. This early adoption planning activity has reduced within the period of this report, from these unusually high levels in the previous year.

Timescales for children in Redcar and Cleveland have continued to improve. The time for moving in with an adoptive family is 319 days which is well below the government expected timescale. Placement order to match has increased slightly. This is based on children already adopted, and therefore doesn't include the higher numbers of siblings, including older children. This increase may be reflective of delays with Medical Advisor appointments, and/or time taken to find and place with the right family.

Stockton

	Q1-Q2 2023-24	Full year 2022-23	Q1- Q2 2022-23
AO's	6	17	11
Placements for Adoption	9 (1 sibling group, 1 joining sibling)	14	9
Early Permanence	0	2	0
PO	9	18	7
ADM	6	23	8
A10	459	540	469
A2	92	91	88
Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%	9%		

Stockton had a small number of children adopted in this period, although children placed for adoption remains consistent with the previous year. Placement orders are at a similar rate, however, the number of children with a Local Authority plan for adoption has reduced on the previous year. Timescales for becoming a child in our Care, to moving in are improving. Higher figures in the last year were analysed and were reflective of a number of children who had returned home on a care order, then come back in to foster care, before going on to adoption. The time between Placement Order and Match continues to be good in Stockton, with the current and previous year being below the government timescale.

Adopters- Sufficiency

Adopter approvals have been lower in this year compared with the previous year and with targeted approvals. The data shows 16 approvals, compared with 55 for the full year 22-23.

Adopters in assessment were at 39, at the end of Q2.

New enquiries to adopt in the period were 123 for the full period, which is lower than the rate of the previous year.

	Total 2022- 23	Q1 2023- 24	Q2 2023- 24	Total 2023-24 YTD
Approved	55	9	7	16
Starting Stage 1	58	13	13	26
Starting Stage 2	51	10	19	29
Marketing Enquiries	309	65	58	123
% Enquiries Converted to ROI	24%	22%	29%	25.5%
Snapshot of the "adopter pipeline"	End Q4	End Q1	End Q2	
Waiting to be matched	29	22	19	
Not yet approved, numbers in assessment	38	37	39	

(Stage 2 starts includes Fastrack and regular S2 starts)

(Conversion calculated 2 months following the month end, to allow for real time lapse for actual conversion from enquiry to ROI)

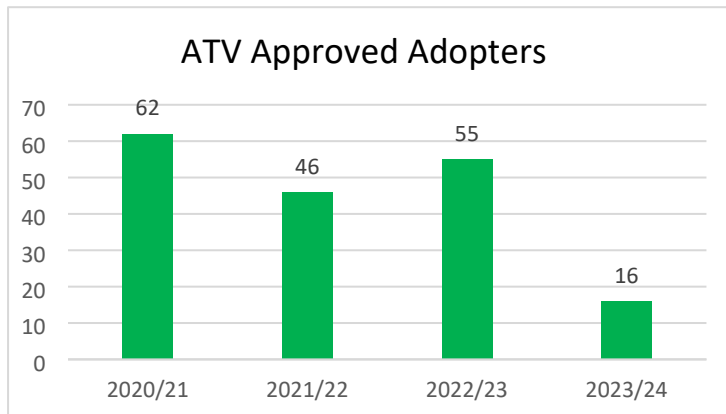
Adopter sufficiency has been particularly challenging for adopters who can take siblings. ATV has had to find external placements for the number of sibling groups progressing through with adoption plans. As noted above, a number of these placements have ended in disruption.

It is difficult to evaluate the full rationale for lower numbers of enquiries and a general downturn in recruitment over this period. Through RAA leaders' data and discussions it is clear Northern RAA's are finding recruitment significantly challenging, and this is evident across the NE region also. Cost of Living crisis may be impacting on decision making around extending the family through adoption.

To address recruitment, ATV has increased the marketing budget from January 2024, diverting into more digital promotional material, including advertising.

ATV is now also targeting additional financial support to "set up" costs for adopters in the following categories:

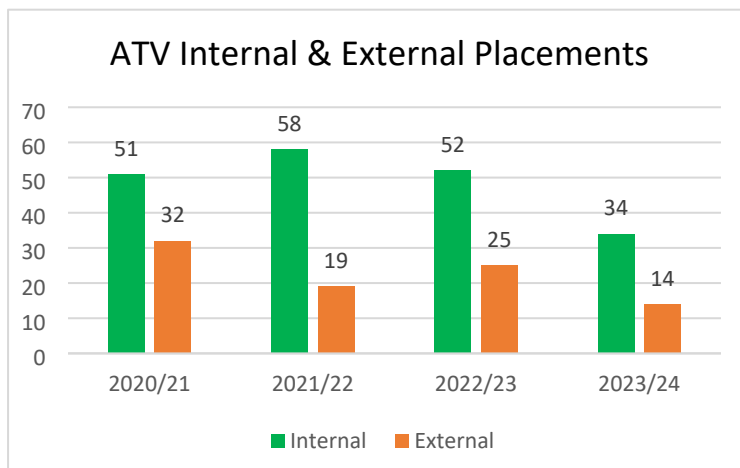
- Adopters approved and linked with siblings.
- Adopters who demonstrate lower financial savings but are considered suitable to adopt.



Of the 48 children placed in this period, 34 have been placed with ATV approved adopters and 14 with external adopters.

69% internal and 31% external placements.

In addition to 48 placed, there were 2 children who had an “interrupted placement” which means they commenced introductions but didn’t not go on to be placed. The adopters withdrew during this period.



As detailed above there have been an exceptionally high number of disruptions in this period, with 6 children having an unexpected end to the adoption placement.

This was a sibling group of 3, a single older child, and a sibling group of 2.

The 2 children with an interruption were siblings.

6 placement disruptions/interruptions were with VAA's, and 2 with a Scottish Council.

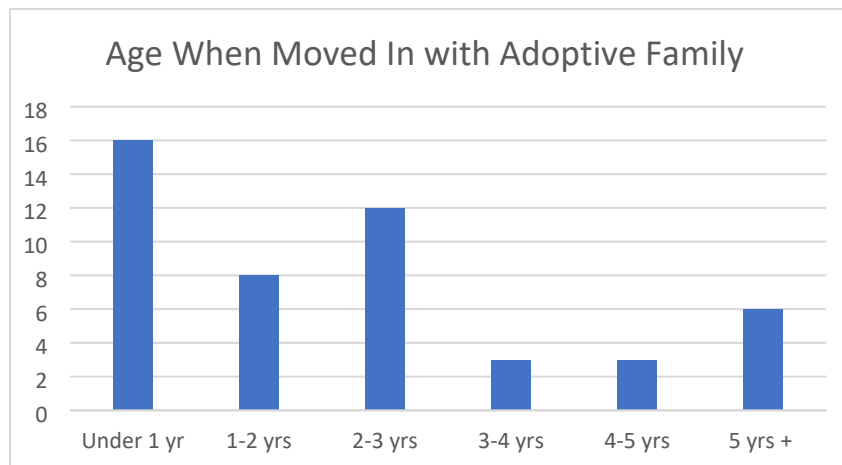
This information highlights the greater resilience of ATV children's placement when placed with adopters approved by ATV and within the local area; and reinforces the need to recruit more adopters in this area. Detailed analysis of themes and trends of placement disruptions is underway and will be noted within the full Annual Report.

Who are the Children Placed and Waiting

Placed

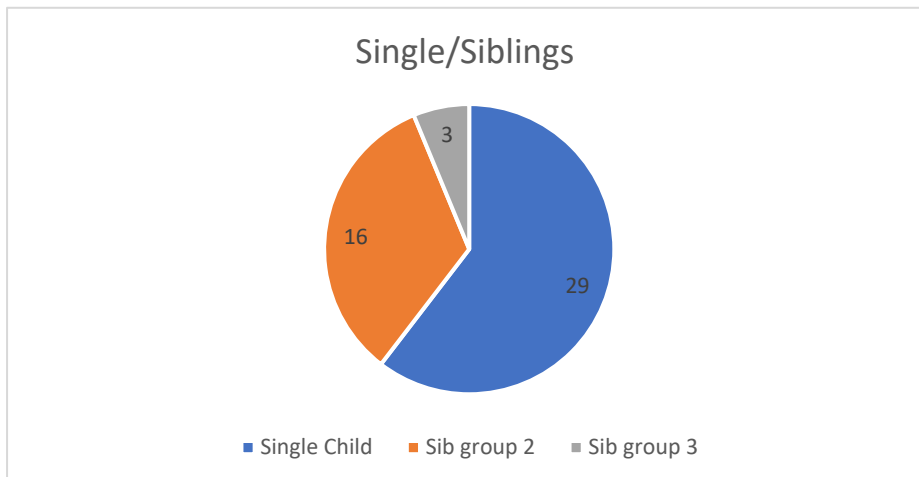
ATV placed 48 children in this period.

Age when moved in with Family.



One third of the children were under 1 year when placed. 25 % were in the age range of 2-3 years, and 19% were over the age of 4 years at the time of placement. Given that a number of these children were older at the age of placement, often with multiple previous moves and extended periods of exposure to early harm, this highlights some of the complex needs for many children who have been placed for adoption in this period.

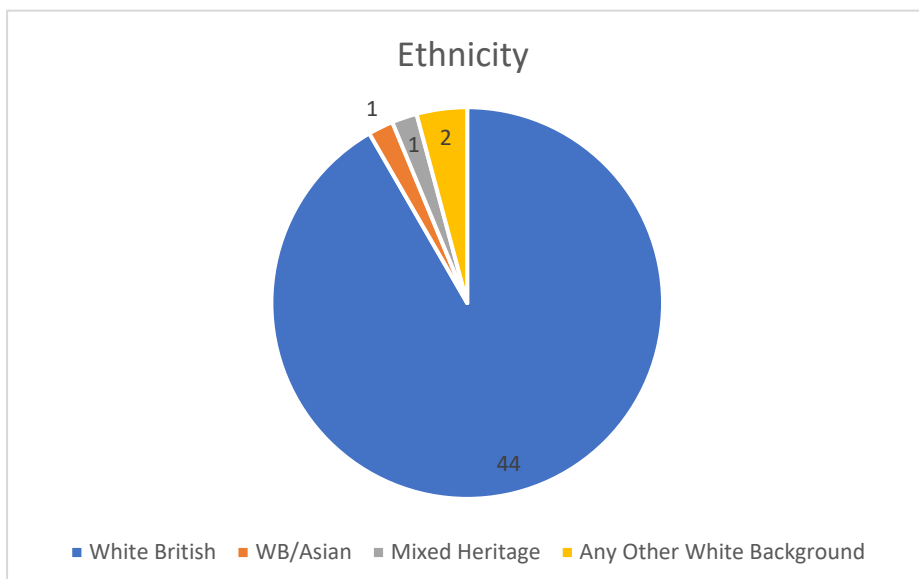
Single Children and Siblings



Of the 48 children placed, 29 were single child placements, 16 children were within a sibling group of 2 (8 sib groups) and 3 children were placed together as a sibling group of 3.

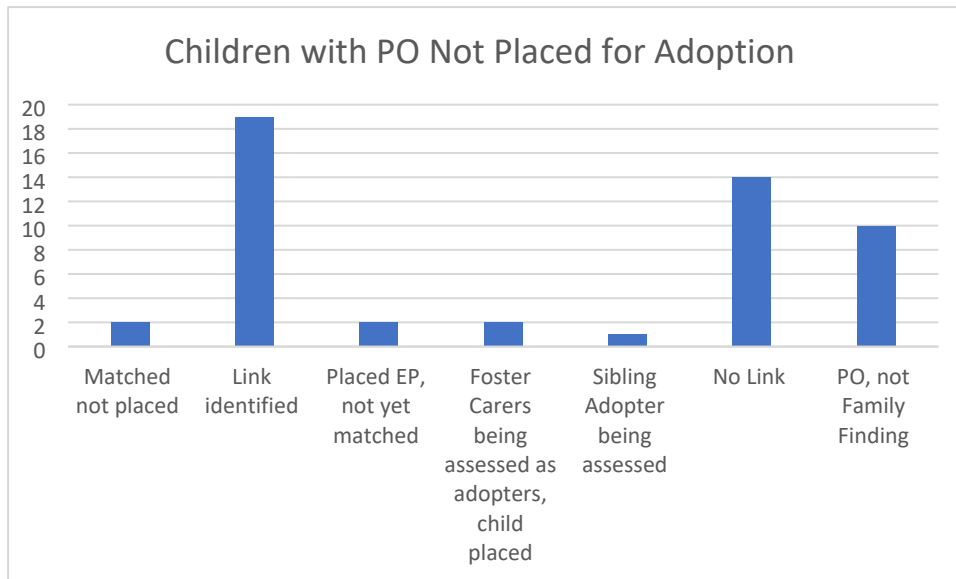
ATV has placed a significant proportion of children with siblings in this period, which includes children in the older age categories. These characteristics of children place them in a high level of complexity.

Ethnicity



92 % of all children placed were of White British ethnicity. 4 % were of black minority ethnicity and 4 % were White non-British.

Children Waiting with a Placement Order



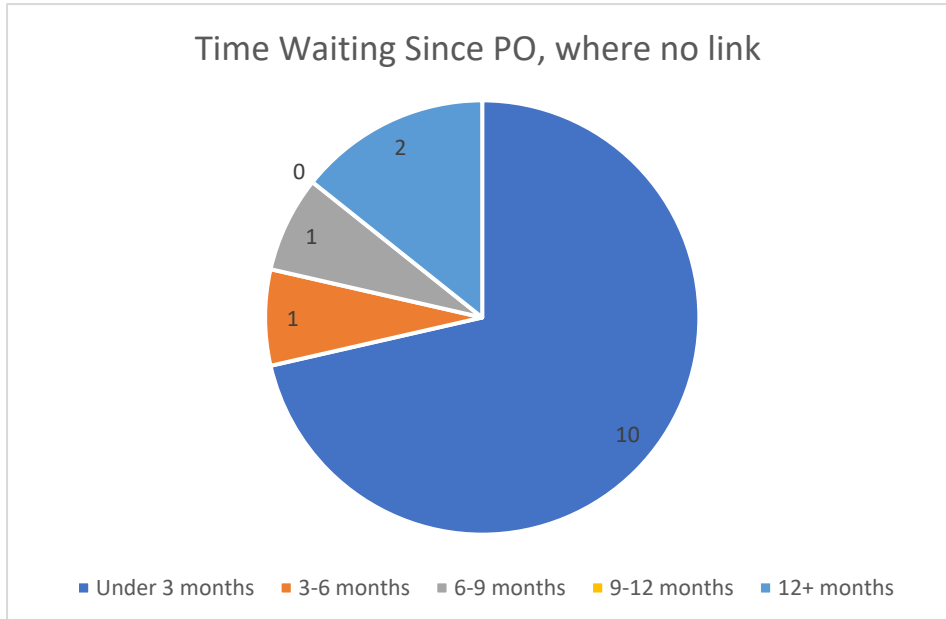
ATV data shows 50 children with a PO, not yet placed. ATV is working with the national RAA leaders' group, and Coram I to look more deeply into the circumstances of children waiting. Nationally reported levels of children waiting do not reflect those children for whom their permanence plan is underway for adoption, but not yet matched, or those for whom the LA no longer plans to place for adoption but has not yet formally changed the plan.

Of the 50 children, 14 are children for whom ATV is continuing to seek an adoptive family, with no family yet found.

ATV is working closely with all 5 Local Authorities to reflect more accurate data on the circumstances of children waiting and this will be progressed through the national data collection via ASGLB.

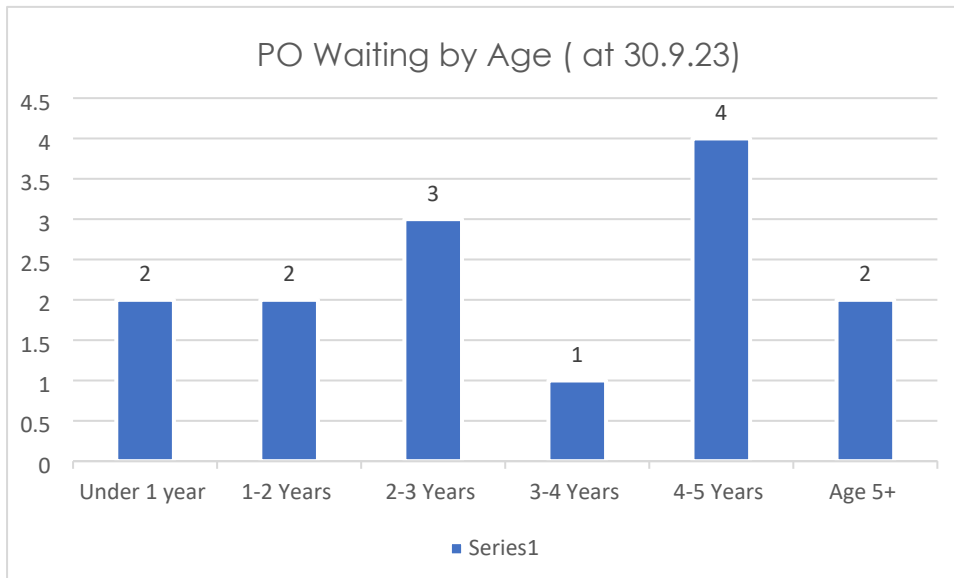
Time waiting since PO granted.

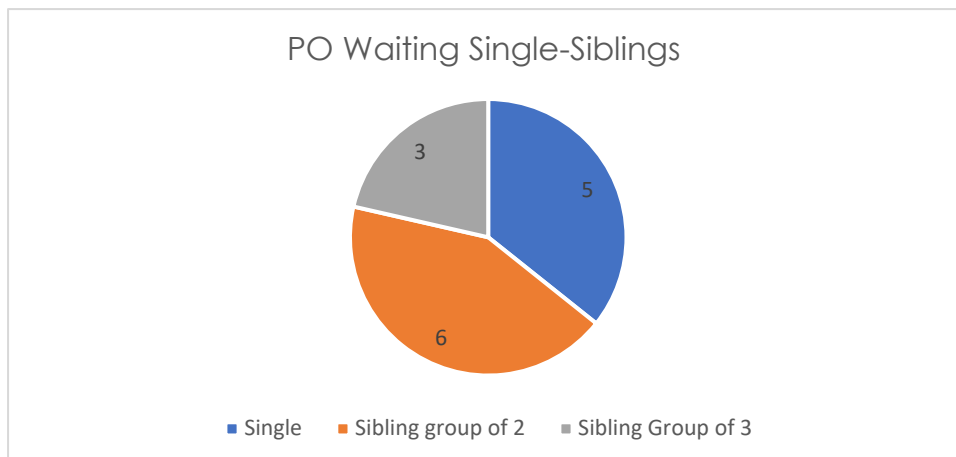
Of the 14 children for whom family finding is active, 10 of these have been waiting less than 3 months since the PO was granted. 2 children have waited over 12 months, but have previously been linked and matched, but not progressed as adopters withdrew.



PO Waiting- Single and Siblings, and by Age

The children waiting for whom active family finding is ongoing are as follows:





Summary and Actions for Continuous Improvement

1. Continued focus on early care planning where adoption may be the plan and planning for more children to have early permanence. Use learning from the Pan Regional Early Permanence and Concurrency project partners to strengthen care planning for early permanence in the Tees Valley region.
2. Mandatory training for social workers and key staff in the Local Authorities, to be provided from ATV.
3. Recruitment of Adopters to be prioritised, with all considerations as to how prospective adopters can be encouraged to come to ATV and consider the harder to place/more complex children. This will involve the widest consideration of adoption support plans, across all agencies, to reassure prospective adopters that they will be supported in caring for children with more complex needs.
4. "Disruptions" themes and factors to be evaluated within ATV, with partner Local Authorities, and with oversight from ATV Board. An action plan to be created to address the themes which have arisen, for strengthening practice and providing a robust scrutiny of external agencies, where children placed externally.

Vicky Davidson Boyd
Service Lead
Adoption Tees Valley