



**Cambridgeshire & Peterborough**

# **Adoption**

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH  
ADOPTION**

**REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2021 – 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2022**

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Overview &amp; Background</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Regional Adoption Agency Governance</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Service Structure</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Performance</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Financial Statement</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Disruptions</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Service Overview</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Commissioned Services</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Staff Profile</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Complaints</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Service Developments</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendix</b>		
<b>A</b>	<b>Financial Statement</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>ASLGB Data</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>Marketing Strategy 2022-2023</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>Annual Panel Chair Report</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>Service Plan 2022-2023</b>	<b>54</b>

## 1. Overview & Background

This report is the first Annual Report of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption – the Regional Adoption Agency for Cambridgeshire County Council & Peterborough City Council. The Agency is responsible for adoption services on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council & Peterborough City Council. Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council collaborated to establish Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Adoption, which is a hosted model, hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council and started from December 2020. The Regional Adoption Agency was created in response to the legal requirement that authorities regionalise their adoption services. The vision and ambition of the two Local Authorities is for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption to ***make a life-long difference to the lives of children for whom adoption is in their best interests.***

Since December 2020, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption has had responsibility for recruiting, assessing, and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and intercountry adoptions. We have also had the primary responsibility for family finding for all children with adoption plans from the two Local Authorities. Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption is also responsible for providing support to all parties affected by adoption, including adopters, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth relatives as well as supporting the partner local authority special guardians.

This Report provides a summary of developments for the period 01 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, the first full operational year of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption. The report fulfils the statutory requirement that an annual report be produced.

The Report is divided into subsections covering: an overview of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption, Performance, Service Update and Staffing Update.

During its first full year of operation, between 01 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption has:

- Matched **58** children,
- Placed **65** children,
- Supported **69** children to be adopted,
- Placed **17** children in Early Permanence Placements,
- Commenced **40** prospective adoptive assessments
- Approved **42** adopters,
- Matched **41** adoptive families with children,
- Supported families with **£230,000** worth of Adoption Support Fund packages of support.

The RAA continues to make good progress in relation to the development of practice, systems and processes that operate across both Local Authorities that ensure that children and young people receive a consistent and child focused intervention that brings about securing permanence arrangements where adoption is in their best interests. Continued effectiveness in developing additional support services for adopted children, young people, and adopters, as well as special guardians, remains critical to the growth of the RAA, as well as utilising the Adoption Support Fund. The RAA will continue to have a presence nationally at the RAA Leaders' group and represent the views of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough residents to ensure we keep abreast of national trends and influence policy and government strategy where we can.

It is important to recognise that as this is the first Annual Report, throughout the period there has been significant focus on joining up and aligning systems, processes and bringing the staff group together. Whilst undoubtedly challenging, the Agency can report considerable success in doing so and this can be seen throughout this report.

## **2. RAA Governance**

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption is a hosted Regional Adoption Agency and there is a written Partnership Agreement that outlines the specific roles and responsibilities between the two authorities, as well as governance arrangements required for overseeing service provision and terms of the partnership.

The RAA is funded by a designated percentage contribution between PCC (30%) and CCC (70%), considering indexation in line with local pay awards, other changes in staff pay, changes in the type of service provided, or any changes in law, government policy, guidance, and best practice.

Governance is provided substantially by the 'Regional Adoption Agency Partnership Board' which is chaired by the Assistant Director of Fostering, Regional Adoption & Specialist Young Peoples Services, and comprises key services - finance and safeguarding managers. The Partnership Board shall carry out a quarterly review of the operation with a report being provided to the Partnership Board by the Head of the Regional Adoption Agency. There is an annual review of the Regional Adoption Agency which the Director of Children's Services and Cabinet Leads from each Local Authority shall also attend.

Over the year there have been four Partnership Boards and there is an Annual Board meeting planned for August 2022. The membership of the Partnership Board has expanded to include Virtual School, Looked After Child Health and an Adoptive Parent to ensure the board has a breadth of knowledge around adoption to enable it to play an effective role in developing the services provided by the Regional Adoption Agency.

In March 2022 a Governance Audit was undertaken by the Internal Audit Service of Peterborough City Council and we are awaiting the final outcome. However, discussions to date indicate that there are limited concerns and any changes needed are primarily around adjusting Partnership Board organisation and attendance.

### **3. Service Structure**

The Regional Adoption Agency provides a range of services to children and their families including children who are requiring an adoptive placement, supporting those caring for children in a permanent placement, as well as the birth families for those children who are placed for adoption. Here is an overview of these services.

Recruitment, assessment, and approval of adopters – The team supports prospective adopters from the start of their interest in adoption with their initial enquiry, completing the assessment process to enable them to be approved as adoptive parents. The team continue to support the prospective adopters with identifying the children they wish to adopt, enabling the children to move in and until they become the sole legal parents for the children through an Adoption Order.

Family Finding – A key activity of the Regional Adoption Agency is ensuring that children are successfully linked with their forever family as early as possible. Dedicated Family Finding social workers will have developed a detailed knowledge of the child throughout their time in local authority care to ensure that the child's adoptive family can be identified and linked as soon as adoption is the plan for the child.

Adoption Panel – Alongside the Recruitment & Assessment and Family Finding teams is the Adoption Panel that considered all applications for approval from prospective adopters, and all applications for the approval of a match between a child/ren from the RAA and suitable adopters. Their recommendation goes to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

Early Permanence – Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have a passion for securing permanence at the earliest opportunity for children and have embedded practices of Early Permanence into the Adoption Service as well as the safeguarding teams. Early Permanence is where adoptive parents are also approved as foster carers so they can provide a safe and stable placement prior to adoption being confirmed as the plan for the child. This will prevent changes in the child's primary caregivers and enables these attachments to be developed at an earlier part of the child's life. Family finding will consider if Early Permanence is a suitable plan for the child and the adoption assessing social worker will prepare adopter to support children with these plans.

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support – The team provides support to adopters, special guardians, and their children to enable them to make positive changes to challenges that they face throughout their childhood and beyond. Their approach is rooted in developmental trauma and attachment. They work with a range of stakeholders to provide a child-centred comprehensive approach grounded by the evidence base. The team is responsible for the delivery of letter box contact, birth records, counselling, and intermediary services.

## 4. Performance

### 4.1 Children with a plan for Adoption – (with a Should Be Placed For Adoption (SHOBPA) decisions and subject to Placement Orders)

Provisional ASLGB data indicates that over the year, 39 children in Cambridgeshire and 21 children in Peterborough had a plan for adoption and 35 children in Cambridgeshire and 16 children in Peterborough were made subject to Placement Orders.

The national trend is that the number of children with a plan for adoption and placement order has been falling significantly, however Cambridgeshire is not following that trend and the numbers are in fact increasing. In 2020-21, 26 children in Cambridgeshire had a plan for adoption and 32 children were made subject to a Placement Order. This has highlighted that Cambridgeshire continues to have a positive view about adoption and ensures that children have this as a permanence plan when there are no alternatives within the family.

However, there has been a decline for Peterborough<sup>1</sup> and, consideration has been given regarding the children who have been subject to a plan for adoption and a placement order over the past year. We have found that there has been a significant focus on younger children with very few children over the age of 2 having a plan for adoption or being subject to a Placement Order (80% of children made subject to a placement order and 91% of children with a plan for adoption were under 2 years old). The ADM and Family Court for both Local Authorities is the same and this ensures continuity and consistency in the decisions with regards to children.

It is important that we understand this further to ensure adoption is considered as a permanence plan for children over 2 years old. The Family Finding Team Manager attends regular meetings with the Service Manager for the safeguarding team and this will be monitored for the coming year.

### 4.2 Children Placed For Adoption

Over the year, 38 children in Cambridgeshire and 18 children in Peterborough were placed for adoption in mainstream adoptive placements, and an additional 9 early permanence placements became an adoptive placement (4 in Cambridgeshire and 5 in Peterborough). Giving an overall total of 65 children being placed for adoption (42 in Cambridgeshire and 23 in Peterborough). When comparing to the previous year, Cambridgeshire has increased the number of placements (2020-21 37 children), whereas there has been a decline in Peterborough (2020-21 30 children). It is important to acknowledge that 13 of these children (11 in Cambridgeshire and 2 in Peterborough) had been waiting for over a year since the Placement Order was granted due to having characteristics that has meant they were harder to place (including complex developmental needs and sibling groups). It is important to note that even though there was a reduction for Peterborough, looking at previous year's

---

<sup>1</sup> 2020-2021 – 28 children had a plan for Adoption and 29 children were made subject to a Placement Orders and in 2019-2020 30 children had a plans for Adoption and 27 children were made subject to a Placement Orders

data the decline is not so significant and 2020-2021 was an unusually high year so the decline is not a significant concern (2019-2020 – 25 children).

The Agency has a success rate of being able to place 80% of those children who have a placement order with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough adopters. Those placed outside are deemed harder to place with seven being part of sibling groups and the other four being over 4 years old or with complex developmental needs. This has been fed into the marketing strategy for 2022-2023.

#### 4.3 Children Adopted

Over the year, 43 children were adopted in Cambridgeshire and 26 were adopted in Peterborough giving 33% of Cambridgeshire children and 22% of Peterborough children exiting care via adoption, which both are significantly higher than the target (18%) as well as the rates on a national (10%) and Eastern Region (12%).

For this cohort, the average numbers of days for A2<sup>2</sup> is 216 for children in Cambridgeshire and 126 for children in Peterborough. The national average is 182 days with the Eastern Region being 176 days.

For this cohort, the average numbers of days for A10<sup>3</sup> is 474 for children in Cambridgeshire and 404 for children in Peterborough. The national target is 426 days with the Eastern Region being 412 days.

It is acknowledged that even though the timeliness of adoption is greater than the target, nationally local authorities and regional adoption agencies are struggling to achieve the target. With regards to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Adoption, there have been several children who were deemed harder to place that we have secured adoption orders (40% were part of sibling groups and 25% were children over the age of 5 years) so these are known to come with longer timeframes. It is important that we continue to promote adoption for those harder to place children and this has fed into the marketing strategy for the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption 2022-2023.

The national trend is that the number of children being adopted is falling, however in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough the numbers have increased. In 20-21, 42 children in Cambridgeshire and 14 children in Peterborough were adopted. We have had the advantage that Family Courts have continued to ensure Adoption Hearings take place and have found creative ways to enable the hearings to take place during Covid. This has been with a hybrid of virtual and in person hearings.

#### 4.4 Early Permanence

---

<sup>2</sup> (Average time between a Local Authority receiving Court authority to place a child and the Local Authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days) - A low number shows good performance)

<sup>3</sup> (Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted (days))

Seventeen children have been placed in early permanence placements during this period with early permanence carers (dually approved carers) and fostering for adoption families (temporarily approved as foster carers). We have continued to promote early permanence with our adopters and are working towards an 'opt-out' approach rather than the current 'opt-in' approach.

The success of early permanence over the past nine months has been due to lead practitioners in the Recruitment & Assessment and Family Finding teams who have developed close liaisons with the Safeguarding teams and attend Unborn Baby Panels to ensure the right children are identified and linked with carers.

#### 4.5 Recruitment of Adopters

<b>Year</b>	<b>April 2021- March 2022</b>
A13 - Number of applications to be adoptive families (still being assessed)	39
A21 - Number of adopter approvals	42
A22 - Number of applications commencing Stage 1	40

The data to the end of March 2022 showed that Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption had approved 42 adopters and in the context that there have been three Social Worker vacancies (33% reduction in resource) it highlights the strength in the performance of this areas of the RAA.

In relation to applications to adopt, at the end of March 2022 there were 40 applications commencing stage 1 with a total of 39 adopters in assessment. This also indicates positive progress, despite an initial drop at the beginning of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption going live (40 adopters in assessment), there has been a continued increase in the number applications to adopt and active assessment, with a 14% conversion rate from enquiries.

The RAA continues to seek ways to improve practice and one area is the timescales is in the timeliness of assessments. The ASGLB data indicates that stage 1 is not completed within the 60 days and 33% of stage 2 assessment are completed in 4 months with the average number of days being 155 days (target of 120 days). It is important to note that the average across England is 18% of stage 1s are completed in 2 months and 46% of stage 2s are completed within timescales with the average number of days being 141 days.

As a new Regional Adoption Agency, it was expected that timescales would increase due to significant changes of staff and processes around assessing adopters. There was a significant impact with the absence of a Panel Advisor (March 2021- January 2022) and a 33% staff vacancy in the Assessment Team. To manage this, we commissioned Independent Social Workers to undertake stage 2 assessments as well as expanded the role of the Recruitment Officer to allow some additional capacity for the Social Worker. Additionally, Covid has led to difficulties in adopters accessing an adopter medical check and building up experiences with children, however, I am



pleased to say these are no longer significant issues. Alongside this, the Team Manager has reviewed the processes around stages 1 and 2 to identify changes that could be made without compromising on the quality of the adopters being approved. Some changes have included introducing regular opportunities for reviews of adopters to enable them to start stage 2 as soon as possible and we are looking to introduce a tracker to identify drift in timescales.

A comparative analysis of the ASLGB data with our SN are in Appendix B and it highlights where the Local Authorities are performing well – for Cambridgeshire this is particularly with the number of placements, number of Adoption Orders and the proportion of these placements being with our own adopters. For Peterborough this is around the placement timescales and the number and length of time children are waiting for a placement. However, it also highlights where improvements can be made, and these were areas that had already be identified. For Cambridgeshire this is looking at the timeliness of adoption and for Peterborough the focus is around the number of children with a plan for adoption.

## **5. Financial Statement**

The budget of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption is provided by the two Local Authorities and was set by the Partnership Agreement in 2020 with the financial management being overseen through Partnership Board that the Finance Officers for both Local Authorities attend. This ensures robust financial monitoring, with variance challenged and scrutinised.

The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption in 2021/2022 budget set by the Partnership Agreement was £2,145,980 with Cambridgeshire contributing £1,508,799 and Peterborough contributing £637,181. As outlined in the Annual Statement, the actual spend for the year was £1,857,872, an underspend of £288,108.28. The underspend was primarily because of staff vacancies. This has resulted in £288,108 being added to reserves for the Regional Adoption Agency.

As part of the financial planning for 2022-2023 despite the underspend, the budget allocated for the Regional Adoption Agency is not excessive and is vital for the running of the essential services. It is proposed that the reserves remain with the Regional Adoption Agency and there are proposals to use these funds to contribute towards further service development – these will be included in Business Cases regarding Commissioning and Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team Resource.

## **6. Disruptions**

There have been no disruptions during this period.

## **7. Service Overview**

The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption Agency is overseen by a Head of the Regional Adoption Agency. There are four main service areas, and each area has one team:

- Recruitment & Assessment
- Family Finding
- Adoption Panel
- Adoption Support

### **Recruitment & Assessment**

The Recruitment and Assessment Team comprises of a Team Manager, 3 Senior Practitioners, 6 Social Workers and a Recruitment Officer. The Recruitment Officer was a new post for the RAA and started in May 2021. The Recruitment Officer has been a positive addition to the service as it has provided a consistent figure to support adopters at the start of their journey and ensure they feel positive about choosing Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption.

Potential adopters who contact the Regional Adoption Agency will initially spend time talking with the Recruitment Officer to explore their interest in adoption. They will have the opportunity to attend an Information Session to understand more about adoption and the assessment process. Initially, due to Covid, we have stopped running information sessions as we did not have the facility to run virtual information sessions, so we provided detailed written and information to adopters. However, after appointment of the Recruitment Officer we have started to hold Information Sessions over MS Teams as well as in person and have run alternate sessions. There will be a review of this approach, including gathering views from those enquiring, as to the future plans for Information Sessions.

Those that meet the criteria to be considered will be offered an initial interview by a member of the social work team; the Recruitment Officer remains their main point of contact during the enquiry phase all the way up to submitting their Registration of Interest, after which the prospective adopter will be allocated a social worker from the Recruitment and Assessment Team.

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption continues to operate a 2-stage assessment process in line with the statutory regulations; stage 1 includes completing statutory checks, and these must be completed and reviewed by the line manager before stage 2 can commence. In addition, the prospective adopters will be asked to complete a series of worksheets to increase their understanding in relation to adopting a child from care.

As highlighted earlier, in the reported year, we accepted 40 applications to adopt and had 39 adopters in assessment as of 31 March 2022.

The RAA's approach towards early permanence needed reviewing to align Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Authorities. Cambridgeshire took a concurrency approach where children were placed early in their looked after journey, whereas Peterborough would place children under a Foster to Adopt arrangement closer to the point where the court were considering the LA's proposed care plan of adoption. It was clear that there were benefits for both and the Agency needed to find a way to merge

the approaches so that children were able to achieve permanence as early as possible. A review of the marketing & training material was completed, and the Agency now has a clear approach for both models and messaging that enable adopters to understand each route. The Marketing Strategy for 2022-2023 includes focused social media posts and, alongside this, the Recruitment Team are moving towards an 'Opt-out' as opposed to 'Opt-In' approach to Early Permanence when adopters wish to adopt a child under the age of 2 years old. This will be a strength for the Agency as we will be able to offer permanence to children at an earliest opportunity. There is also work being undertaken by the National RAA team into Early Permanence looking at the definition and the training provided – it is reassuring to see the proposed approach mirrors our approach.

The Agency has a dedicated training lead who has undertaken a review of the training courses offered, as well as the material used. There is a clear whole team approach that even though there is a training lead, all members of the team take a proactive role in delivering training.

The training offer is:

#### Prepare to Adopt Training – Stage 1 & Stage 2

This is the part of the core training for prospective adopters and provides a baseline of information around adopting. The training includes practical information about the process of the adoption journey whilst also focusing on the developmental and attachment needs of children placed for adoption. This is the second part of the core training and this builds on the previous training. There is a focus on providing adopters the skills on parenting children with a detailed session around therapeutic parenting and involving case discussions to think about translating this theory into practice. There is also information around supporting children with their own identity and contact with birth families. The course will provide thinking around loss for children and how to support them with this. There is an opportunity to hear from adopters on their own experiences of adopting. It is also a valuable opportunity to build up support networks with those in the training.

#### Transitions Training

This training takes the next step for adopters to think about their journey after being an approved adopter. Covered in this training is the matching process as well the introductions and supporting the child with the move. This includes working with schools and provides some practical tools around talking about adoption and using Theraplay games to support developing the child's relationship with the adopter.

#### Early Permanence

This 2-day course is a course for all adopters who are interested in adopting a child under 2 years old. The course provides detailed information about the principles and processes around Early Permanence and gives the opportunity to consider this alongside the case examples.

#### Adopting Siblings

This course focusses on preparing adopters for caring for siblings. The course will help adopters to understand the impact of trauma on sibling relationships and give the opportunity to hear from an experienced sibling adopter. Alongside this there will be

chance to gather some practical advice about managing time, emotional and practical resources within the family, and give space to think about applying theory into practice with some case examples.

### Preparing existing children

This is a course aimed at prospective adopters who already have children in the family home, to provide some discussion and suggested tools and resources to support parents in preparing their children.

### **Marketing:**

We have a small and dedicated Marketing & Communications Team with a Marketing & Communications Manager working with the RAA as well as the Fostering Service for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. During the year, it was agreed that we would appoint a time-limited Marketing & Communication Assistant who would provide dedicated marketing time for the Agency. This started in January as a half time post that will remain until December 2022. The addition of the Marketing Officer has enabled the Agency to take a proactive role around the current marketing approach.

Over the year marketing and communications have been planned, executed, and delivered so that the service is able to meet the needs of the children and young people who need adoption. We have formed an activity plan which details events, campaigns, internal meetings, newsletter publish dates, department comms, light touch messages for social media, reports, supports groups, prepare to adopt, and campaign planning meetings. This means we have been able to co-ordinate all our activity with the service and make sure that we hit deadlines and keep activity and awareness high. We have undertaken three large campaigns to date covering LGBT month, YOU CAN ADOPT and National Adoption Week – all co-ordinated throughout the year to help capitalise on adopters and those core groups highlighted in our marketing and recruitment plan for adoption.

One area we were keen to develop was creating new stories of those that have adopted for us to promote the real adoption messages. We have created four new profiles for our website and our marketing campaigns, as well as video promoting adoption of children with complex needs, and the benefits of caring for a sibling group. We aim to build on this in 2022 with a video promoting Early Permanence.

There was an acknowledgement that the website created for the launch of the RAA was in its infancy and would benefit from changes to improve usability as well as have an eye-catching design to encourage those considering adoption. We completed a review of the website and complete stage one of development which covered images, usability, and support. The website has also been optimised for mobile use as we know a significant number of visitors come via mobile phones and tablets. The website has also had several changes made to improve the navigation for visitors, and we have detailed a plan of action to develop stage 2 and 3, helping to improve each department. We have improved our language so that we are more conversational and more chatty and therefore more appealing.

The service launched its Facebook page in early 2021 with the aim of promoting the service. We have since added Facebook groups and are now engaging more agency support to help us spread the message about the need for more adopters. Our channel

works well and although we have more development work to do, we are seeing more interactions and engagement on the page which feeds back to enquiries (reported on in our quarterly reports). We plan to launch our Instagram page in June 2022 to help target audiences through visual representation and the use of videos. We are going to focus on our core groups of children and young people who need adopters. The service currently uses the corporate Twitter account as research show this will improve awareness – we are working on driving visitors to the website.

For the upcoming year we have conducted research and developed a targeting list for fertility clinics, churches, events, and community groups so that we can promote adoption much more widely. This action plan is currently being worked through in conjunction with the adoption team managers.

The Adoption Service has a full suite of marketing and promotional materials to use for internal/external promotion and at events. We are working on branding each area into one distinct colour from the logo so that they each have their own identities and do not all look the same.

The Marketing & Recruitment Strategy for 2022 – 2023 is Appendix C.

### **Family Finding:**

The Family Finding Team comprises of a Team Manager, 2 Senior Practitioners and 2 Social Workers.

The Regional Adoption Agency has dedicated Family Finding Social Workers who have knowledge of all the children from Cambridgeshire and Peterborough who may need an adoptive placement. The Family Finding Social Workers will regularly review the permanency plan for the child and once it is clear adoption is the plan for a child active family finding will start.

Family finding activity includes early information sharing of children with a plan for adoption with the Regional Adoption Agency approved adopters, the use of exchange events and adoption activity days where required, as well as forums such as Link Maker.

When a child is identified by an adopter, there will be a series of meetings with the Regional Adoption Agency and the Local Authority, or other agency where applicable, to ensure that adopters have full information about the child – as far as is available. This will include meeting with the Medical Advisor, the current foster carer, the child's school, if at school age, and a Child Appreciation Day to gather detailed information about the child's experiences and history to date. Prospective adopters are entitled to all available information about the child that they are considering and will need to feel confident that all information about the child has been shared with them.

If a child is placed on an Early Permanence basis when the final care plan is not yet determined, the placement will be supervised, managed, and supported in line with fostering regulations.

As outlined earlier, over the year, 39 children in Cambridgeshire and 21 children in Peterborough had a plan for adoption and 37 children in Cambridgeshire and 22 children in Peterborough were made subject to Placement Orders and, despite the national trend indicating a decline in numbers, we have not seen this. In fact, our numbers are increasing. This has highlighted that both Local Authorities continue to

have a positive view about adoption and ensure children have this as a permanence plan when there are no alternatives within the family. The Should Be Placed For Adoption ADM and Courts for both Local Authorities are the same and this ensures continuity and consistency in the decisions with regards to children.

It is important to acknowledge that over the past year, 65 children have been placed for adoption and that this is a significantly higher number than anticipated. Within these placements, we have been able to secure adoptive placements for those children who have been waiting over 12 months. This is a positive story for the Regional Adoption Agency and has meant that in the current children waiting for adoptive placements, only one has been waiting longer than 18 months and this child is linked and hopes to be placed by September 2022.

The Regional Adoption Agency does not have a statutory role with the ADM for Should Be Placed For Adoption, however we have been working closely with the ADM to review the processes so we can align Cambridgeshire & Peterborough. As part of this strategy, we are introducing the Agency Advisor to play a quality assurance role for the papers being presented for Should Be Placed For Adoption ADM. The new processes will be relaunched in August 2022, and this will be a joint approach of Children's Social Care and the RAA.

At 31 March 2022:

	Cambridgeshire	Peterborough
Children being tracked	64	28
Children with PO	20	8
Children with Should be placed for Adoption	18	4
Children Linked	8	3

When considering the matching of children who have a plan for adoption, it is important to consider not only the numbers of children and adopters but the characteristics. The ASLGB refers to *The Adopter Gap: This is an analysis on the gap between the number of adopters available compared with the number of children needing adoptive parents*. The National Adopter Gap is +71% indicating that there is an excess of adopters available.

The Eastern Region has a +86% mirroring the national trend with there being an excess of adopters available. However, the data for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption is very different; we currently have a 12% adopter gap indicating that we have a small gap between the number of adopters available for children (24 adopters available for 22 children) – the adopter gap only considers those children with a Placement Order. However, internally, we monitor the number of children who have an ADM for adoption and this data indicates there are an additional 22 children where the plan for adoption has been ratified and waiting for the outcome of the Court. It is important to acknowledge that this is associated with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough authorities continuing to promote adoption as a care plan for children, where appropriate. The number of ADMs has remained higher than the national average (ADM Number per 10,00 population under the age of 18 years old is 3.01%, whereas the national average is 2.59% and the Eastern Region is even lower at

2.16%). Additionally, liaison with other Regional Adoption Agencies local to us has indicated that they have excess adopters, however they also are struggling to match the adopters due to a mix match of the adopter offer and children available. All of this indicates the importance that we continue to have an active recruitment campaign for adoption to ensure we have a continuous flow of approved adopters to enable to timely matching for children.

### **Panel:**

The Adoption Panel for the Region is constituted in accordance with legislation, regulations, and guidance. There is a central list of 24 approved panel members, including three Chairs and a Vice-Chair. The work of the panel is supported by a Panel Advisor and Panel Administrators. The Regional Adoption Agency has recently recruited an Adoption Advisor, Jade Cullum, whose primary role is Panel Advisor. She joined us in February 2022.

Members of the Adoption Panel include individuals with personal experience of adoption, adopters and adopted adults and other independent members with professional experience of adoption, fostering and looked after children. Panels are balanced as far as possible in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and experience.

The purpose of the Panel is to consider all applications from prospective adopters for approval and makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker. The Panel considers all applications for the approval of a match between a child/ren from the RAA and suitable adopters. This recommendation goes to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for the relevant Local Authority of the child being placed. The Panel also considers placements for adoption where the birth parent(s) request their child be adopted. The recommendation goes to the ADM for the relevant Local Authority.

Over the year there were 41 Panels held that heard 50 approvals, 55 matches, 2 relinquished baby plans and 3 adopter de-registrations.

There was one match where Panel did not recommend the match – this took place in May 2021. This was a sibling group of 2 children who were aged 4 and 8 years old who had complex needs as result of their childhood experiences. The match was with adopters approved by another Adoption Agency. The concerns raised by Panel were around the preparation of the children, as well the readiness for the adopters to manage the potential complex needs. The Panel was held on Microsoft Teams. The ADM took on board the concerns, however, being aware of the coherent narrative from the social workers who felt it was a good match for the children, the ADM requested additional information by way of an independent second opinion report to inform the ADM decision. Having received additional information, the ADM agreed to approve the match and I am pleased to report that the placement progressed well with no concerns and the application for an Adoption Order has now been made.

The Panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), in relation to approval. The Panel members are provided with training, including mandatory courses, such as equality and diversity, safeguarding and other learning events relevant to panel activity. In January 2022 we arranged for New Family Social to run a training course on LGBT+ Adoption which gave Panel members a better insight in the routes LGBT+ individuals and couples take to adoption; it explored how we can improve our relationships with potential applicants and existing adoptive

parents or foster carers. Feedback from the Agency Advisor and Panel members who attended said that the course was a useful and helpful course. A comment included:

*I found it useful in as far as it gave insight into how same sex couples feel pressured to fit into a “mould” developed by more traditional relationships. It was interesting how different people feel about labels and how words such as ‘queer’, which I find so offensive, relate to a time where they were used in a derogatory way (which is probably why I find it so offensive) and how the younger gay community have turned it round and made it a word they are proud of.*

Since Jade has been in post, she has taken a proactive approach to training and is developing a multifaceted approach to training for Panel members including ensuring all Panel members have access to a range of courses provided by Cambridgeshire County Council training department.

There is a detailed Annual Report completed by the Panel Chairs and this is Appendix D.

### **Adoption & Special Guardianship Support:**

The Regional Adoption Agency has a broad offer of support, and this includes approved adopters and the partner local authority Special Guardians Support Order. Post placement adoption support is provided by both the allocated child’s social worker and the adopter(s)’ social worker or connected person social worker. Once a child is adopted or subject to a Special Guardianship order, the support is provided by the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team.

The Adoption & Special Guardianship Support team comprises of a Team Manager, 4 Senior Practitioners, 1 Social Workers, a Therapeutic Family Worker, a Birth Relative Outreach Worker and 3 Post Box Co-ordinators.

The Regional Adoption Agency provides a range of adoption support services including advice, guidance, birth relative outreach support, birth records counselling, support with contact arrangements (direct and letterbox), intermediary services, access to adopter peer support and more targeted support through access to therapeutic support via the Adoption Support Fund.

On receipt of a referral for support, an initial assessment will be completed to outline the identified needs for the family, but also the support to be provided to the family. Services can include advice and guidance, parenting support, family work and individual work with children. Some of these services are delivered through the Adoption Support Fund.

It is important to acknowledge that the past year has been a challenging time for the team, partially due to significant staff vacancies and sickness absences, as well as a high level of demand for support from families. Until March 2022, the team had 50% social worker capacity in the team which meant families have had to wait for support. Alongside this there are significant difficulties for families to access universal services, include Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), and this has led to substantially higher numbers of referrals than expected from families requesting support from the Agency, when previously universal services would have given this. This has led to families waiting for an assessment of need and support being offered. On a positive note, there has been an agreement for the Adoption Support Fund to be



available until March 2025. The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) is a *DfE statutory service where the adoption support fund provides funds to local authorities (LAs) and regional adoption agencies (RAAs) to pay for essential therapeutic services for eligible adoptive and special guardianship order (SGO) families.*)

However there has also been a considerably high demand for Adoption Support Fund commissioned therapeutic support, which in turn has meant that families are being placed on waiting lists for accessing therapeutic support. The Team have continued to offer duty support for families so that families can access advice and support in the meantime.

Three post box co-ordinators sit within the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support team facilitating indirect contact for children who Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have placed for adoption. The Team will also support families where there are plans for direct contact between the children and their birth families.

Birth records counselling and intermediary services are another key area of work for the Team and due to Covid-19 and the difficulties with office-based working, the provision of this support had previously been paused. It was acknowledged that there was a significant high number of people waiting, including many vulnerable due to age and health needs. As response to this, it was agreed that the Team would appoint a social worker on a fixed term contract for 6 months to focus on this area and enable the service to respond to these requests, without having an impact on the capacity of supporting families on the waiting list. We have appointed to this post and the worker will start in June 2022 until December 2022.

Another area that has become part of the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team is the review of Adoption & Special Guardianship allowances. The annual reviews are overseen by the Head of the Regional Adoption Agency who works closely with the respective Local Authority Finance teams to complete the annual reviews. Where there is a clear financial hardship a means test allowance can be provided. However, there are times where the needs of child indicate the need for an allowance by exception. In these situations, the Support Team will undertake a needs-based assessment to consider the needs of the child and the financial support that should be offered.

Alongside this, there has been a review of the Financial Allowance process for Adoption & Special Guardianship Allowances; the Finance and Resource Panel has been disbanded and replaced with a clear simplified process for allowances that are within the policy, as well as allowances that are an exception due to the needs of the child. The Head of the Regional Adoption Agency has worked with the Head of Fostering & Supervised Contact to create this process. It is due to be launched in July 2022.

Over the past year the Team has received:

Initial Assessment for family support	107 (49 – SG Families & 58 – Adoptive families)
BRC/Intermediary/GRO	48 referrals
Financial Assessment	68 – since June 2021
ASF initials /reviews	200
Value of ASF Applications	£230,000

The Team facilitates regular support groups for children and families across various locations. There 6 support groups that run on a minimum of a monthly basis. They are based across the local authorities with a focus to support adopters to build up their own support networks. Members of the Support Team attend to offer advice and support. There is one support group that was set up to support Special Guardians and this is based in Peterborough.

We have been committed to increasing the therapeutic skills in the Team to enable them to provide therapeutic informed support and training to families. To achieve this, we will have provided training for the Team on the Trauma Informed Model as well as DDP Training. The plan is to be able to use this training to support the other teams in the RAA as well as Panel, to have a Trauma Informed approach to practice. There is also a desire to access training for this model with other areas of Children's Services, specifically Fostering and Children In Care.

It has become clear since the Regional Adoption Agency has been live that there is not adequate capacity in the Adoption & Special Guardian Support team to provide a timely response to referrals from families. After further exploration, a Business Case has been completed to identify options going forward. The Business Case is due to considering by identified members of the Partnership Board to agree a way forward to enable families to access support in a timely way.

## 8. Commissioned Services

There are several services that the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) has to commission to fulfil the needs of the service costing approximately £298,460 on an annual basis.

	Annual Cost
Medical Advisor – this is to complete reports with regards to the <i>adopter medical reports that are a statutory requirement for assessment and review of approved adopters</i>	£7,000
Panel Chairs – <i>we have 4 Panel Chairs that share the responsibility for chairing the Adoption Panel.</i>	£4,000
Linkmaker – <i>Online service to support linking for children with a plan for adoption and prospective adoptive parents across the England, Wales, and Scotland</i>	£17,000
Birth Relatives Counselling – <i>this is a statutory provision and is currently provided by Adoption Plus.</i>	£18,000
Intercountry Adoption – <i>there is a statutory duty for the local authority to provide intercountry adoption whereby the adopters are assessed in the UK and linked with a child that is not based in the UK.</i>	£13,000

Adoption Support Fund – <i>a DfE statutory service where the adoption support fund (ASF) provides funds to local authorities (LAs) and regional adoption agencies (RAAs) to pay for essential therapeutic services for eligible adoptive and special guardianship order (SGO) families.</i>	£230,000 (approx.)
Coram BAAF membership – <i>this allows us to access support, advice and discounted training and resources to ensure that we continue to provide complaint and good practice.</i>	£8,500
New Family Social membership – <i>this is an agency dedicated at promoting adoption and fostering within the LGBT+ community. They also provide training, advice, support, and resources that are valuable when supporting adopters in this community. there are different levels of membership with differing levels of promotion and resource access.</i>	£960

The partnership agreement outlines transferring the commissioned services and the responsibility for procurement activity for those services, however there is no resource within the Regional Adoption Agency or Cambridgeshire Country Council's Children's Commissioning Service to fulfil this.

As the Regional Adoption Agency is part of a Local Authority, all commissioning activity is subject to procurement & commissioning regulations. It is also vital that the RAA continues to explore efficiency savings because of the two Local Authorities coming together, and these opportunities will be explored in 2022-2023. As there is no dedicated resource in the Regional Adoption Agency there is a Business Case underway to devise a plan for this going forward. This will be considered by Board in August 2022 is due to be completed by June 2022.

## **9. Staff group – recruitment & retention, sickness**

As with any service, the staff group is a vital part of the effective running of the Agency. It is important to acknowledge that there has been a lot of changes in the staff group, however the Agency ends the year in a strong position to move forward.

At the start of the year there were several identified vacancies, including many in the management group. These posts included the Head of the Regional Adoption Agency, 2 Team Managers and a Panel Advisor. These vacancies placed significant pressure on the Agency to have a stable base to grow the service. The Head of the Regional Adoption Agency was appointed and then following this the remainder of the management team were in place by February 2022. Some of the appointments were internal to the Agency by way of progression, internal transfer within the local authority and some new staff to the local authority.

Over the year:

9 members of staff have left	5 Business Support Officer, 2 Social Workers, 1 Team Manager
8 members of staff have joined	2 Management positions, 4 Social Worker positions, 2 Business Support Officers and a Marketing Assistant
4 members of staff have been promoted	3 Management positions and 1 Social Worker positions.

As at the end of the year we have 2 Social Worker vacancies, however we have appointed to these vacancies with members of staff due to start in April and July.

Another area that has created pressure for the RAA has been around sickness and this is particularly so for the Adoption Panel and the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team. Over the 12 months the Service has lost 423 days to sickness over a total of 17 employees. The prevalent reason being stress with 276 days, followed by anxiety at 104 days. 315 days have been linked to long-term sickness. For all those workers who have had a period of sickness, there is a return-to-work meeting and for those on long-term sickness, an Occupational Health assessment was completed and a there is a planned phased return over a 4-week period, with additional support to enable a successful return to work.

It is acknowledged that the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team has been under significant stress owing to high levels of referrals and families in periods of acute stress, and this has contributed towards staff sickness. In response to this we have provided the Team with additional resources including agency Social Workers and a permanent Full Time Business Support Officer, alongside reviewing the services offered and suggesting referrals to other services as appropriate.

## 10. Complaints

Over the past year we have received 18 Stage 1 complaints which have come from 16 families. 15 of the complaints related to the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team. We upheld 3 complaints, partially updated 12 and did not uphold 3.

Of these complaints

- 6 were regarding delays in accessing an assessment and support from the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team,
- 3 were regarding delays around post box contact,
- 4 related to special guardianship allowances,
- 2 were regarding accessing birth records as an adopted adult,
- 1 was regarding a decision not to progress with an assessment as an adoptive parent,
- 2 were regarding delays in securing the adoption order for the child.

We have one Statutory Stage 2 complaint and one Statutory Stage 3. These were for the same family who raised a few concerns regarding the support being provided by the Adoption Support Team. For the Stage 2 complaint there were a few issues raised, and one was upheld, 7 complaint issues were not upheld and 2 were partially upheld. There were 9 recommendations, 8 of which have been completed and 1 is in progress.

The statutory Stage 3 complaint was because the family were unhappy with the outcome of the Stage 2 complaint and on 31 March 2022, this is in progress.

## **11. Service developments**

Despite the Regional Adoption Agency only being 15 months old and the significant staffing changes and vacancies, there has continued to be a drive to evolve and improve practice with the Service. Some of these are in the early stages and will be evolved further in 2022 – 2023.

One area that is starting in the Adoption & Special Guardianship Support Team is embedding Trauma Informed practice; this is a strengths-based approach, which seeks to understand and respond to the impact of trauma on people's lives. The approach emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone, and aims to empower individuals to re-establish control of their lives. Research has identified that this is a successful way to support families who are caring for children who have experienced trauma. We have a trained Senior Practitioner in the team who has been sharing this learning with the rest of her team, however there is a plan to broaden this across the whole of the Regional Adoption Agency. There are training dates planned for May & August 2022 so we can support the team and members of the Adoption Panel in embedding this approach.

We have a plan to hold a Regional Adoption Agency Service Away Day in May 2022 where we will bring the whole service together for the first time since we started in December 2020. We will aim to use the day to look at each area of the Service and identify ways in which we can improve. This includes how we promote adoption to recruit adopters, increasing the voice of the adopters, embedding the child's voice within all the work we do, and introducing the Trauma Informed Model.

One of the successes for the past year is that we have an Adoptive Parent who has joined the Partnership Board and has been proactive in offering appropriate challenge and I would like to take this further. There is a plan to embed the Adopter's voice into all aspects of the service we offer. This is outlined in the Service Plan – Appendix E.

As I have already mentioned above, it has been acknowledged that the commissioning work in the Regional Adoption Agency is significant and an area where we need to undertake a Business Case to consider how we approach ensuring effective commissioning is undertaken as well as provide scope for further commissioning with the Agency as well as across other agencies.

Joanne Banks

Head of the Regional Adoption Agency.

27 July 2022

## Appendix A : Financial Statement 2021-2022 & Budget Plans 2022-2023

Account	Account (T)	Current Budget	Actuals	Outturn Variance	
A0000	Pay	1,623,113.00	1,252,143.90	-370,969.10	
A4000	Agency Staff	10,000.00	65,717.50	55,717.50	
A6110	Recruitment Advertising	0.00	1,950.00	1,950.00	
A6200	Staff Training & Development	3,000.00	5,523.00	2,523.00	
A6400	Staff health & welfare Costs	6,500.00	0.00	-6,500.00	Expended under Internal recharges
B2005	Casual hire of facilities	1,000.00	1,064.00	64.00	
C5000	Car mileage and allowances - staff	38,758.00	4,309.85	-34,448.15	
C5010	Car mileage and allowances - other	1,690.00	1,188.40	-501.60	
D0230	Books and Multimedia Supplies	250.00	96.98	-153.02	
D3000	Printing	0.00	167.60	167.60	
D3100	General Office Expenses & Stationery	8,112.00	0.00	-8,112.00	
D3105	Unallocated Purchase card expenditure	0.00	748.98	748.98	
D4105	External Legal Fees	0.00	2,833.30	2,833.30	
D4110	Professional Fees and Hired Services	69,567.00	85,499.37	15,932.37	Ongoing adoption placement costs inc £5334 of PCC costs pre RAA
D4800	Advertising / Publicity (non Recruitment)	36,000.00	22,275.45	-13,724.55	
D5110	Mobile Phones	3,780.00	0.00	-3,780.00	
D6000	Staff subsistence	1,500.00	397.89	-1,102.11	
D7000	Subscriptions	51,460.00	58,747.78	7,287.78	
E7100	Adoption Agency	288,000.00	367,366.00	70,366.00	Inter Agency - Includes £9k of PCC IA costs pre RAA
F1010	Adoption Allowances	3,250.00	7,154.38	3,904.38	
G2000	Internal Recharges	0.00	2,155.75	2,155.75	
J2205	Other Funding Contributions	-637,181.00	-637,181.00	0.00	PCC RAA contribution
J2205	Other Funding Contributions		-274,197.00	-274,197.00	2020/21 carry forward
J2205	Other Funding Contributions	0.00	562,305.00	562,305.00	2021/22 carry forward into 2022/23
J4300	Other Cost Recovery	0.00	-12,468.41	-12,468.41	
		<b>1,508,799.00</b>	<b>1,517,798.72</b>	<b>-0.28</b>	
	Pay		-315,251.60	-288108	2021/22 underspend
	Non Pay		-48,556.68	-274197	2020/21 carry forward
	Inter Agency		61,366.00	-562305	2021/22 carry forward
	PCC				
	Recharge		14334		
			-288,108.28		

## RAA Budget 2022/23

Cost Centre (T)	Account	Account (T)	Current Budget
Regional Adoption Agency	A0000	Pay	1,170,067.00
Regional Adoption Agency	A1000	NI	125,838.00
Regional Adoption Agency	A2000	Pension	246,884.00
Regional Adoption Agency	A3005	Other Allowances	48,600.00
Regional Adoption Agency	A3100	Apprentice Levy	5,850.00
Regional Adoption Agency	A4000	Agency Staff	10,000.00
Regional Adoption Agency	A6200	Staff Training & Development	3,000.00
Regional Adoption Agency	A6400	Staff health & welfare Costs	1,000.00
Regional Adoption Agency	B2005	Casual hire of facilities	1,000.00
Regional Adoption Agency	C5000	Car mileage and allowances - staff	25,575.00
Regional Adoption Agency	C5010	Car mileage and allowances - other	1,000.00
Regional Adoption Agency	D0230	Books and Multimedia Supplies	150.00
Regional Adoption Agency	D4105	External Legal Fees	1,000.00
Regional Adoption Agency	D4110	Professional Fees and Hired Services	37,000.00
Regional Adoption Agency	D4800	Advertising / Publicity (non Recruitment)	36,000.00
Regional Adoption Agency	D5110	Mobile Phones	500.00
Regional Adoption Agency	D6000	Staff subsistence	1,500.00
Regional Adoption Agency	D7000	Subscriptions	40,000.00
Regional Adoption Agency	E7100	Adoption Agency	338,710.00
Regional Adoption Agency	F1010	Adoption Allowances	40,000.00
Regional Adoption Agency	J2205	Other Funding Contributions	-637,181.00
<b>Regional Adoption Agency</b>			<b>1,496,493.00</b>

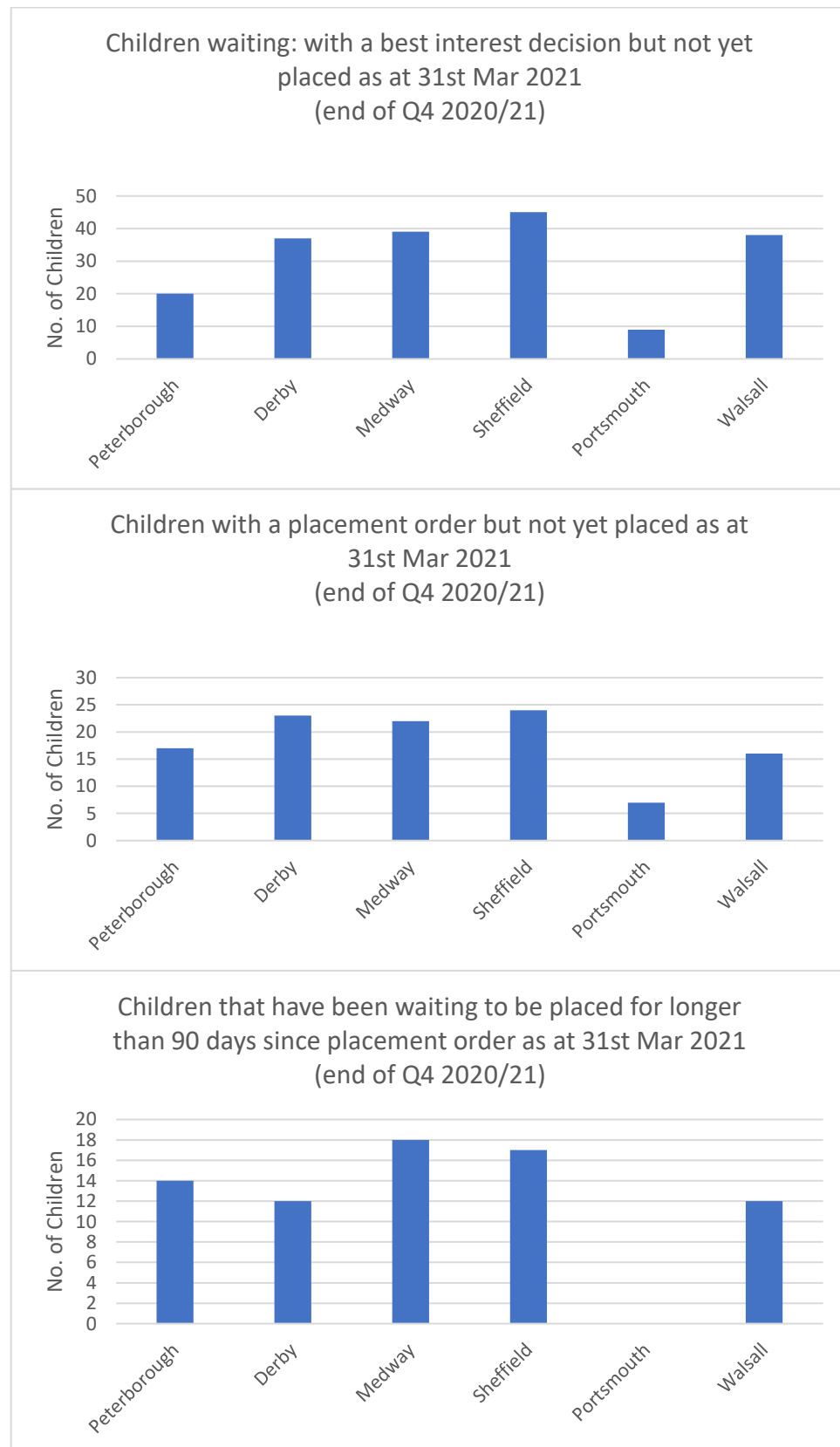
### Note:

Additional budget to cover NI increase has been added to budget which would increase PCC contribution to £640102 (+2921)

Additional budget will also be added to cover 1.75% CCC pay rise which will also necessitate an additional PCC contribution

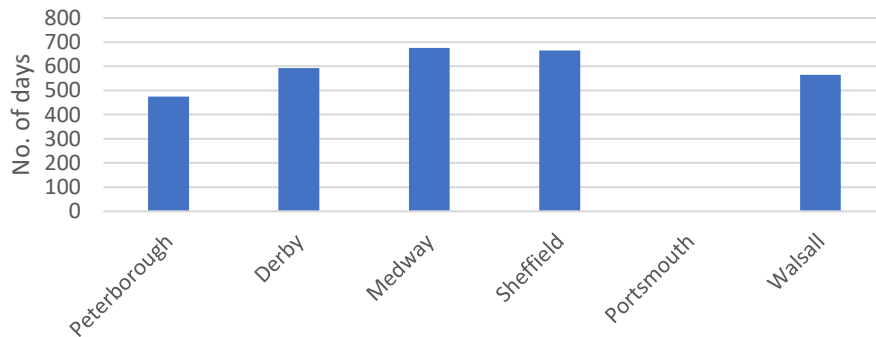
Proposal is once final figure is known this is tabled at the Board for approval

## Appendix B – ASLGB Data SN Comparison - Peterborough

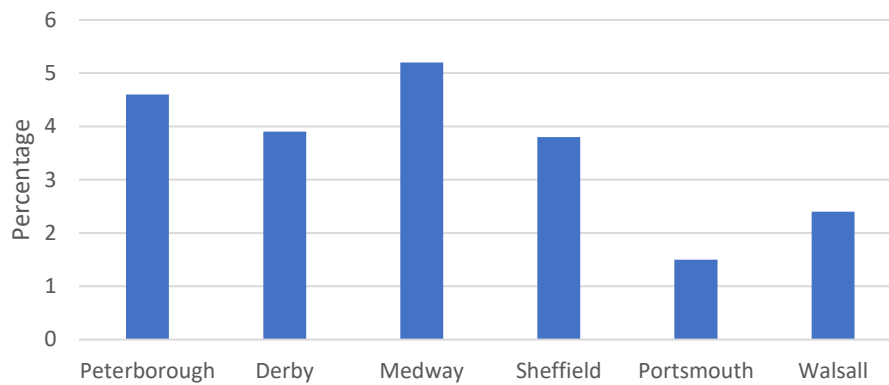




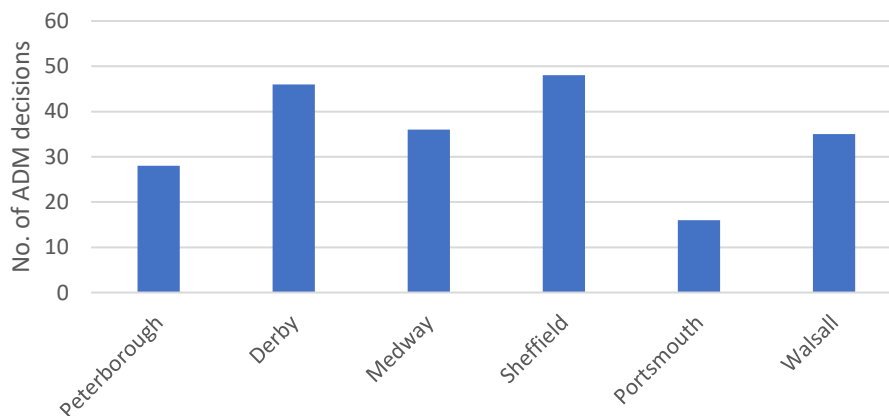
Average number of days spent waiting to be placed with placement order since entering care at 31st Mar 2021  
(end of Q4 2020/21)

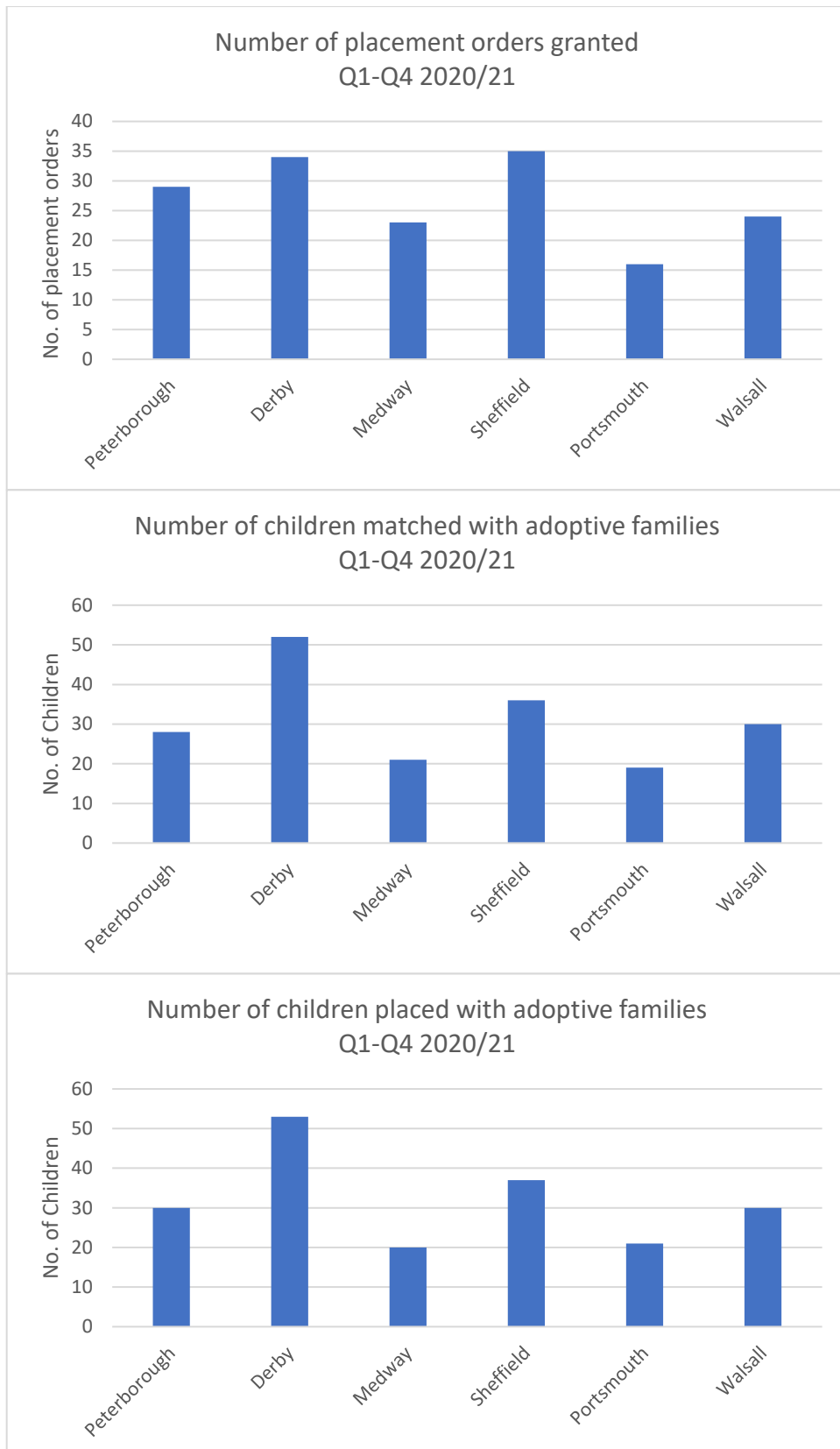


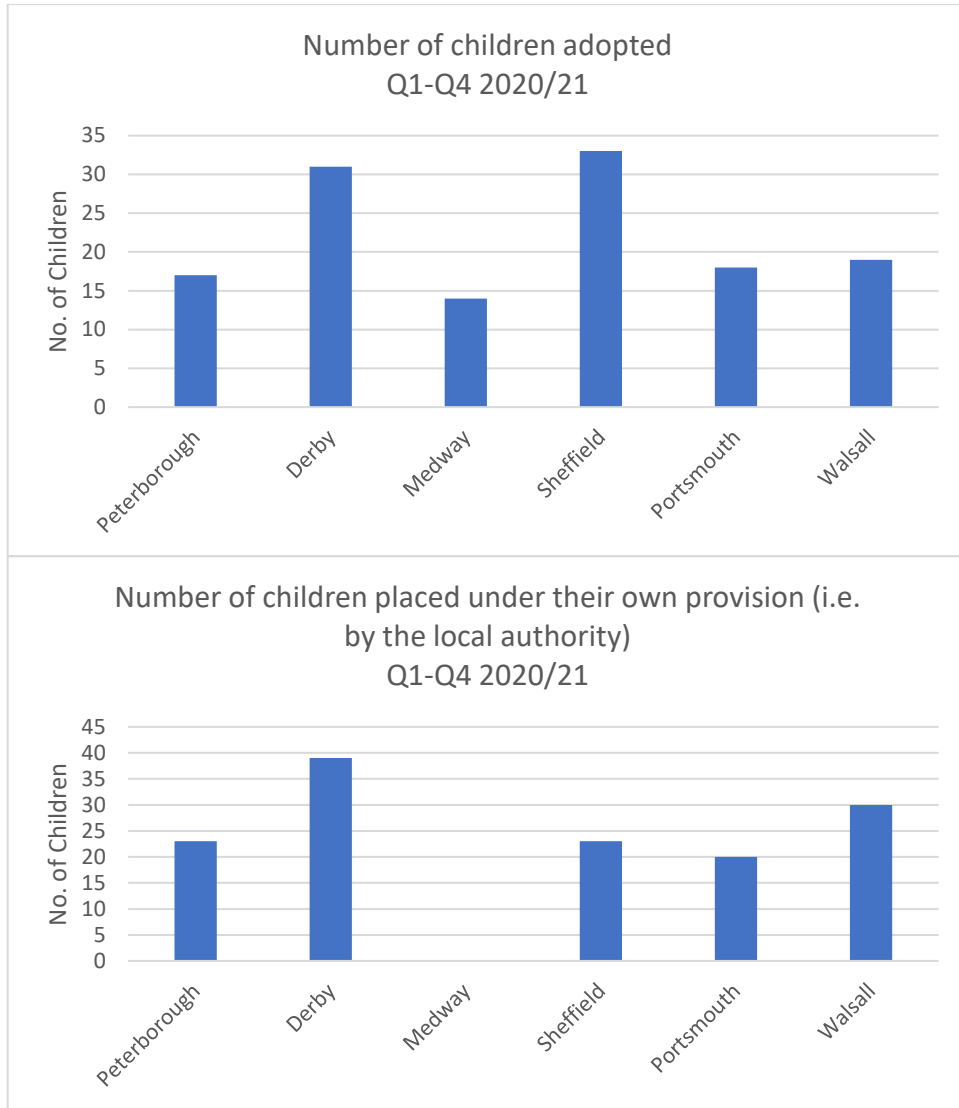
Percentage of children waiting to be placed with a placement order at 31st Mar 2021 per children looked after as at 31st Mar 2020

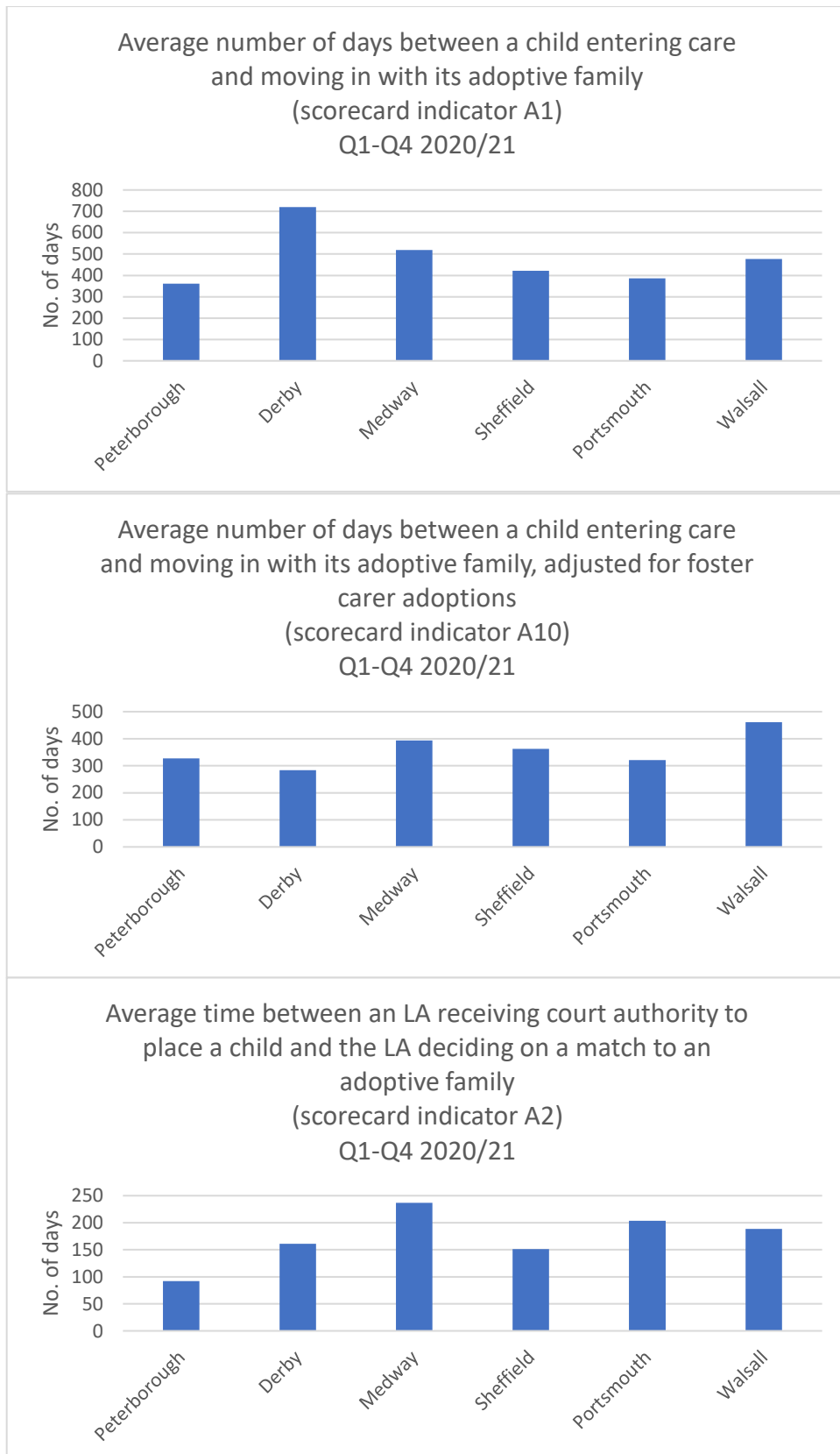


Number of ADM decisions  
Q1-Q4 2020/21

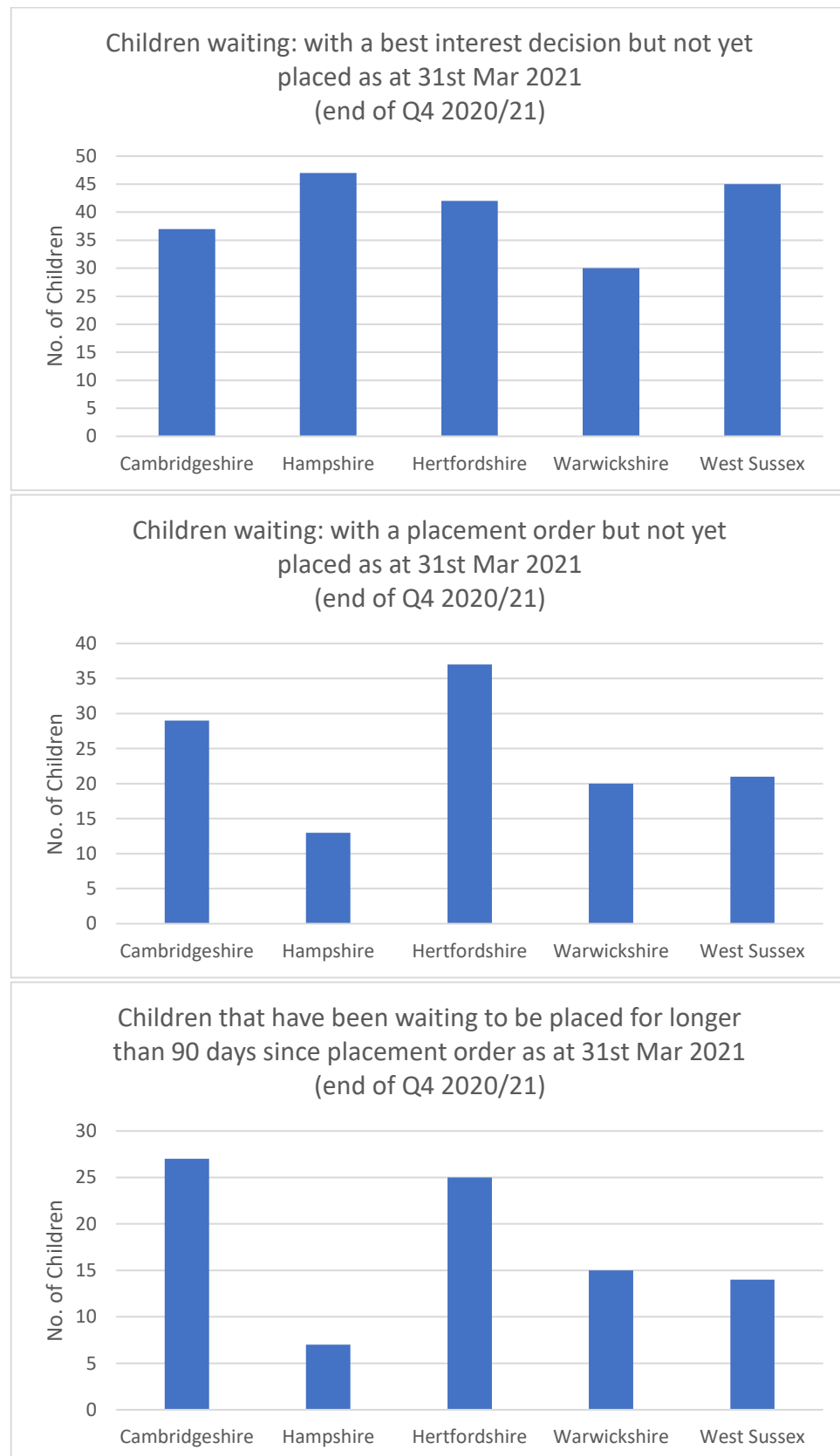


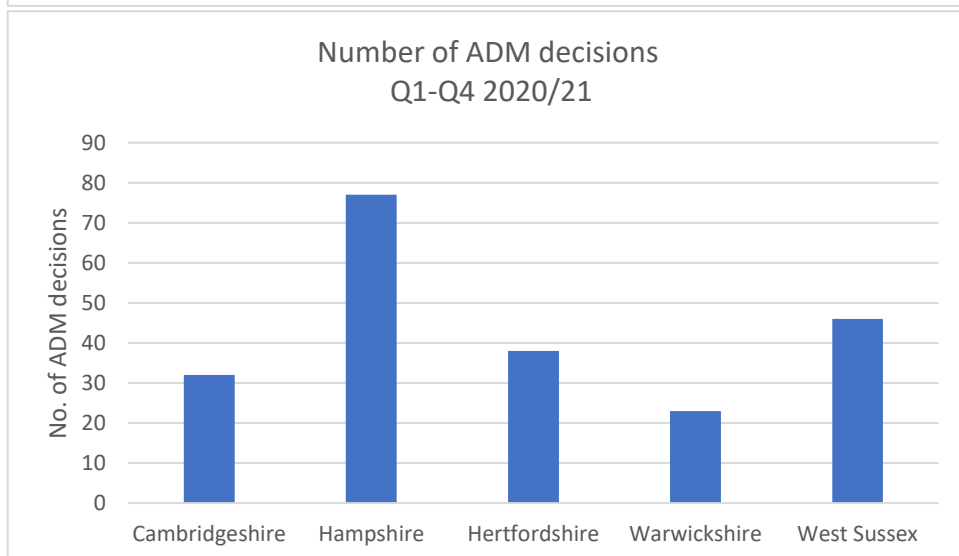
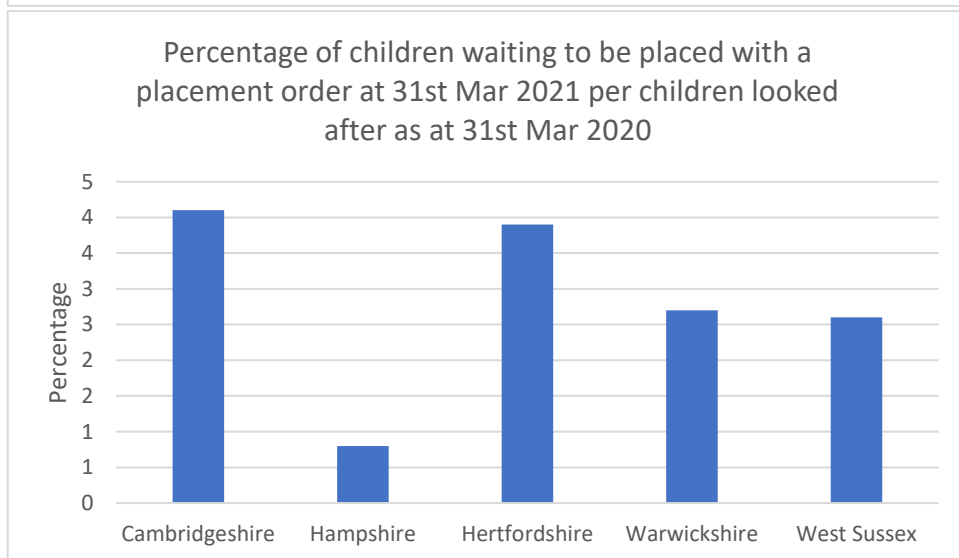
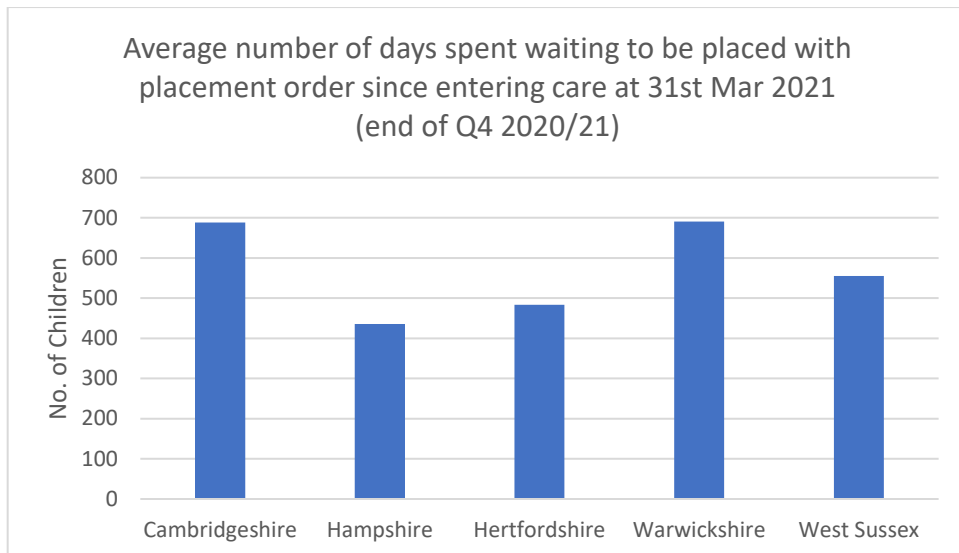


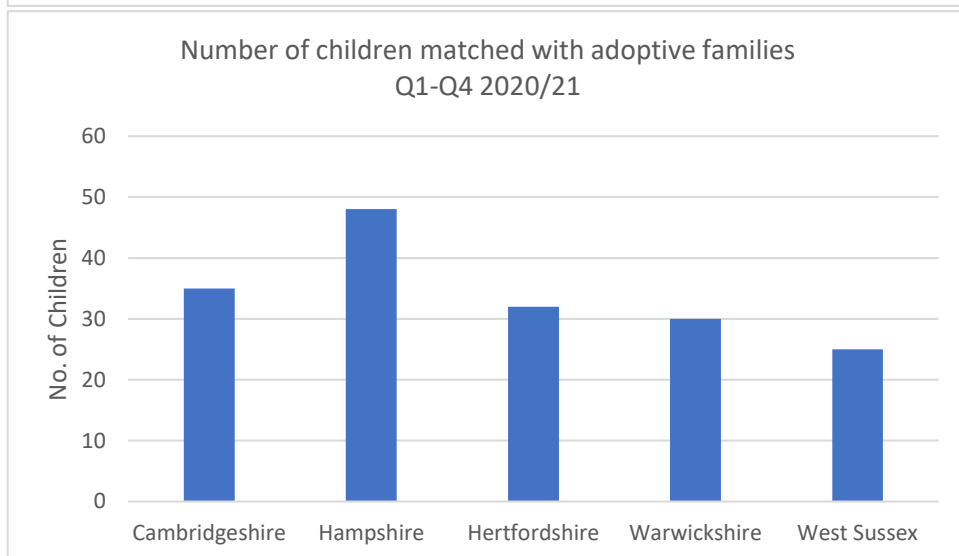
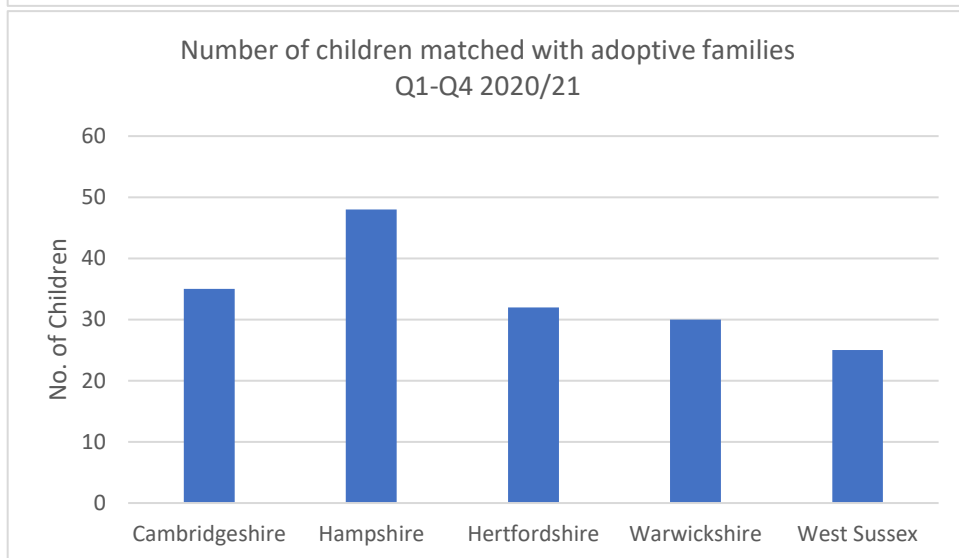
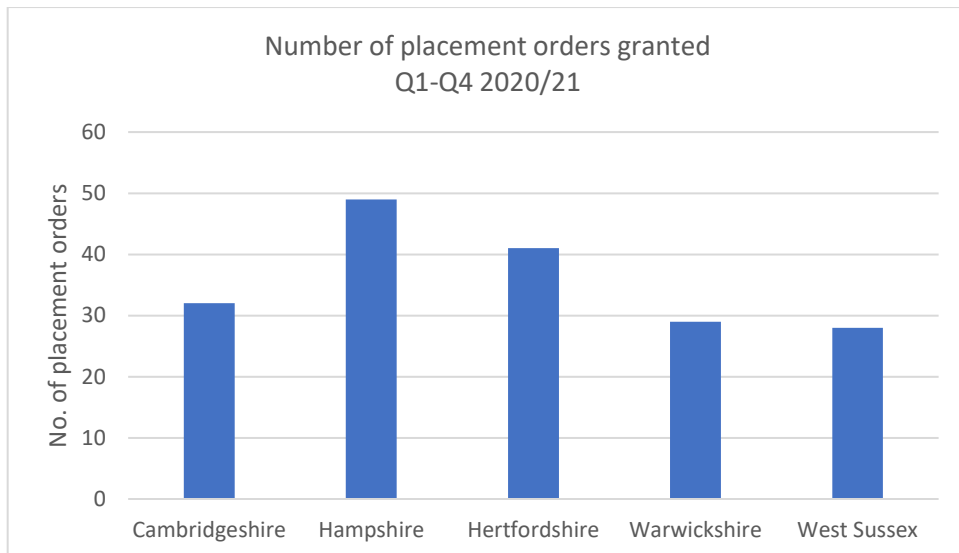


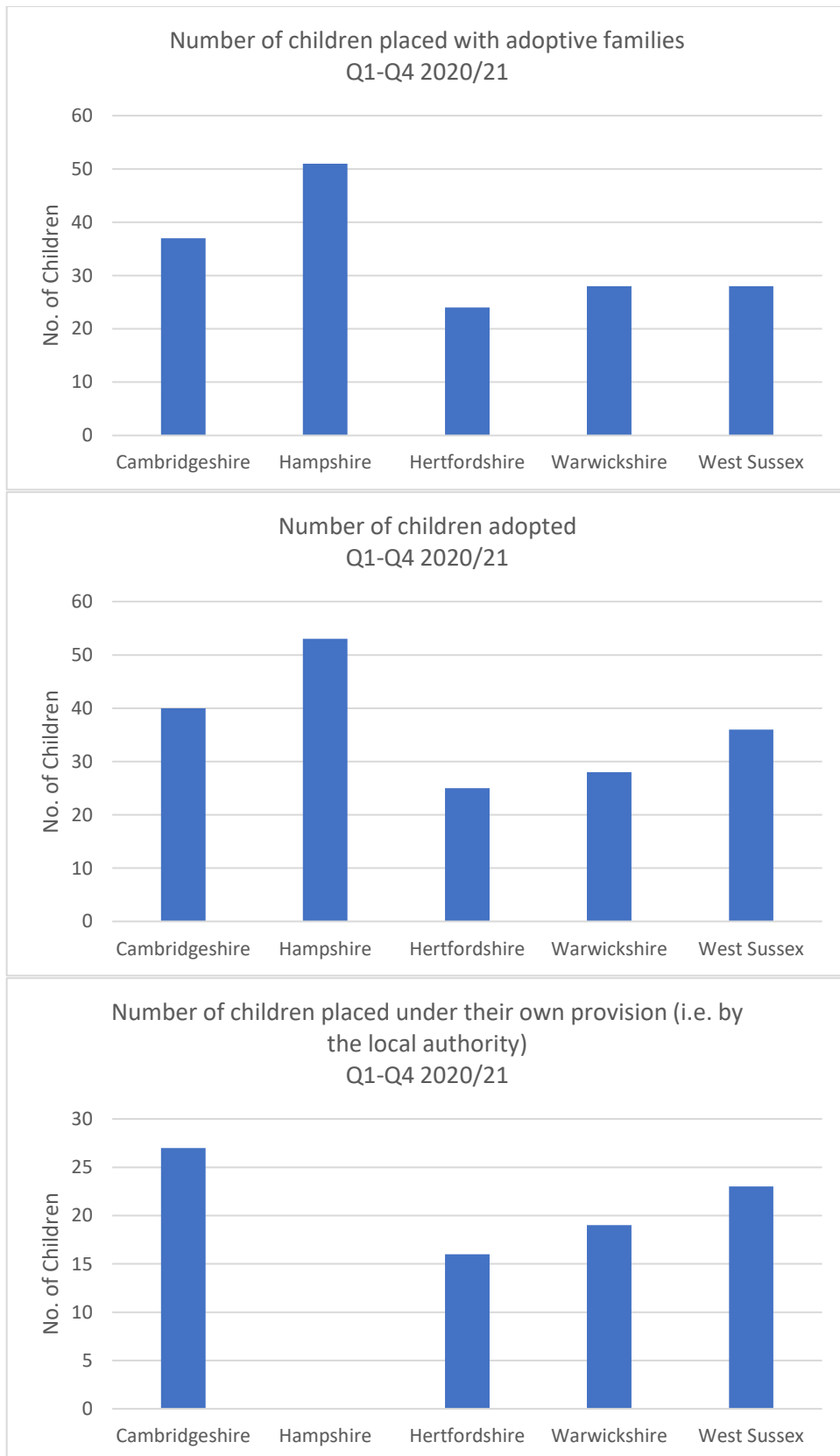


## Appendix B – ASLGB Data SN Comparison - Cambridgeshire

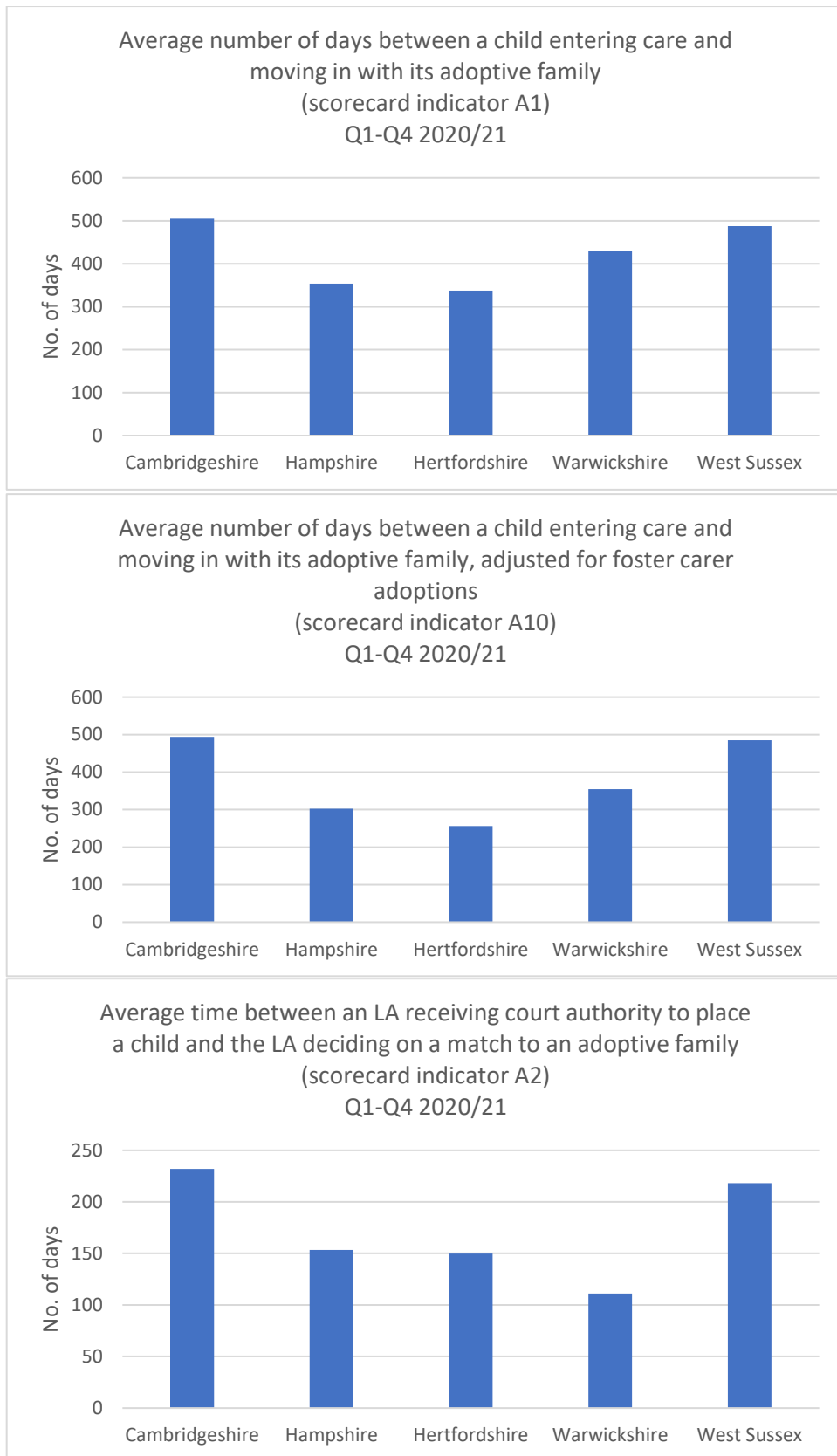












## **Appendix C Marketing Strategy 2022-2023**

**See Marketing, Communication & Recruitment Strategy 2022-2023 Attached**

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH  
ADOPTION  
ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE PANEL  
REPORT – ANNUAL**

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022**

## **1.0 Introduction**

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Adoption, Regional Adoption Agency, was formed and was established from 01 December 2020.

The Adoption and Permanence Panels from both Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council have come together to form one Adoption and Permanence Panel for the RAA.

The detail and statistics for this report are for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Adoption Agency Adoption and Permanence Panel.

All adoption agencies are required by law to have an Adoption Panel, the key role of which is to provide independent scrutiny of the proposals presented by an Adoption Agency. The Panel is asked to determine whether all the issues have been appropriately clarified and whether the proposal is sound, and to make a recommendation to an Agency Decision Maker (ADM) accordingly.

The proposals placed before the Adoption Panel are:

- The suitability of applicants to become adoptive parents, as presented in the Prospective Adopters Report,
- The match between a child or children and approved adopters, as presented in the Adoption Placement Report (APR) with the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) and Child's Permanence Report (CPR),
- The plan that a relinquished child be adopted, as presented in the Child's Permanence Report (CPR),
- The Panel will also consider the renewed approval or termination of approval for adopters who have not been matched with a child after 3 years; and a 'Brief Report', i.e., the case made by the Agency that an applicant or applicants is/are not suitable to adopt.

Adoption Panels have the discretion to offer advice to the relevant Agency about:

- The approval range for prospective adopters (i.e., the number, age range and needs of a child or children to be matched),
- The preparation of applicants for Fostering for Adoption,
- The arrangements the Adoption Agency/local authority proposes to make for allowing any person contact with the child.

## **2.0 Adoption Panel**

The Adoption Agencies' Statutory Guidance requires that each Adoption Agency must maintain a 'central list' of persons it considers suitable to be a member of an Adoption Panel. The Panel's business can only be conducted if at least 5 members are present, including the Chair or vice-Chair and a social work representative.

The central list membership stands at 24 active members:

Central List Membership (as of 30th March 2022)

Gary Shorter	<b>Independent Chair (social worker, adopter, and foster carer)</b>
Fernley Copping	<b>Independent Member/Vice chair/Independent Chair</b>
Lesley Hamilton	<b>Independent Panel Chair (Birth Parent)</b>
Jackie Fernandez	<b>Independent Panel Chair (Adopter)</b>
Mervyn Cowdell	<b>Independent Member</b>
Cathie McCulloch	<b>Social Worker, PCC</b>
Sue Hogg	<b>Independent Member (foster carer)</b>
Kathryn Moore	<b>Independent Panel Member (adopter)</b>
Alison Cotterill	<b>Social Work Rep, PCC</b>
Christopher Offiler	<b>Independent Panel Member</b>
Geraldine Moyo	<b>Independent Panel Member/Social Worker</b>
Sabina Giga	<b>Independent Panel Member</b>
Deborah Ward	<b>Independent Panel Member (adopted person)</b>
Jackie Venables	<b>Independent Panel Member (foster carer)</b>
Horia Astalos	<b>Independent Social Worker</b>
Stephen Cook	<b>Independent Member (Adopted Adult)</b>

Patricia Cullen	<b>Independent Social Worker</b>
Rayna Wallis	<b>Independent Member (Adopter)</b>
Louise Fraser	<b>Independent Member (adopted adult)</b>
Laura Dilkes	<b>Independent Social Worker</b>
Darren Jenkins	<b>Independent Member (Adopter)</b>
Elaine Barry	<b>Independent Social Worker</b>
Hugh Minty	<b>New member due to start. Independent Social Worker, (adopter and foster carer)</b>
Dr Rachel Bower	<b>Independent Panel Member &amp; Medical Adviser (Designated Doctor for LAC)</b>

The Regional Adoption Agency Adoption and Permanence Panel has a core membership of highly skilled, knowledgeable, committed individuals from diverse professional backgrounds including adopters, adopted adults and a birth parent.

Dr Tim Ladbrooke, Medical Adviser, provides adult medical advice to the Agency. Dr Rachel Bower focuses on children's medicals for Cambridgeshire County Council and when available sits on Panel for matches. Dr Gregory and Dr Augustic provide focuses on children's medicals for Peterborough City Council. Dr Bower, Dr Gregory, or Dr Augustic meet with prospective adopters for each child to go through the child's and their family's medical history as far as it is known and provide comprehensive medical reports for adopters and Panel.

Panel members have been appointed subject to relevant references and have up to date enhanced DBS checks. There was no programme of member appraisals in place during the period before the current Panel Adviser took up the role. Individual Panel member appraisals are planned to take place in May 2022 and will be ongoing until all are completed. Feedback invited from Panel members will form part of the discussion, drawing in members' reflections (they each will be asked to complete a self-assessment) and observations of working with individual Chairs.

All Panel Chair appraisals were completed in December 2021.

The Panel members who sit regularly demonstrate a high level of commitment and passion for their role, and the recommendations made for prospective adopters and children reflect members' broad range of expertise and experience. Panel members are nearly always well-prepared and prompt for meetings and seek to contribute

helpful feedback to the agencies. It is also appreciated that Panel members have been accommodating and patient as new Panel processes are established.

Panel does work effectively and meets the statutory requirements in relation to the central list, including the Panel being quorate for each meeting.

### Membership updates

Some Panel members, including one of the Panel Chairs, have been sitting on Cambridgeshire County Council Fostering Panel again this year which has the benefit of further helping them in reaching recommendations on fostering and adoption dual approval cases.

All Panel members have confirmed that they wish to continue as Panel members and be part of the central list for the RAA Adoption and Permanence Panel.

We have continued to look to increase and diversify our Panel members. As a result of this we have recruited three new Panel members: Laura Dilkes, Elaine Barry, and Darren Jenkins. Laura is a qualified Social Worker with a long-standing experience in Adoption and Fostering. Laura joined Panel in July 2021 and has been a regular member of Panel. Elaine Barry is also a qualified Social Worker and currently sits on other adoption and fostering panels and works for ARU with support for Step Up To Social Work students. Elaine joined us in October 2021. Darren Jenkins is an adoptive father and has adopted 2 children on separate adoption applications. He brings the valued adoptive family view to Panel and is keen to provide a critically helpful view for Panel. He joined us in October 2021.

In March 2022 Hugh Minty joined us too, he is an experienced social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer who is also an adoptive parent and foster carer. Hugh has been observing panels and will be starting to attend panel as a member shortly.

There have been no Panel members leaving the Panel in the last 12-month period.

### **3.0 Panel operation**

Panel is provided with written legal advice in advance for adoption matches by Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council Legal Services and this is presented to Panel.

There are 2 full time Panel administrators' posts; however, this has been an area of difficulty. Tracey Roberts was employed as an agency worker and was very experienced in the role but left in March 2022. A new full time worker Tracey Fifield started March 2022. Due to unexpected circumstances, Kristal remains unable to return as planned.

Benjamin Ness, agency worker began working for 2.5 days to support the service; however, this is temporary only as he will be ending his employment from July. A second full time post will hopefully be filled over the summer. Having 2 full time Panel Administrators will greatly improve the running of panels and enable the advisor to focus on development of the service.

#### **4.0 Agency Advisor role**

Between March 2021- February 2022 Panel advice has been provided by Joanne Banks, Head of the Regional Adoption Agency, following Andy Cussell's departure in March 2021. There has been active review of the role of the Panel advisor and in September 2021 the job was re-evaluated to include providing a role around Practice Standards for the RAA.

Jade Cullum was appointed as Agency Advisor in February 2022. Panel advice has been provided by Jade Cullum from this point on. Jade Cullum had worked as an advanced practitioner in Peterborough adoption team for 9 years and then as a Children's Guardian/Family Court advisor in Cafcass prior to joining the RAA.

The Should be placed for adoption processes have been a focus of work for the AA and service manager of the RAA in liaison with medical advisors, ADM and legal. This was to support robust systems being in place (noting importance of the Somerset Judgement) and aligning PCC and CCC process. A new practice guide, process flow chart for social workers and new templates have been created. There is currently a period of consultation before these are shared across teams.

#### **5.0 Panel processes**

Since the RAA started in December 2020, we have continued to operate as a paperless Panel and use Huddle or SharePoint as the method to securely share files. We are looking to move solely to using SharePoint and are creating a RAA Adoption & Permanence Panel SharePoint site.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, it was not possible for Panel to meet in a physical space. Panel has been operating successfully on a virtual platform, Microsoft Teams. We have maintained a quoracy of five members. Panel meetings continue to be virtual currently. The AA will be reviewing this over the next year.

The online panel processes have been continuously monitored and streamlined to offer continuity and same level of scrutiny across panels; the processes continue to be revised by the Agency Advisor and chairs.

With Panel operating on a virtual platform the Panel Chair and AA meet new applicants to have a pre-Panel discussion prior to joining Panel on the day. This discussion notes how panel will function, strengths in their application and question themes that will be asked. The applicants are then offered an opportunity to discuss with their social worker if they wished. Cameras are kept on by the Panel Chair, Panel member asking the question and applicants and their social workers. This is to assist with applicants being able to respond to questions without multiple images of people and uncertainty of who to direct answers to.

A system for Panel to feed back to the Agency on the quality of reports on a case-by-case basis has been established since March 2015 and has proved beneficial to the Agency and to Social Workers. This is an area where additional value could be obtained as the uptake on completion remains low.



Minutes: The format of the Panel minutes has been standardised by the new Panel admin in post during the reporting period. Draft minutes are sent for an accuracy check to the Chair and agency advisor before being then sent to Panel members.

ADM decisions: The Adoption Panel makes recommendations to the agency and there is a statutory requirement for the ADM to make their decision within 7 working days of receiving the finalised minutes. This is being achieved.

## **6.0 Panel Training**

Adoption National Minimum Standards (NMS) set out several requirements regarding the training and induction of panel members:

*NMS 23.13. The adoption agency provides each person on the central list with an opportunity of observing an adoption panel meeting before they sit on an adoption panel.*

*NMS 23.14. Each person on the central list is given induction training which is completed within 10 weeks of being included on the central list.*

*NMS 23.15. Each person on the central list is given the opportunity of attending an annual joint training day with the agency's adoption staff.*

*NMS 23.16. Each person on the central list has access to appropriate training and skills development and is kept abreast of relevant changes to legislation, regulation, and guidance.*

These standards have been met.

A Panel training day took place in February 2022. This was provided by New Family Social and focused on LGBT+ diversity awareness to aid Panel discussions. This was well attended by Panel members.

Panel Chairs attend the quarterly CoramBAAF meetings for Adoption Panel Chairs.

Jade Cullum has joined the Panel advisor Forum and attends quarterly CoramBAAF Panel forum meetings.

Panel chairs, Agency advisor and management within PCC/CCC have regular meetings (Panel Advisory Group).

Panel Chairs have 3 monthly supervision/discussion meetings facilitated by the agency advisor.

Planning is underway for Panel training in 2022 with various aspects currently being explored by the new agency advisor. Within SharePoint there is a folder for Panel members to access files and videos

The next training event will address therapeutic models used in adoption support and the date is over the summer period.

The AA is currently exploring options for in person workshops/service days.

Online training via Cambridgeshire County Council's learning and development team is being explored by the AA.

During the year Panel welcomed several social workers, health professionals in training and new Panel members as observers

### **7.0 Panel Business – Number of Panels held**

	01.04.2021 to 31.03.2022
Total Panels	41
Cases Considered	50 approvals; 57 matches; 2 De-Registration 2 Relinquished baby plans

The Adoption Panel has met 2-3 days per month. Two Panel meetings were cancelled in the period 01.04.20 to 30.09.21 due to lack of cases being booked.

Between September to April 2022 one Panel meeting was cancelled in this reporting period due to lack of cases being booked.

We have not needed to increase the number of Panel meetings that were originally planned; however, would have the ability to do this as needed.

### **8.0 Panel feedback**

Social workers, Panel observers and adopters continue to be invited to provide feedback on Panel activity. This is always considered by Panel as part of its post-Panel reflection with discussion and careful consideration about whether any changes are necessary. Few feedback forms have been received in the last year. Applicants are asked to electronically return their feedback forms. 10 responses between Sept 2021 and April 2022 have been received from adopters and feedback remains largely positive.

The agency advisor will work with Panel admin to look at increasing feedback numbers and quality from adopters and other professionals.

Feedback from September to April from 4 different applicants

*1-Our feelings about our experience of the Panel are overwhelmingly positive. The questions that were asked to us were fair and gave us a good opportunity to express ourselves. The Panel members were all so friendly and certainly made us both feel at ease.*

2-Adopters have favourably commented on how the meeting is managed in a virtual environment

*We were given plenty of time to answer peoples questioned and we very much liked the way the only person on the screen was the person asking the question. This was fair less intimidating for us.*

3-Virtual panels have been seen as positive by applicants

*With panel being virtually we feel that we were more at ease as we were in our own home and would have been more relaxed especially as there is distance involved.*

*4-We both felt very comfortable and were made to feel welcome during the panel, which put us both at ease and helped us to confidently provide answers to all the questions.*

## **9.0 Approved Adopters**

	1.4.21 to 30.3.22
Number of Adopters Approved (Households)	44 mainstream adoption approvals and 6 Early Permanence dual approvals

## **10. Ethnicity of Adopters**

Ethnicity	Number of Approved Households 01.04.21 to 30.03.22
White British	39
British Black African/White European	2
White African/White British	3
White European/White British	3
Asian	1
Eastern European	1
American/White British	1

The majority of adoptive applicants were white British heterosexual couples. 6 of the approved adopters were single female; 2 of the approved households was a same sex female couple; 5 of the approved households were same sex male couples.

### **11.0 De-registrations**

Two de-registration case was presented to Panel in the period 01.04.20 to 31.03.22. The adoptive couple had experienced employment changes and had decided that it was not the right time for them to pursue adoption and they withdrew. Panel noted this withdrawal of the couple as approved adopters. One case was a single adopter who had a child placed with her but unfortunately due to the complex needs of the child, the placement had ended. She subsequently moved to Germany and decided to withdraw as an adopter.

### **12.0 Quality of Reports**

The overall quality of reports is good, and this is reflected in most of the feedback sheets produced by the Panel on each case heard.

Panel Advisor and Chairs will continue to feed back to the Agency on the quality of reports received and the timescales of bringing cases to matching and approval. Panel would also welcome increased feedback from social workers attending.

Agency Advisor and Service Manager have been working to ensure reports are compliant and of an acceptable level to be heard at panel.

Within the Child Permanence Report ? (CPR) social workers must sign to confirm whether they have met the regulatory requirements for the qualifications of the workers writing reports, and whether the information required in Schedules1, 4 and 5 of the AAR is contained in the adoption reports.

Panel compile feedback on each case presented to them, which is reported back to the agency.

The Agency Advisor is aware that many agencies also provide a rating for reports to provide a more qualitative and informed judgement on how reports have improved or deteriorated over time, and this is being explored.

### **13.0 Prospective Adopter Reports (PAR)**

The establishment of a more concise PAR has also become embedded in practice and is welcomed by Panel.

The PAR usually evidences well how prospective adopters can meet the needs of the child.

There is clarity and thoroughness, with clear ecomaps and genograms supplied. PARs are now more routinely explicit about whether Concurrency and Foster to Adopt have

been explored and discussed with the applicants. There is evidence that Fostering for Adoption had not only been discussed by the social worker, but that the applicants understood the implications. Feedback from Preparation Course facilitators is detailed and specific. The Agency has worked to ensure a consistency of format, content and quality of the PARs presented to Panel. It is positive to see that the majority of adopters have gained experience of working with children through volunteering when needed.

#### **14.0 Child Permanence Reports (CPR)**

The quality of the Child Permanence Reports seen by Panel continues to vary; however, Panel has seen some improvement over the past year with some CPRs being of good quality.

There have been some concerns raised around the quality of the CPRs in the sense of a clear narrative on the child's journey in placement as different workers have contributed towards the report. This has been fed back and will become an area for further work.

Areas for continuous review by social workers, particularly prior to matching, are the consistent inclusion of parents' views and post adoption contact plans, in particular contact plans with siblings. As much background information as possible on a child's birth parents and siblings or halfsiblings, including photographs, is obtained.

There is ongoing work needed in respect of allocated social workers' ownership of the CPR regardless if written by someone else. This included attending to tasks from LAC and adoption medicals set out by the medical adviser.

The AA will be addressing the concerns regarding the Child's Permanence Report needing to be updated before matching to reflect the child and their birth family situation since the making of Care and Placement Orders. This should include the final position of the Guardian, the person tasked to represent the child's best interests in court, and whose view is therefore relevant to that child.

#### **15.0 Adoption Placement Reports (APR)**

Panel has noted-

- The APRs set out the child's journey to adoption, their needs and the family finding process well.
- The contributions by adopters were valued in the report.
- There continues to be concern regarding the progress of Life Story work when a match comes for consideration at Panel. The Panel Chairs understand that there is now a dedicated team within the local authority helping with progressing life story work in a timely way.
- APRs do not always include details of prospective adopters' plans for adoption leave and future childcare plans. Adoption Support Plans would benefit from setting out more clearly the longer-term plans.
- Transitions planning could be further addressed, and the agency adviser did meet with the adoption managers to discuss how this could be done. It is very

helpful for Panel to have a full picture of the contact with adopters and foster carers, play dates, telephone calls or other pre panel contact there has been.

### **16.0 Adoption Matches**

	01.04.21 to 31.03.22
Number of children matched	64 children

\* Included in this figure are 8 x sibling group of 2 and 3 x sibling group of 3.

### **17.0 Adoptive Matches at Panel**

<b>Cambridgeshire children matched with adopters -</b>	01.04.21 to 31.03.22
Cambridgeshire County Council Adopters	47
Voluntary Adoption Agency Placements	5
Other Local Authority/RAA Adoption Agency Placements	3

### **18.0 Relinquished baby plans**

	01.04.21 to 31.03.22
Relinquished baby plans	2

### **19.0 Adoption Disruptions (Cambridgeshire children)**

	01.04.21 to 31.03.22
Adoption Disruptions	0 child

There have been no disruptions of adoptive placements between April 2021 and April 2022.

### **20.0 Looking forward**

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Regional Adoption Agency has been running since December 2020 and throughout that period there has been a smooth transition for the Adoption and Permanence Panel. The Panels have gradually come together with central lists, processes, documents, and practice being reviewed and merging into the RAA Panel. This work is being continued by the AA, Jade Cullum, who has been in post 3 months.

The Panel Advisor will be exploring how to communicate regular updates for Panel members detailing progress of approved adopters with linking/matching and how matches heard at Panel are progressing. This task - relatively easy for a single Panel constituted from a small central list of members and serving a single local authority pre-regionalisation - has proved challenging where Panel line-ups vary widely. Nevertheless, it is recognised that for Panel members a short update on the progress of a match to which they have given much time and care helps to 'complete the circle' and brings its own reward. While recognising the constraints on social workers' time to provide updates for Panel, the Panel Advisor plans to introduce a level of reporting back for some cases if not all.

Panel will continue to respond to new case law to ensure a full and reasoned recommendation for adoption matches.

There are plans for training in July/Aug 2022 but there needs to be consideration about a training plan moving forward with the options of shorter workshop sessions to review practice being explored. We believe there is a strong argument for Social Workers joining some of these training sessions so the learning can be across the RAA.

Panel has been held virtually since April 2020 using the platform of Microsoft Teams and although there have been some technical challenges and it has been necessary for all to adjust to working on a virtual platform, Panel has always operated on the dates planned and no cases have been delayed being considered by Panel. We have been able to use the platform to ensure a better experience for adopters attending. A challenge moving forward is to consider the options for future Panel meetings whether virtual or if a return to a physical space should be considered and where the location might be.

The wider context of adoption panels across the area appears to be to remain virtual. In feedback from Panel members there appears to be a majority who prefer virtual and several who have stated they would not necessarily continue to be Panel members if the Panels reverted to in person.

Adjusting to a post-covid way of working while ensuring the robustness and credibility of the Panel role is still ongoing. This will be evidenced through further learning around, and development of, the potential of virtual platforms on the part of Panel Chairs, members, and staff alike, all of whom will continue to review the effectiveness and limitations of Panel meetings held online. The needs of Panel members to feel part of a team through in-person events will also be considered, with plans for events being explored currently.

## **21.0 Chairs' Comments**

*Panel has continued to operate well despite the challenges brought about by Covid and the changes in the admin team. We are fortunate to have a new permanent Panel Advisor who is rapidly putting in place measures which will improve quality of reports presented to Panel and ensure regular training and appraisal programmes. Although adopters, social workers and Panel members have embraced virtual working and can see many advantages, it is of concern that the lack of personal contact has an impact on Panel cohesion – the sense of a 'team' – especially as the two formerly separate panels have come together without meeting in person. It is therefore good to know that there are plans for getting together. Lesley Hamilton*

*Panels have continued to run smoothly in the main and this report is an accurate reflection of panel business and activity. We have seen an improvement in the CPRs over the last few months. I would say most are of a good quality. CPR's that can sometimes lack flow tend to be those that have had more than one author or are updated, and the updates are not always clear. I am pleased that panel have had access to training as this had been a little sporadic and it is very good news that panel members now have access to an online portal where they can pick training events that they think will develop their knowledge to bring to panel. Panels have remained remote, and I think panel members have adjusted well to this. We continue to offer a friendly and welcoming environment in order to put applicants and social workers at their ease. The applicants seem to quite like the remote method as they are in their own homes, and it is therefore perhaps less daunting for them. The process has been adapted to fit and although it is never quite the same it is effective and runs smoothly in general. As chairs we always seek to ensure that feedback to the authors of any reports over improvement is done constructively and with care in order that they do not feel less valued and the massive amount of work they have put in remains recognised. There have been changes to those involved in making panels work with a new Agency Advisor and Admin staff. This has of course had an impact on panel members as they adjust but panel remains functional and in my view is run exceptionally well. I have been pleased to see new panel members coming on board and adding diversity and differing knowledge to discussion" Gary Shorter*

*It has been noticeable to me that a very positive feature of the initial development of the new RAA has been the willingness of chairs and members to work together with the agency to build an effective and consistent process. Whilst upholding the independent role of panel in scrutinising and challenging assessments and plans, a keenness to work together has been promoted by both panel and agency in the interests of securing the best possible outcomes. Fernley Coping*

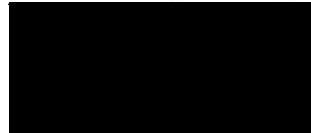
*Over the last year, we formed Cambridge and Peterborough RAA. We spent the first few months ensuring all panels had similar structures in terms of how they were chaired and a cross-fertilisation of panel members across the counties - which has proved to be a success. The quality of the CPRs and PARs are improving, and I look forward to the year ahead. Jackie Fernandez*





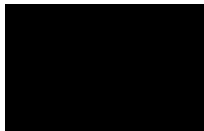
Lesley Hamilton

Panel Chair



Jackie Fernandez

Panel Chair



Gary Shorter

Panel Chair



Fernley Copping

Panel Vice Chair



Jade Cullum

Regional Adoption Agency Advisor

Date. 30/5/2022

Written by Agency Advisor Jade Cullum in consultation with all Chairs.

## Appendix E: Service Plan 2022-2023

<b>Key Performance Indicators – 2022-2023</b>	
<b>Recruitment &amp; Assessment Of Adopters (CC)</b>	
Number of Enquiries	300
Number of Registration of Interest Received	50
Number of Adopters Approved	45
Timeliness of stage 1	18% completed in 4 months
Timeliness of stage 2	50% completed in 4 months

<b>Children (TM)</b>	
Number of children with a plan for adoption	CCC - 36 PCC - 18
Number of children placed for adoption	CCC - 34 PCC - 16
Number of children adopted	CCC – 40 PCC - 20
Proportion of the children exiting care via adoption	18%
Number of Early Permanence Placements	10
A2 - Time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family, for children who have been adopted (days) – A2	National Average - 182 CCC - 206 PCC - 126
A10 - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted (days) – A10	National Average – 445 CCC - 450 PCC - 404

<b>Adoption Support (KJ)</b>	
Referrals to be triaged by TM	<b>5 working days</b>
Referrals for support average waiting time	<b>4 months</b>
Initial Assessments completed in 4 months	<b>80%</b>

*Joanne Banks (JB) – Head of the Regional Adoption Agency*

*Chris Clipston (CC) - Team Manager*

*Tom Hey (TH) – Team Manager*

*Kelly Johnson (KJ) - Team Manager*

*Jade Cullum (JC) – Agency Advisor*

*Kat Heath (KH) – Senior Practitioner*

*Tony Darnell (TD) – Marketing and Commination Manager*

*Lottie Ettling (LE) – Recruitment Officer*

Objective	Action	Leads	Outcome	Performance Indicator	Target date for delivery
Communication & Recruitment (TD & CC)					
Increased adopters, specifically got for harder to place children – Siblings, children with additional needs, early permanence.	Social media presence to expand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Regular social media posts</li><li>Dedicated Instagram Page and Twitter Handle.</li><li>Link to case studies of adopters</li></ul>	TD, CC	Increase in the number of enquire in total and a higher proportion of interesting in adopting harder to place children.	Number of Enquiries	Review every quarter
	Improve the useability of the website.	TD			December 2022
	Early Permanence Video for external and internal marketing	TD, KH			September 2022
Ensure Adopters views central.	Month long campaigns to promote adoption	TD, CC			March 2023
	Attend community events	CC			March 2023
	Develop relationships with external partners to promote adoption overall as well as with those employed – including (but not limited to) fertility clinics, hospitals, police force, fire brigade and community hubs.	TD, CC			March 2023
	Quarterly Newsletters				May 2022 onwards
	Adopters to attend Information sessions.				November 2022
Assessment of Adopters (CC)					

<b>Recruiting Adopters – creating a stronger resource in line with the children’s needs.</b>	<p>Recruitment Officer to take a lead on responding to enquiries and ensure the service focuses on what they can offer children. They will remain the consistent link for adopters throughout the enquiry process.</p> <p>Information sessions to be held virtually and in person and bring in the adopter voice into this.</p>	LE	Increase the number of adopters in assessment and in the number of those open to adopt harder to place children.	<p>Increase number of enquiries.</p> <p>Higher conversion rates</p>	
<b>Consistency in practice</b>	<p>Review of processes to identify strengths and areas for potential improvements.</p> <p>Feedback from adopters at different stages of the process</p> <p>Handbook of processes – internal for the RAA as well as clear outline for adopters</p> <p>Handbook for Adoption Panel to prepare adopters for panel.</p> <p>Timeframe for assessments – system to be embedded to monitor timeframes and highlight concerns.</p>	<p>CC</p> <p>CC, JC</p> <p>CC</p> <p>JC</p> <p>CC</p>	<p>Consistent experiences for adopters.</p> <p>Regional Dashboard to aid performance monitoring</p>	<p>Complaints</p> <p>Timeliness of approval</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>September 2023</p>

<b>Comprehensive Training programme for adopters</b>	Review the training content	CC, KH,	Brochure of training on offer		August 2022
	Increase the involvement of adopters in the training	CC, KH	All training courses to involve adopters attending to present sections		March 2023
	Expand therapeutic training input – explore running Foundations For Attachment with the Adoption Support Team	CC, KJ	Support families to access training early in placement to strengthen relationships	Disruptions & Fragile Placement numbers remain very low	March 2023.
<b>Early Permanence (CC, TH, KH)</b>					
<b>Increase the number of placements.</b>	Monthly linking meetings between Family Finding & Recruitment & Assessment	CC, TH	Identify early links.	Number of EP placements.	Review every quarter
	Close working between children's Safeguarding	CC, TH, KH,	Joint meetings to review potential links – PPM's and Unborn Baby Panels.		May 2022 onwards
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attend Permanence Planning Meetings and Unborn baby Panels</li> <li>offering workshops and sessions on Early Permanence</li> </ul>	TH			January 2023
	All UBB's to be monitored by Family Finding from referral.	KH			May 2022
	Family Finding to have a dedicated EP Lead.	JB, CC			May 2022  November 2022

	Develop links with CAFCASS to promote Early Permanence				
<b>Improve practice in line with Early Permanence Quality Mark</b>	<p>Review of practice and process in line with Coram's guidance and Early Permanence Quality Mark.</p> <p>Work towards applying for the Early Permanence Quality Mark.</p>			<p>Number of EP placements.</p>	<p>June 2022</p> <p>March 2023</p>
<b>Linking &amp; Matching (TH)</b>					
<b>Consistency in practice</b>	<p>Review of processes for linking &amp; matching to identify strengths and areas for potential improvements.</p> <p>Create process guide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transitions plans for children</li> <li>• External linking</li> <li>• Play days</li> </ul> <p>Support Plans – review and ensure they are clear and child focused.</p> <p>Family Finding to play a QA role with Safeguarding and CiC around plans for children.</p>	<p>CC</p> <p>CC, JC</p> <p>CC</p> <p>JC</p>	Consistent experiences for adopters, foster carers and children's social workers		<p>March 2023</p> <p>March 2023</p>

<b>Clear Family Finding Role</b>	<p>Review the role of the Family Finding Social Worker</p> <p>Consider role post placements – EP, internal and external placements.</p> <p>Better communication between Safeguarding – particularly for expectations during court process. TH to raise at PPM's.</p>	TH	Clarity to CiC and Safeguarding on the role of the Family Finding SW and ensure FF can be proactive in informing the child's care plan.	<p>Number of Adoption Order Granted</p> <p>Number of children with a plan for Adoption</p>	September 2022
<b>Cross RAA working</b>	<p>Meet with TM for neighbouring RAA for potential Interagency linking – this to include sharing adopter and child profiles and consider profile events as necessary.</p> <p>Also share profiles of children coming through for adoption to inform recruitment strategies.</p>		<p>Speed up matching for children with local adopters</p> <p>Potential cost savings with mutual interagency placements</p> <p>Inform future plans for recruiting adopters.</p>	Timescales for children waiting for adoption.	June 2022
<b>Adoption Panel (JC)</b>					

<b>Ensure effectiveness of panel.</b>	Panel training Programme to be developed for 2022-2023	JC	Ensure panel members practice and knowledge if kept up to date.  Any feedback that improvements needed - respond to and jointly as a management group.  JC to share ideas with panel chairs and create implementation plan.		September 2022
	Ensure appraisals take place on a yearly basis and practice concerns are raised.	JC			March 2023
	Review Process for panel to identify strengths and areas for potential improvements. Meetings between JC, CC, TH to allow a continuous review. JC to meet with the Panel Chairs on quarterly basis.	JC			June 2022
	Feedback from adopters on their experiences via feedback from sent out.	JC			May 2022
	Meet with other panel advisors to inform development of panel.	JC			June 2022
<b>Panel Membership</b>	Continuous recruitment of panel members to ensure we have sufficient and robust panel members.	JC	Sufficient panel members to ensure panel can take place. Panel recommendations & ADM decision to align.  More diverse panel members.		March 2023
	Increase diversity of panel members. JC to link with traveller community for panel membership.	JC			March 2023
<b>Child's Voice</b>	Exploration of ways to bring the child's voice into panel. JC to discuss with CC, TH, and panel chairs.	JC	Minutes from panel include child's voice		January 2023



Adoption Support (KJ)					
<b>Consistency in practice</b>	Review of services and processes to identify strengths and areas for potential improvements.	CC	Consistent experiences for adopters.	Waiting time for an assessment.	March 2023
	Practice guidance to be completed including timelines for assessments	CC, JC		Timeliness of assessment s	March 2023
	Lead workers for:	CC	Clear process for each area. Earlier support for SG's.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-order Adoption support</li> <li>• Special Guardianship Support</li> <li>• Early support and advice</li> <li>• Postbox</li> <li>• BRC &amp; Intermediary</li> </ul>	JC	Clear package of support for universal services. Clarity on number of post box exchanges. Decline in the number outstanding		September 2022 December 2022

<b>Increase Therapeutic offer</b>	A SP to embed Trauma informed practice into the team and RAA via workshops	KJ, LB	Assessments use the Trauma Informed Practice in their analysis.	Case file audits	March 2023
	Therapeutic parenting to be baseline to practice – all workers to be DDP Level 1 Trained	KJ	All workers are trained.		December 2022
	Offer Foundation For Attachment training for adopters and special guardians. A SP to take a lead.	KJ	Course dates are booked in.		March 2023
	Explore additional resource to team to enable team to offer therapeutic packages of support to families	JB	Business Case completed and reviewed.		September 2022
<b>Early Advice</b>	A SP to form link with locality teams and early help.	KJ	Meeting dates are booked to meet with locality managers.		March 2023
	Website to have links for advice and resources. Families at enquiry stage are offered a pack of resources whilst waiting.	KJ	Website has the links and the pack is available for all families enquiring.		December 2022

<b>ASF Framework</b>	JB to work with procurement team to complete the preparation for the framework.	JB	Procurement framework to be launched		March 2023  June 2022
<b>Regular Support Groups to be accessible</b>	<p>Monthly support groups to be available in variety of locations and with different focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stay and play with younger children.,</li> <li>• Parents only</li> <li>• Family groups</li> <li>• New placements</li> <li>• Special Guardians</li> </ul> <p>Brochure of the available support groups to share with adopters &amp; special guardians</p> <p>Children &amp; young people groups- link with the participation service for support</p>	<p>KJ</p> <p>KJ, CC</p> <p>KJ</p>	<p>Families have stronger local support networks</p> <p>More families accessing support groups</p> <p>Children &amp; Young people have a social network</p>	<p>Referrals for the A&amp;SG S Team.</p>	<p>September 2022</p> <p>November 2022</p> <p>January 2023</p>
<b>Quality Assurance (JC)</b>					

<b>Clear awareness of the quality of the written work of the RAA.</b>	Create an Audit Tool for the RAA.	JC	Clear awareness of the quantity and quality of the recording of the service.		June 2022
	Monthly audits completed by the RAA Management team initially on their own and then with the workers from January 2023	JB, KJ, CC, TH, JC			August 2022 January 2023
	Panel Chairs & Panel Advisor (JC) to feedback on themes on QA of paperwork from panel and feedback to relevant teams.	JC	Themes can feed into service action plan.		September 2022 March 2023
	Self-Assessment to be completed	JC & JB	Clear action plan for areas of concern of practice.		November 2022