



Regional Adoption Agency

# Annual Report 2022/23



August 2023



Gateshead Council



Newcastle City Council



Northumberland County Council



North Tyneside Council

North Tyneside Council



South Tyneside Council

South Tyneside Council

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## Executive Summary

This Annual Report provides an overview of the work of the Adopt North East Regional Adoption Agency during the period 01 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Adopt North East is responsible for adoption services on behalf of Gateshead Council, Newcastle City Council, Northumberland County Council, North Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Council. Created in response to the legal requirement that the authorities regionalise their adoption services, the vision and ambition of the five partner Local Authorities is for Adopt North East to achieve '**excellent adoption services that transform children's and families lives for the better**'.

Since December 2018 Adopt North East has had responsibility for recruiting, assessing and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and intercountry adoptions. The Agency also has primary responsibility for family finding for all children with adoption plans from the five partner Local Authorities. Adopt North East is also responsible for providing support to all parties affected by adoption, including adopted children, adopters, adopted adults and birth families.

The Report is divided into several subsections. Each section contains an infographic, some contextual information and then a narrative report for the year. This Annual Report is intended to be read in conjunction with the Annual Performance Report for 2022/23.

Performance information for 2022/23 evidences a remarkably consistent level of demand for forever families by the partnership. It also suggests that the partnership is not subject to year-on-year reductions in the number of children with plans of adoption reported nationally. This is consistent with the partnership's higher than national average children in care population. Unfortunately, over the year such robust demand for adoptive placements has not been matched by stable or increasing supply of available adopters. Regrettably the 2022/23 outturn represents the lowest number of applications to adopt received by the Agency since its start. Sadly, the cost-of-living crisis with its greater income, employment, and lifestyle uncertainty has undoubtedly suppressed interest in adopting, both for the Agency and nationally. Whilst there is some cause for cautious optimism that the numbers of assessments and approvals by the Agency are increasing within the new reporting period, it is nevertheless highly likely that recruitment will continue to be challenging in the year ahead. The Agency continue to do all that it can to meet this challenge, working in partnership with communications experts from North Tyneside Council and input from the National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group to recruit adopters from across the region and beyond.

In the last Annual Report, the Agency expressed an intention to 'leverage opportunities arising from the Department for Education's National Adoption Strategy

to contribute to its own improvement journey'. It has done so. During the reporting period, the Agency has successfully secured grant funding for two significant projects. Firstly, through a strategic partnership with the two other Regional Adoption Agencies in the North East of England, Adopt North East has secured funding to develop practice and increase the sufficiency of Early Permanence placements. Secondly, through a strategic partnership with the two other Regional Adoption Agencies and the Integrated Care Board for the North East and North Cumbria, the Agency has received funding to develop a Centre of Excellence for Adoption Support, enabling the creation of a Regional Multi-Disciplinary Team. As other grant opportunities emerge, the Agency will continue to seek to secure funding to improve and strengthen services for children and families.

The reporting period has also been noteworthy for two significant learning events. Firstly, Adopt North East commissioned a Peer Review from the Local Government Association (LGA) in relation to its governance arrangements and performance relating to adopter sufficiency. In early November 2022 a small team of experts in adoption led by an experienced ex-Director of Children's Services spent three days with Adopt North East and its partners, speaking to stakeholders and gathering information and views during Focus Groups, as well as from additional research and reading to form its findings. The LGA Team concluded:

***The peer team found a strong adoption service with some areas for development. They observed a professional, passionate, skilled and creative staff group who are well-managed and well-supported. Staff at Adopt North East appear to be working with contemporary adoption practice and introducing new models to improve practice and deliver the best outcomes for children. Adopt North East has strong workforce development offer including an extensive training programme and has achieved a high level of workforce stability... The peer team considers that after a challenging start, performance has been improving... The new organisation has, understandably, up until now focused on developing its own identity as a service which it has done successfully. Now the focus needs to shift to developing a shared culture across the wider partnership.***

These findings were a welcome confirmation of the progress made by the Agency since 2018 and a helpful challenge, particularly in relation to its need to work toward a shared culture across the partnership. The LGA Peer Team made nine formal recommendations. These have been accepted in full by the Agency and form part of its improvement plan for 2023/24.

The second significant learning event within the period for the Agency was, very sadly, the tragic death of Leiland-James Corkill. Leiland-James died in the care of Cumbria County Council whilst placed with adopters assessed and approved by the Council. One of the adopters was subsequently found guilty of his murder and jailed

for life. A Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership was undertaken. The Review made a number of recommendations relevant to practice by Adopt North East. These recommendations have been implemented. The death of Leiland-James represents a powerful reminder to the Agency of its primary role to safeguard and promote the welfare of children with whom it is working.

The reporting period is the Agency's fourth full year of operation. Between 01 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, Adopt North East:

- Matched **103** children
- Placed **103** children, **19** in Early Permanence Placements
- Supported **105** children to be adopted
- Received **366** Contacts about becoming an adopter
- Commenced **81** prospective adoptive families at Stage 1 of the process
- Approved **59** adopters
- Matched **90** adoptive families with children
- Received **278** Contacts for adoption support
- Supported **653** claims to the Adoption Support Fund with a value of over **£1.6m**
- Supported **59** birth families affected by adoption
- Supported **69** Adopted Adults

Over the year, the Agency has continued to mature in adoption expertise, with its stable staff group accessing no less than 287 separate training episodes. Following the Peer Review of Post Adoption Support at the end of the preceding period, the Agency has strengthened delivery of support to adoptive families, not least through changes to the case management system, initial response and commissioning of providers. The Agency also continues to greatly value the contribution of North East Adopters' Voice to its improvement journey and is grateful to its volunteer members and their commitment to working in partnership with Adopt North East to develop services in the best interests of children.

Despite such progress, there are inevitably a number of areas for further development in the year ahead, not least strengthening sufficiency planning by the partnership and the development of a shared culture. Given the performance outturn, the Agency will also need to be relentless in its work to recruit adopters, despite the challenging social context in which this must be done. The Agency will also continue to seize opportunities to innovate, including those presented by funding from the Department for Education.

To conclude, it is fair to say that Adopt North East has had mixed year – with strong progress in strategic partnerships, success in funding applications and significant assurance from a robust Peer Review process balanced against areas of weaker performance, particular in relation to adopter recruitment. As the impact of the pandemic and the Somerset Judgment fade, the Agency should and must remain absolutely focused on issues of sufficiency to maintain its incremental progress towards achieving **‘excellent adoption services that transform children’s and families lives for the better’**.

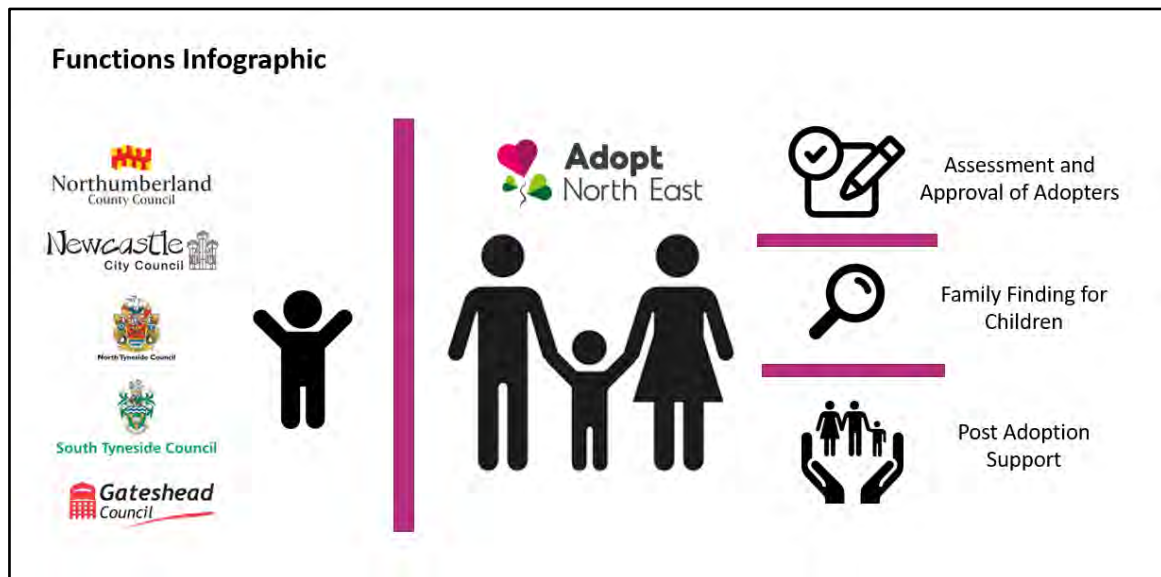
Finally, as acknowledged in previous Annual Reports, in a lengthy document it is often difficult to summarise an entire year let alone communicate the difference the Agency makes to those with whom we work. With consent, an adopted young person working with the Post Adoption Support Team, she shares her thoughts on the importance of her Adopt North East Social Worker to her, arguably reflecting some of the outstanding social work undertaken by the Agency on a daily basis.

***My Adopt North East Social Worker is someone I actually like and trust. She worked hard to build a relationship with me and was not pushy and didn’t force me to interact or build a relationship with her. She was just kind and she was actually interested in our lives. She also put a lot of effort into us as a family. I could start chatting to her as she is about to leave [at the end of a visit] and just then I could decide to chat to her and she would actually stand there and chat to me. She didn’t treat me like I’m her next paycheque. She actually put in effort with how to help me and made an effort and would come up to my bedroom and made sure I actually got what we had been talking about. She always checked that I was okay and comfortable with what she was saying. She was also nice to everyone in my family. She also loves the dogs and I feel if I needed to I could get in touch with her cause I don’t feel judged by her.***



# Adopt North East Services Provided

## Infographic



## Overview

Adopt North East has responsibility for recruiting, assessing and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and commissions a specialist service in relation to intercountry adoptions.

Adopt North East has primary is responsible for family finding for all children with adoption plans but the five partner Local Authorities retain overall responsibility for children in their care.

Adopt North East provides support to all parties affected by adoption, including adopters, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth relatives.

The Agency is required by law to maintain an up-to-date Statement of Purpose. The Statement of Purpose provides a description of the services it provides. It is written so that children, young people, families and professionals can use it as a guide to what they can and should expect from Adopt North East. It is reviewed and endorsed on an annual basis each year.

## 2022-2023 Report

### Working Post-Pandemic

It has been a pleasure for the work of the Agency during 2022/23 not to be subject to public health restrictions relating to the coronavirus pandemic. This has enabled a welcome return to office-based working for staff and far greater in-person direct work

with children and families than had been possible. Learning by the Agency during the pandemic about the effectiveness of virtual meetings using the MS-Teams platform has meant that the Agency has however maintained a 'blended model' of adopter assessment, using both in-person home visits and virtual sessions – this is popular with adopters who feedback that this approach is more convenient. Equally, following feedback from adopters and professionals, the Agency has maintained both virtual and in-person Adoption Panel options.

### Supporting the Adopter Community

The welcome removal of public health restrictions also enabled the resumption by the Agency of both Christmas and Summer Parties for our adopter community. The Agency was overwhelmed by the response of adoptive families to these opportunities to meet and share lived experiences – with 150 attending a Christmas Party at a local soft-play venue and nearly 300 attending our Summer Party to enjoy a circus, animals, ice cream, games, crafts and bouncy castles. Both events were incredibly successful with the Agency receiving very positive feedback. Events such as these are intended by the Agency to support the wider adoption community and provide a safe and enjoyable space for peer support and learning.

### Strengthening Early Permanence

During the Reporting Period, the Agency has partnered Adoption Tees Valley and Adopt Coast to Coast in securing Department for Education grant funding to support the development of practice and increase the use of Early Permanence across the Region. The two-year project funding has enabled the appointment of a Regional Practice Lead and a dedicated Agency 'Champion'. The Agency is committed to increasing the use of Early Permanence for the children of the partnership over the course of the Project.

Concurrent to the pan-regional work, the Agency has committed to achieving the nationally recognised Quality Mark for Early Permanence. This branded accreditation enabled the Agency to undertake a systemic review and development of its practice, policies and procedures in relation to Early Permanence. It is anticipated that the Agency will secure the award – following external assessment – in the next reporting period.

### Supporting Waiting Adopters

During the reporting period, a new monthly support group was launched by the Agency to support approved adopters waiting for a match. The Waiting Adopters Group (WAG) was established in acknowledgement that for some approved adopters, being linked and matched with a child or children can take time. The Agency understands that this period of waiting can be emotionally challenging. The Group:

- Continues to prepare adopters through relevant on-going training;
- Enables adopters to meet with other adopters for peer support;
- Enables adopters to consider their matching considerations by hearing about some of the children the Agency is currently family finding for; and
- Helps adopters to strengthen their profile as prospective adopters.

The Group has proved popular and strengthens the family finding work of the Agency.

### Tenacious Family Finding

During the reporting period, the Agency has once again delivered two large, full day Adoption Activity Days (May and October) to support family finding for children. Activity Days are in-person events that allow prospective adopters to meet a range of children waiting to be adopted in a prepared, supported, safe and fun environment. They are entirely child-centred and allow adopters to spend time with children who have a plan of adoption to see if they feel any early chemistry with a child. The events have proved hugely effective as a family-finding tool and feedback from attendees has been very positive.

During the reporting period, the Agency has continued to work tirelessly with partners to find forever homes for whom it is harder to secure a forever family. The Agency holds a regular monthly tracking meeting where the needs of these children and progress towards permanency are reviewed. Additionally, the Team Manager for Family Finding has regular monitoring meetings with the five Local Authority partners. During the reporting period, each partner was provided with a named Family Finding Link to strengthen communication and information sharing. Part of the role of the Link is to attend the offices of their Children's Social Care partner and be available for informal advice and support. This new approach is intended to strengthen permanence practice.

### Embedding evidence-informed Transitions for Children

In June 2021 Adopt North East and its partners introduced an evidence-informed model of introductions developed by the Centre for Research on Children and Families, University of East Anglia. During the reporting period the Agency has continued to lead the work to embed the model across the partnership. Regular Briefings have been used to raise awareness and develop learning as the model has been implemented.

## Strengthening the Commissioning of Therapeutic Providers

In June 2022 the Agency hosted a gathering of regional providers of therapeutic support for adopted children and their families. This well-attended meeting included a presentation by the Agency which marked the beginning of a lengthy process by which providers of therapeutic support would be required to tender to be placed on an Approved Provider Flexible Framework to secure future work commissioned by the Agency. Supported by commissioning and procurement experts from North Tyneside Council, this approach will significantly strengthen assurance of the quality of provision. It is anticipated that the Framework will go live in the first Quarter of the 2023/24 period.

To complement the strengthening of commissioning arrangements by the Agency, a new process was introduced by the Agency to review the impact of support on the wellbeing and functioning of children and families using one or more Outcomes Measurement Tools. The Agency piloted the work at the request of the Department for Education in advance of a national role out of the approach.

Finally, in the reporting period the Agency successfully prepared for and transitioned to the new payment methodology introduced by the Adoption Support Fund which went live in April 2023.

## Becoming a Regional Centre of Excellence for Adoption Support

During the Reporting Period, the Agency has partnered Adoption Tees Valley, Adopt Coast to Coast and the Integrated Care Board for the North East and North Cumbria in securing significant Department for Education grant funding to support the development of adoption support across the Region. The two-year project from April 2023 to March 2025 will enable the development of a Regional Multi-Disciplinary Team. This new team will work to test out ways to reduce delays in assessment for children and families who are facing difficulties that can emerge for adopted children as a result of abuse and neglect suffered before they were adopted and which can impact their education, friendships and family life. The project will seek to speed up assessment by creating a single team with Social Workers, psychologists and other specialists who will work together to deliver an understanding of what support a child and family need. By reducing the time taken for assessment, families will be able to access support earlier than they would otherwise be able to do so, meaning that problems do not become more complex for the child whilst families wait for help.

## Updating the Statement of Purpose

The Adopt North East Statement of Purpose was reviewed and updated within the period. The most recent version was reviewed in June 2023 and subsequently endorsed on 16 June 2023 by the Senior Leadership Group. A hard copy is available by the Agency upon request and it is made publicly available in electronic form on the Adopt North East website.

[Statement-of-Purpose-2023.pdf](#)

## Adopt North East Governance Arrangements

### Infographic



### Overview

The Adopt North East Regional Adoption Agency is a partnership between five Local Authorities: Gateshead Council, Newcastle City Council, Northumberland County Council, North Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Council. It is hosted by North Tyneside Council. In joining their adoption services together and forming a Regional Adoption Agency, the vision and ambition of the five partner Local Authorities is for Adopt North East to achieve ***‘excellent adoption services that transform children’s and families lives for the better’***.

On an annual basis, the Lead Members for Children’s Services of the five constituent Local Authority partners are briefed on the work of the Agency. This meeting is

facilitated and hosted by the Lead Member for North Tyneside Council and enables political overview, scrutiny and challenge.

The five Directors of Children's Services sit as the Executive Board of the Agency. The Executive Board meets on a bi-monthly basis. The Board is Chaired by Ms. Cath McEvoy-Carr, the Director of Children, Education and Skills at Newcastle City Council.

The Assistant Directors of the five partner Local Authorities sit as the Senior Leadership Group of Adopt North East. The Group has met at varied frequencies to ensure the effective delivery of adoption services by the Agency. It currently meets on a bi-monthly basis.

Senior Managers from the five partner Local Authorities responsible for children with plans of permanency by way of adoption sit as the Adoption Practice Leadership Group. The Group meets monthly. This Group provides a regular forum for practice issues to be raised and shared across the partnership. There is a shared ownership of the agenda – this is reflected in the Chair being shared on a rota basis across all five partners.

The North East Adopters Voice (NEAV) Group act as a reference group of adopters whose lived experience of adoption and feedback on accessing services and support from the Agency is invaluable. The group meets on a bi-monthly basis.

## **2022-2023 Report**

During National Adoption Week 2022, a joint meeting of the Executive Board and Lead Members of the five Local Authority partners was held. The meeting was hosted by the Lead Member for North Tyneside Council and Chaired by the Director of Children's Services for North Tyneside Council. As well as an overview of the Agency, its performance and quality of practice, Board and Members met with and heard directly from members of the Post Adoption Support Team on the work of the Agency to support adopted children and their families. The well received presentation included case studies.

During the reporting period all five partner Local Authorities have actively participated in the governance arrangements. In particular, the monthly Adoption Practice Leadership Group has continued to a key driver for the development of practice. Despite changes in membership, the regular meeting of five experienced and knowledgeable Senior Managers for Permanency has enabled the co-production of a range of policies and procedures for practitioners involved in adoption.

The North East Adopters' Voice aimed to meet bi-monthly during the reporting period. Despite some understandable difficulties of members attending on occasions, the commitment and contribution of adopters to the work of the Agency is truly humbling. The meetings continue to provide a unique opportunity for the

Agency to hear the voice of those it seeks to serve and be influenced by those who are experts by experience.

Outside of but complementary to the formal governance arrangements, within the reporting period representatives from the Agency have met regularly or have had contact with the Virtual School Headteachers, the Adoption Medical Advisors, the Designated Family Judge, CAFCASS, other Regional and Voluntary Adoption Agencies, CoramBAAF, the Adoption Support Fund and the Department for Education.

## Adopt North East Staff Group

### Recruitment and Retention

#### Infographic



#### Overview

Working for Adopt North East presents a unique professional opportunity for members of staff to work across a large geographical area and to contribute to outcomes for children across five different local authority areas.

Adopt North East has a staff group of just over 50 members of staff, including 40 Qualified Social Workers. All Qualified Social Work staff hold a recognised qualification in social work and are registered with Social Work England. All staff are

subject to Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks upon commencement of employment and checked thereafter on a three-year rolling basis.

All staff are employed directly by North Tyneside Council and enjoy the benefits of being part of the Authority's Children's Services, graded Outstanding by Ofsted in March 2020. This includes a commitment to high quality supervision and management oversight, excellent training opportunities, support for career progression, good office accommodation, a modern case management system and agile working solutions.

## **2022-2023 Report**

Adopt North East continues to benefit from a stable permanent staff group and, during the reporting period, used no Agency staff. Any vacancies during the period were promptly recruited to and Adopt North East has evidenced significant success in its recruitment activity, with rounds over-subscribed with high-calibre, experienced applicants. It is clear that Adopt North East is perceived as an employer of choice for those passionate about adoption and wishing to develop adoption specialism.

The Senior Manager of Adopt North East, Mr. Nik Flavell, has remained the same throughout the reporting period. The Senior Manager is part of the Children's Services Senior Management Team of North Tyneside Council, host Local Authority for the Agency. Nik is a Qualified Social Worker with 21 years of experience, the last decade in Senior Management. During the reporting period, Nik participated in a Senior Leadership Higher Level Apprenticeship course (Level 7) delivered by Northumbria University. He obtained the qualification in July 2023.

During the reporting period two of the three Recruitment, Assessment and Support Team Managers left the Agency, one retiring and the other to take up work elsewhere. Both vacancies were successfully recruited to from within the staff group, evidencing strong succession planning by the Agency. However, these management changes, alongside a long-term sickness absence within the Management Team undoubtedly slowed the embedding of changes to the structure of the Agency which had been implemented in the last Quarter of the preceding the reporting period (see Section below).

The Agency continues to deploy an eleven-question anonymous Staff Survey on a bi-annual basis.

The findings are noted below. Respondents are invited to scale whether they Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree or Strongly Disagree. For each response, there is the opportunity for anonymous comments to support their scaling. As no respondents used Agree or Disagree responses, these columns are deleted for ease of reference.



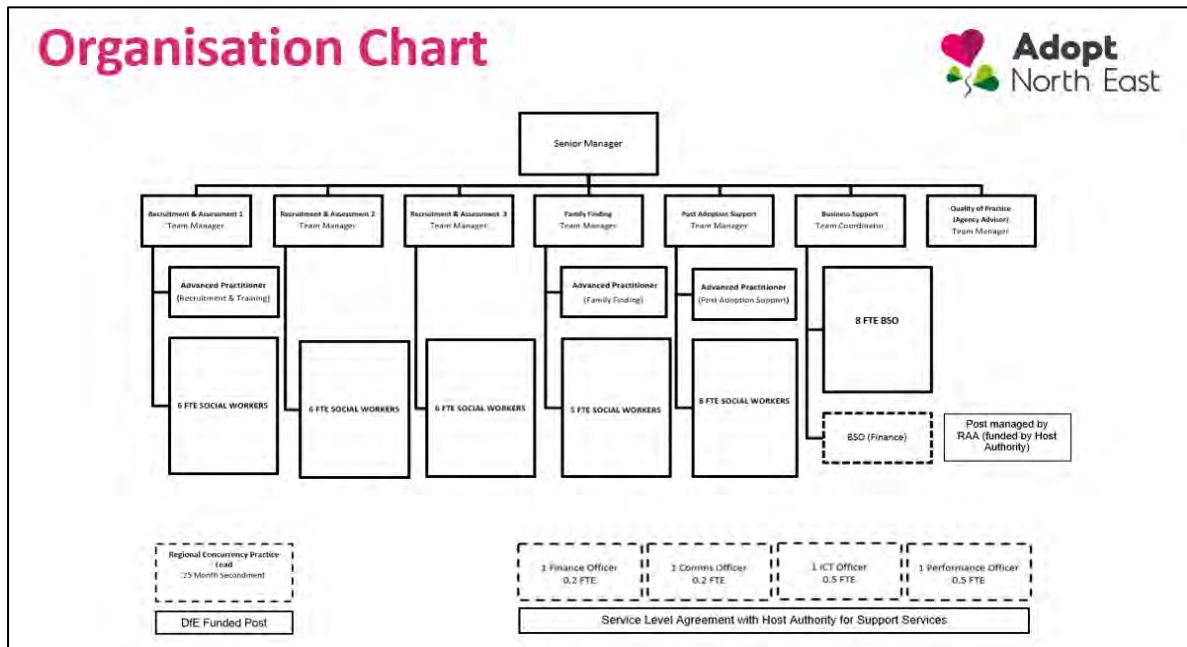
		<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	I am clear about my role and accountability	5%	5%	89%
2	I am able to use my own judgement and creativity in my role	0%	16%	84%
3	I am able to work collaboratively with colleagues	5%	21%	74%
4	I am allocated a caseload which reflects my skills and experience, health and well-being	6%	22%	78%
5	I am supported and cared for by my manager	5%	11%	84%
6	I am cared for by my manager	5%	5%	89%
7	I am supported to develop passion and expertise in adoption work	11%	11%	79%
8	I am able to make a positive difference to the lives of children, young people and families	0%	5%	95%
9	I am able to raise any concerns that I have	11%	16%	74%
10	I am valued for who I am	0%	11%	89%
11	I am proud to be part of Adopt North East	0%	16%	84%

These findings suggest an overwhelming majority of staff are positive about their role, the care and support that they receive, that they feel valued and pride in working for the Agency. Nevertheless, it is accepted that a small minority expressed some strong disagreement and work is ongoing to ensure that the staff group feel they are able to develop expertise in adoption and able to raise concerns.

Finally, during the reporting period, the Agency contributed to the regional development of Social Workers and the sufficiency of the Social Care workforce in the North East. The Agency was able to offer five placements to Social Work Students, utilising experienced Practice Educators within its staff group.

# Organisational Structure

## Infographic



## Overview

The Agency is divided into three service areas: Recruitment, Assessment and Support; Family Finding; and Post Adoption Support. These are supported by a dedicated whole-service Business Support Team.

Each Social Work Team is managed by knowledgeable Team Manager with experience of adoption. Additionally, a dedicated Team Manager acts as Agency Advisor to the Adoption Panel.

The Agency is managed by a Senior Manager who also acts as the Agency Decision Maker. The Senior Manager is also part of the North Tyneside Council Children's Services Senior Management Team.

The work of the staff team in Adopt North East is supported by specialists from North Tyneside Council, including ICT support for its Liquidlogic Case Management System, support with its financial management and support around Performance Management Information and Human Resources. Adopt North East also benefits from regular support from media and social media experts from North Tyneside Council to enable production of effective communications about Adopt North East, including regular targeted marketing and recruitment campaigns.

## **2022-2023 Report**

Immediately before the reporting period, the Agency changed some elements of its organisational structure. This included merging the Recruitment and Training Team function with the Assessment and Support function to create three generic teams. This followed a lengthy review and Consultation process. The change was intended to increase both Agency capacity and resilience in key areas of activity. However, feedback from staff after implementation raised concerns that the responsiveness of the Agency to Initial Contacts by those considering becoming adopters and those querying Non-Agency Adoption routes had been negatively impacted by the increased breadth of responsibilities of Social Workers within the three teams. Given the importance of a timely, high-quality response to applicants, a decision was taken to revert to an arrangement where a small number of Social Workers would take responsibility for Initial Contacts and Non-Agency Adoptions, a 'Front Door' team. This was implemented as a 'pilot' in April 2023 and is currently subject to review.

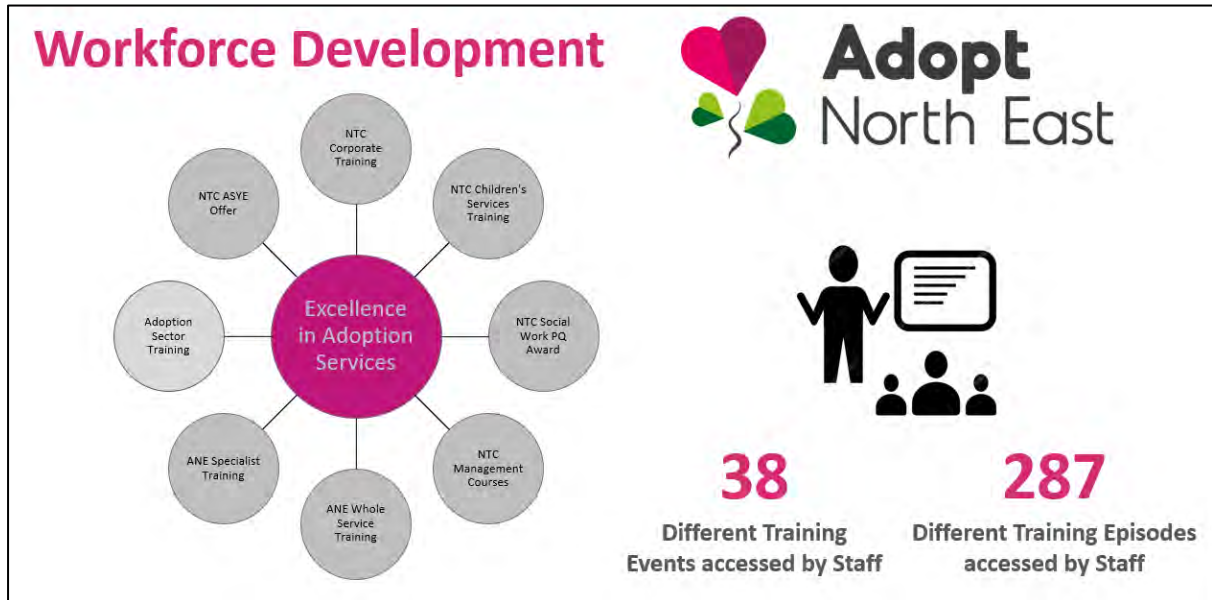
As well as merging the Recruitment and Training Team function with the Assessment and Support function, the Agency disbanded the stand-alone Post Box Team, transferring administration to the Business Support Team and Social Work activity relating to Post Box to the Post Adoption Support Team. This change was intended to reduce delay in the distribution of letters. This change proved effective, and the Agency now distributes letters it receives in a timely manner.

Equally successful, during the reporting period, the new Advanced Practitioner posts have, as intended, contributed to the development of the Agency by mentoring less experienced staff, developing specialisms and supporting management capacity. Additionally, the role has been effective in supporting the retention and progression of experienced staff, with one Advanced Practitioner successfully progressing to Team Manager in the period.

During the reporting period, a Qualified Social Worker within the Family Finding Team was appointed to the role of 'Early Permanence Champion' to support the pan-regional project to increase the use of Early Permanence within the North East of England. This grant-funded one-day per week secondment enables the Agency to fully participate in the two year project.

# Workforce Development

## Infographic



## Overview

Delivery Objective Four of the Agency is to ***develop a passionate, skilled group of specialist staff, committed to best practice.*** This objective recognises that the Adopt North East workforce is its biggest asset and critical to achieving the ambition for excellence in adoption services.

The Agency has a Workforce Development Strategy which is reviewed annually. It is produced with the support of the Organisational Development Business Partner for Children's Services at North Tyneside Council.

## 2022-2023 Report

During the reporting period, there has been evidence of continued commitment by the staff group of Adopt North East to develop their knowledge and skills in adoption work.

Training highlights within the reporting period have included:

- Sibling Assessments – Better Together or Apart (May 2022)  
Following a Training Needs Analysis, the Agency commissioned CoramBAAF to deliver training on this complex area of assessment
- Annual Half-Day Staff Conference (June 2022)

Joan Hunt, Independent Social Work Training Consultant on learning from Disruptions

- Annual Staff Conference (December 2022)  
Dr. John Sands, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, on the challenges of assessing resilience and vulnerabilities in adopters and the developing research and understanding of the needs of adopted children and the most effective therapeutic responses
- Information Governance (July 2022)  
All staff were required to attend mandatory specialist training on the safe and secure management of information
- Oliver McGowan Training (Jan 2023)  
All staff were required to complete mandatory training on Learning Disability and Autism in compliance with the Health and Care Act 2022. The Oliver McGowan Training is standardised e-training developed for this purpose.

Additional training accessed to inform and strengthen the practice of Adopt North East have included:

- Coaching as a Management Style
- Early Permanence
- Effective Minute Taking
- Effective Case Management System (LCS) use
- Induction (North Tyneside Council)
- Information Governance
- Lone Working and Personal Safety
- Panel Administration Training
- Panel Training
- Practice Educator Award
- Senior Leadership
- Therapeutic Lifestory Work
- Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences
- UEA Model of Introductions Training

### Tri.X Policies and Procedures

During the reporting period, the Agency reviewed and added additional policies to the Tri.X platform, an accessible, secure site for ease of use.

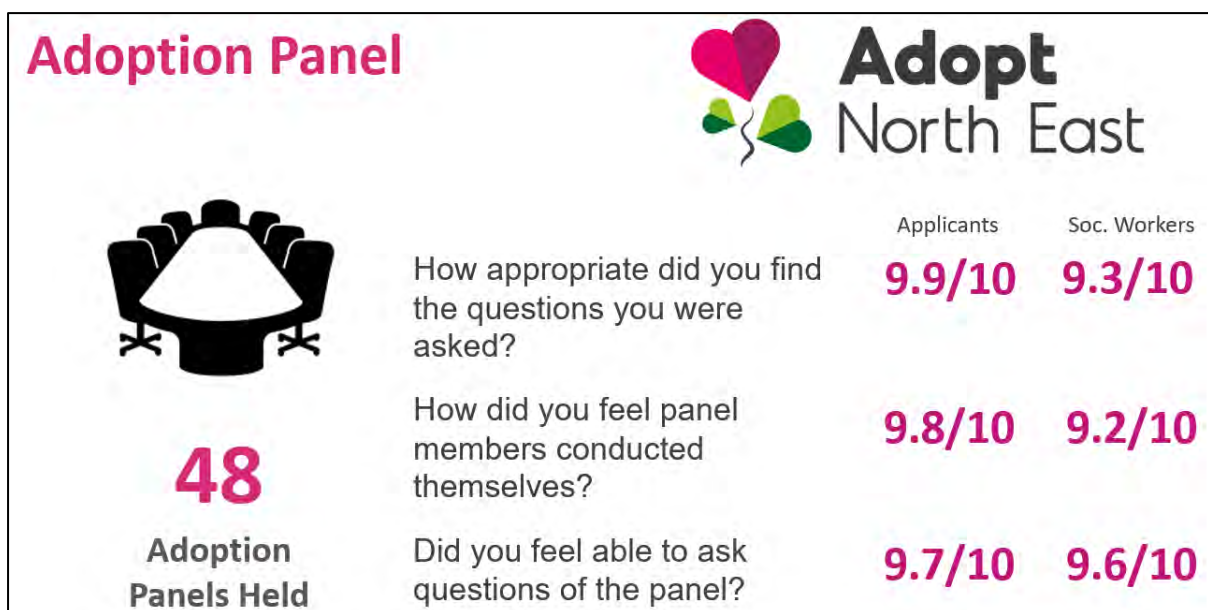
## Therapeutic Life Story Work – Carole Scott, Social Worker

Ms. Carole Scott is an experienced Qualified Social Worker. She qualified in 2004 and joined Adopt North East in 2020, working in the Post Adoption Support Team. During the reporting period Carole was supported by the Agency to undertake training in Therapeutic Life Story Worker and has now become qualified to do this important work on behalf of the Agency. Therapeutic Life Story Work is an evidence-informed model created by Professor Richard Rose. It offers adopted children the opportunity to explore, question and understand past events of their life and gives them a voice and safe space to feel and express their emotions when making sense of past experiences and the relation it has to their current thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Carole notes

***I had supported Life Story Work for years... but I knew that I needed a different set of skills and expertise to support some children and their families when issues relating to early childhood trauma are being re-enacted in the family home. The Therapeutic Life Story Work training was tough but the training has not only influenced how I do such work but some of my new skill set has also been useful in undertaking post adoption assessments with children and families.***

## Adopt North East Adoption Panel

### Infographic



## Overview

The Adopt North East Adoption Panel performs an important role in assisting the Agency to reach the best possible decision in respect of:

- The suitability of prospective adopters or the termination of approval of a prospective adopter, and
- Whether a child should be placed for adoption with a specific prospective adopter.

Additionally, the Agency's Adoption Panel plays an important quality assurance role, providing objectivity and having the ability to challenge practice which is felt not to be in the interests of children or fall short of the regulations governing adoption or Adoption National Minimum Standards. The Panel is required to give regular feedback to the Agency on a six-monthly basis.

The Agency is required by law to maintain a 'Central List' of people it considers suitable to be a member of the Adoption panel. The Agency works hard to maintain a pool of people with different skills, experience and qualifications to bring to its deliberations.

## 2022-23 Report

Within the reporting period, 48 Panels were held by the Agency, an increase of 3 over the previous year. The Agency held Panels on a weekly basis, four times per month to meet demand. The Agency continues to have the facility to convene additional Panels should the need arise to ensure no unnecessary delay for prospective adopters or children.

As a result of learning from the pandemic, the Agency took the decision to maintain virtual Panels in addition to the resumption of in-person Panels. This has enabled adopters to have choice over which medium they are most comfortable with. Toward the end of the reporting period, the Agency committed to improved hybrid working solutions to improve the audio quality of virtual Panels – it is anticipated that installation during the Summer of 2023.

During the reporting period a third Independent Chair was appointed to increase the resilience of the Panel process. Additionally, a new Vice Chair was also appointed following the departure a Vice Chair.

Panel continues to have an established and experienced membership and quoracy has been maintained throughout the period. The Central List has been expanded to includes individuals with expertise in education and therapy. The Agency particularly welcomed a care experienced person joining the Central List and making a particular

contribution based on her expertise by experience. Additionally, the Central List continues to grow in diversity with the joining of a British Asian member who works for My Adoption Family, an organisation which supports Black and Minority Ethnic families to navigate the adoption process. The List also benefits from members of the LGBTQ+ community.

There has continued to be appropriate professional attendance at panel by the assessing and supporting Social Workers within Adopt North East as well as the child's Social Worker.

Each Panel has continued to benefit from the attendance of Medical Advisors where matches for children are being considered. Legal Advice continues to be provided to Panel.

The administration of Panel continues to be of high quality, benefitting from established and experienced Business Support colleagues, with electronic distribution of paperwork well co-ordinated and timely.

In the most recent available Chair's Report, the Chairs note:

***It is clear from the breadth and depth of discussion that takes place within each panel that members have robustly read and considered the information to make informed recommendations... In conclusion, Adoption Panels have continued to function well, with a clear and unwavering commitment from panel members, social workers and prospective adopters to ensure children are given the opportunity to be cared for by those who are committed to providing a loving, secure, lifelong family so they can grow and thrive.***

#### Independent Chairs

- Ms. Lisa Henderson (appointed October 2021)
- Ms. Yvonne Hamilton (appointed January 2021)
- Ms. Sharon Slack (appointed August 2022)

#### Independent Vice Chairs

- Ms. Judith Capstick-Meredith (appointed April 2019)
- Ms. Sarah Wade (appointed August 2022)

#### Professional and Lay Members

The other members of the Adopt North East 'Central List' are as follows:

- 5 Qualified Social Workers
- 6 Adoptive Parents



- 4 Adopted Persons
- 1 Foster Carer
- 1 Child Therapist
- 3 Minority Ethnic Members
- 2 LGBTQ+ Members
- 3 Care Experienced Adults

#### Agency Advisor to Panel

Adopt North East has a dedicated Panel Advisor post. The post is held by an experienced Team Manager, Ms. Barbara Hodgson. The Advisor is not a panel member and does not take part in the decision-making process. However, the Advisor regularly contributes to Panel Meetings by providing advice, for example about the Agency's procedures and practices.

The Agency Advisor has an important role in quality assurance and liaises with Team Managers to quality assure the Child's Permanence Reports (CPR), the Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR) and the Adoption Placement Report (APR). Where there are concerns about a report, the Agency Advisor is responsible for deciding whether the report should be presented to Panel and the Agency Decision Maker.

#### Medical Advisors to Panel

Panel is very well supported by its Adoption Medical Advisors. Their expertise is extensive and invaluable to the decision making of Panel. Regular bi-annual meetings are held between the Medical Advisors, Agency Advisor and Senior Manager who acts as Agency Decision Maker for approvals. These meetings enable discussion about health-related issues for children and adopters.

All Adoption Medical Advisors have been appointed in compliance with the relevant regulations.

The Agency takes the opportunity to note that, very sadly, during the reporting period one longstanding Medical Advisor died unexpectedly following complications resulting from a car accident. The Advisor was a popular member of the partnership and known to the Agency for her dedication and commitment to adopted children. Our sympathies are with her family.

#### Feedback from Applicant Adopters attending Panel

- ***I was made as comfortable as I possibly could be on such an occasion. Everyone was very welcoming, understanding and kind. The questions were relevant to my specific case and by no means generic. All panel members introduced themselves professionally and told me a bit about***

*themselves to give me an understanding of their background. I was asked throughout if I had any questions. As panel was virtual the waiting area / facilities were my own home, so I couldn't have been more comfortable. A very positive experience that exceeded my expectations.*

- *I was made to feel very comfortable and Panel put us at ease. It would have been great to have met all the panel members in person, but it was an equal pleasure to meet them all online... As the questions were asked we could feel just how seriously our ability to raise an adopted child was being considered. We will never forget the moment we were told we had been approved... we still haven't come down from cloud nine.*
- *The experience was positive. Panel members had a friendly manner while still maintaining the level of professionalism for the seriousness of their responsibility.*
- *When we logged on to Teams, we both became nervous due to this been a very important part of the journey we had been on. However, once we had both relaxed a little and were introduced to the Panel members and had a brief opening address which covered our positive approach to the journey, we both felt very comfortable and eager to answer the questions from each Panel member. We had a good idea of what questions may have been asked and we found that all were appropriate... We found that all Panel members conducted themselves professionally with the right mix of understanding, feelings and reality to the journey we have taken. We both felt we could ask questions to the Panel, which we did and received clear answers. Our whole experience of Panel was one of positivity, professionalism and supportive, especially taking into account of the severity of the outcome for all involved.*
- *There is absolutely no requirement to change anything about the coming to panel day, we believe that Adopt North East have the day perfectly planned and administrated excellently. We would like to thank you all for making the day easy, relaxed and very straight forward.*

#### Feedback from Professionals attending Panel

- *I found it to be a very positive experience and expect the prospective adopters will feel the same way.*
- *Very comfortable. Panel gave the adopters every opportunity to express themselves. The male adopter is usually quite reserved, so Panel did a great job of making him feel comfortable as he did share his views and feelings.*
- *It was clear Panel had really thought about the huge change adopting 3 children will bring about in this couple's lives. Their questions were positive and considered. The overall experience was very positive.*
- *All members of the panel were very respectful. Each person was given the opportunity to speak and express their views. The experience was*

*very positive. I felt the adopter was kept at the centre of the meeting and was given the opportunity to ask any questions.*

- The panel were very friendly and welcoming. This was my first face to face panel at ANE. The panel made the couple very welcome, and the questions allowed the couple to share their intentions if they were to be matched. The panel were very personable.*
- Really comfortable, it was really positive to have a face-to-face panel. It was nice that the Chair came along and introduced herself, it put the applicant at ease. This was the most positive panel I have been too and the first one face to face. I thought panel members were warm and inviting and they were really responsive to answers, which doesn't always come across over Teams.*
- Very positive and balanced in terms of the discussion around strengths and any vulnerabilities.*
- Very comfortable – it felt fairly relaxed and informal. I thought it was a positive experience and it was clear all information had been carefully read through and analysed by panel members.*

## Adopt North East Commissioned Services

### Infographic



### Overview

Adopt North East is committed to delivering excellent adoption services. In specific circumstances and subject to robust best value commissioning, the Agency will use specialist third-party providers where it is in the best interests of service users.

## 2022-23 Report

### i. PAC-UK

During the reporting period, Adopt North East continued to partner and commission PAC-UK to provide specialist services for birth parents, relatives and adopted persons. PAC-UK is a national organisation with expertise in these areas. Throughout the period, the performance of PAC-UK was robustly monitored by Adopt North East with expert support from a North Tyneside Commissioning Manager. No issues emerged during the reporting period regarding the services provided.

During Quarter 3, Adopt North East undertook a review of the services commissioned from PAC-UK, as part of a best value exercise in preparation for the end of the three-year contract in March 2023. This work led to a decision to recommission services, based on an entirely new Service Specification. A Waiver was obtained to extend the contract with PAC-UK whilst commissioning took place. It is anticipated that a new contract will be awarded in 2023/24, delivering reduced costs to the Agency.

### ii. Inter-Country Adoption Centre (IAC)

During the reporting period, Adopt North East continued to commission the Inter-Country Adoption Centre (IAC) to act on its behalf for all requests for information, for the assessment of prospective adopters and for support of adopters until the child enters the UK with their adopters. Adopt North East commissions IAC to ensure that prospective adopters receive the highest quality service relating to issues outside of the normal practice of Adopt North East, including specialist knowledge of UK immigration laws and the legal framework of the child's host country. With expert support from a North Tyneside Commissioning Manager, six monthly review meetings are held to ensure that quality of service provision, effective partnership working and best value have been achieved. No issues emerged during the reporting period regarding the services provided.

### iii. CATCH

During the reporting period, Adopt North East has continued to commission CATCH (formerly, The Adopter Hub), an accessible, safe, curated online platform of support, focused eLearning and information for adopters. It is provided by Parents And Children Together (PACT), an adoption charity. No issues emerged during the reporting period regarding the services provided.

In partnership with CATCH, a review of the use by Adopt North East's prospective adopters and adopters was undertaken in July 2022 to ensure best value. Following

the review, changes in the registration process were implemented and promotion of the resource increased. As a consequence, access to CATCH has significantly increased. CATCH has become a key part part of the core support offer of the Agency.

## Adopt North East Communications Strategy

### Infographic

**Marketing Campaigns**

**Adopt North East**

**We're here whenever you're ready**

*"After unsuccessful fertility treatment I started researching adoption and rang Adopt North East. I was very nervous as I tried to explain why I was wanting to adopt. Adopt North East listened to me with warmth and sympathy."*

Telephone 0191 643 5000  
Email [AdoptNorthEast@adoptne.org.uk](mailto:AdoptNorthEast@adoptne.org.uk)  
[www.adoptnortheast.org.uk](http://www.adoptnortheast.org.uk)

**Adoption - how old is too old?**

Start their forever today, with us.

Click here to find out more.

**Adopt North East**

**Who's too old for adoption?**

How old is too old to be an adoptive parent? And at what age should a child have been adopted?

Adopt North East is the local adoption agency for our region, working on behalf of Newcastle City Council.

The truth is, there is no magic age from which someone is 'too old' to be a parent. In fact, many mature applicants are welcomed as they offer the strength of the experience to adoption. As long as you have the health and ability to meet the needs of a child to be adopted through to adulthood, whatever your age, you can.

Adopt North East would particularly welcome applications by experienced parents who have children who are now adults, who feel that they will have a lot to offer as a parent. They can be an excellent match for an older child.

There is no upper age limit for us to be an adoptive and younger age children are adopted each year. Only children aged over ten legally need 12 months' notice to be adopted, yet the need for an older child to find a forever family can be more urgent and Adopt North East works hard to do this.

Find out more at [www.adoptnortheast.org.uk](http://www.adoptnortheast.org.uk) or join our free regular information sessions - what you feel is right and others are in greater. Please do us the favour of the network, to please call for details.

[www.adoptnortheast.org.uk](http://www.adoptnortheast.org.uk)  
Email: [adoption@adoptnortheast.org.uk](mailto:adoption@adoptnortheast.org.uk)  
Tel: 0191 643 5000

**Children of every age and background need adoptive families**

Parenting adopted children is uniquely challenging and extremely rewarding!

Research has shown that children in foster families are more likely to be adopted than those in care. This is because foster families are more likely to be able to meet the needs of a child to be adopted through to adulthood, whatever your age, you can.

Adopt North East would particularly welcome applications by experienced parents who have children who are now adults, who feel that they will have a lot to offer as a parent. They can be an excellent match for an older child.

There is no upper age limit for us to be an adoptive and younger age children are adopted each year. Only children aged over ten legally need 12 months' notice to be adopted, yet the need for an older child to find a forever family can be more urgent and Adopt North East works hard to do this.

Find out more at [www.adoptnortheast.org.uk](http://www.adoptnortheast.org.uk) or join our free regular information sessions - what you feel is right and others are in greater. Please do us the favour of the network, to please call for details.

[www.adoptnortheast.org.uk](http://www.adoptnortheast.org.uk)  
Email: [adoption@adoptnortheast.org.uk](mailto:adoption@adoptnortheast.org.uk)  
Tel: 0191 643 5000

**"The day we walked into the room and met our seven-year-old daughter for the first time... we melted."**

[www.adoptnortheast.org.uk](http://www.adoptnortheast.org.uk)  
0191 643 5000

**Start their forever today, with us.**

**Adopt North East**  
[www.adoptnortheast.org.uk](http://www.adoptnortheast.org.uk)

### Overview

Adopt North East's Communication and Marketing Strategy is supported by experts from North Tyneside Council. The Strategy commits Adopt North East to communications which are:

- Open and honest – direct, truthful and factual.
- Timely – up to date and communicated regularly, consistently and quickly.
- Clear and concise – in plain English and jargon free – easily understood by all sectors of the community.
- Accessible – easy to access through appropriate media/channels.
- Relevant – targeted at the needs of the intended audience, appropriate informative and useful.
- Inclusive – all material designed to encourage and value discussion and feedback, with information available in other formats upon request

The stated objectives are to:

- Undertake three distinct marketing campaigns a year – Spring, Summer and Autumn – reflecting recruitment needs identified through performance management information
- Maintain and promote the profile and brand recognition of Adopt North East
- Develop bespoke recruitment packages for specific children as required
- Effectively use the assets and materials produced by the National Adopter Recruitment Strategy

## **2022-2023 Report**

During the reporting period, a small ‘Comms Group’ of staff from the Agency has been established. With outstanding specialist support from a dedicated Marketing Advisor from the North Tyneside Council Communications Team, the Group has met monthly to co-produce a range of high-quality marketing assets. The Group has also taken responsibility for maintaining, updating, and refreshing the Agency’s Website as appropriate.

The Agency has undertaken a number of adopter recruitment campaigns during the reporting period.

We have delivered three large seasonal campaigns:

1. ‘Our hearts melted...’ (Summer 2022)
2. ‘Start their forever today with us’ (Autumn 2022)
3. ‘How old is too old’ (Spring 2023)

Each campaign has used relevant, compelling imagery and content and has been delivered using the following media:

- Adopt North East Website
- Digital Radio Advertising
- Public Transport (Metro and Bus)
- Large Banner Adverts
- Partner Local Authority Websites
- Social Media Content on Facebook and Twitter
- Regular press releases to promote Adopt North East
- Regular features/adverts in the residents’ magazines of North Tyneside, Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland and South Tyneside
- Regular feature/advert in the internal comms briefings of North Tyneside, Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland and South Tyneside

We have also undertaken a range of targeted recruitment activity, including:

- Faith Communities
- Diocese of Newcastle (Church of England)

- Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle (Catholic Church)
- Al-Azhar Masjid
- Whitley Bay Masjid
- South Shields Mosque
- Newcastle Central Mosque
- Al Bahr Academy (Newcastle)

#### LGBTQ+ Community

- Newcastle Pride
- Northumberland Pride

#### Minority Ethnic Community

- Newcastle Mela

#### Specialist Communities










- Gateshead Fertility Clinic
- Berwick Speedway

#### Employment Sectors

- NHS
- Education
- Police
- Quorum Business Park
- Council Employees

# Adopt North East Performance for Children

## Infographic

<b>Performance - Children</b>						
						
 Referred	28 31	22 30	22 16	42 22	20 11	<b>134</b> 110
 Placed	31 25	32 24	13 12	17 17	10 30	<b>103</b> 106
 Adopted	27 15	32 31	8 24	21 35	17 16	<b>105</b> 127

## Overview

Adopt North East has primary is responsible for family finding for all children with adoption plans referred to it by the five partner Local Authorities. The partners retain overall responsibility for the children who are in their care.

## 2022-2023 Report

A total of 134 children were referred to the Agency by its five Local Authority partners in 2022/23, in comparison to 110 in 2021/22, a 22% increase. However, the number is consistent with 133 children referred in 2020/21 and 134 in 2019/20. This suggests a remarkable stability of demand for forever families by the partnership. It also suggests that the partnership has not been subject to the overall reduction over the last few years in the number of children with plans of adoption reported nationally. This is consistent with the partnership's higher than national average children in care population.

Of the 134 children referred, 28 had a plan of adoption subsequently reversed, the majority because it was assessed that the child's needs had changed. The Agency meets regularly with each partner to discuss progress toward securing permanency by way of adoption for each child and participates in reviews of care plans as



appropriate.

A total of 118 children were made subject to Placement Orders in 2022/23 compared with 71 in 2021/22, 124 in 2020/21 and 122 in 2019/20. Whilst this is a 66% increase on the previous year, it is noted that the 2021/22 figure was impacted by the uncertainty generated within the adoption system by the Somerset Judgment and the 2022/23 outturn shows remarkable demand consistency with previous years.

A total of 103 children were placed in 2022/23, a reduction from 108 in 2021/22, 137 in 2020/21 and 104 in 2019/20. Although the 2022/23 outturn was a 5% decrease on the previous year this reduction is not regarded as statistically significant – 2020/21 was regarded as an exceptional year and an outlier – and again evidences stability of demand by the partnership for placements.

A total of 78 children were placed with adopters assessed and approved by Adopt North East in 2022/23, a decrease on 88 in 2021/22 and 100 in 2020/21, and the same as 2019/20. This represents an 11% decrease on the previous year reflecting the challenge of recruiting adopters experienced nationally.

A total of 25 children were placed with adopters not assessed and approved by Adopt North East in 2022/23, an increase from 18 children in 2021/22 and a decrease from 37 in 2020/21 and 26 in 2019/20. Although the 2022/23 outturn represents a 38% increase in comparison with the previous year, it is noted that the 2021/22 outturn was impacted by the uncertainty generated within the adoption system by the Somerset Judgment which suppressed placement activity. In total, non-Adopt North East placements – known as Inter-Agency Adoption Placements – accounted for 24% of the total placements in 2022/23, in contrast to 17% in 2021/22 and 28% of total placements in 2020/21. The 2022/23 placement distribution therefore outturns a sufficiency of 76%. This continues to represent strong and consistent performance by the Agency.

Of the 25 children not placed with adopters assessed and approved by the Agency, the following observations may be made about the profile of the children relevant to sufficiency planning by the Agency and partners:

- Just over half of the children placed in inter-agency placements were placed as sibling groups – including two groups of 3 siblings. Sibling placements was the largest need group for placements not able to be provided by the Agency. This outturn has informed the forthcoming recruitment campaign for the Autumn of 2023 which focuses on the needs of siblings.
- The average age of the children placed in inter-agency placements was just under 5 years of age (two years older than the average age of children placed in Adopt North East placements). This included 6 children 6 years old and over. This outturn informed the Recruitment Campaign 'How old is too old?' in

Spring 2023.

- Over a third of the children placed inter-agency were assessed as having complex additional needs. This outturn informs the work of the Agency to continue to target recruitment to the caring professions, including NHS and Education sectors.
- Nearly a third of the children placed had some restrictions about the geographical areas that they could be placed, limiting the availability of adopters assessed and approved by Adopt North East. This outturn has led to a focus by the Agency in expanding its recruitment activity. It has also led to the development of a partnership-wide risk assessment tool to ensure that limitations on family finding are robustly grounded in evidence.

A total of 19 children were placed in Early Permanence Placements in 2022/23, a decrease on the 28 2021/22 and marginally up from 18 in 2020/21. This reduction on the previous year evidences that there is more work to do. The partnership has increasing the number of Early Permanence Placements as a strategic priority for 2023/24. The RAA is committed to increasing the availability of Early Permanence Placements available and has a new, dedicated Training Pathway for applicant adopters. The partnership is also part of a two-year pan-regional project to strengthen practice around Early Permanence.

Finally, a total of 105 children were adopted in 2022/23, down from 121 in 2021/22 and similar to 106 in 2020/21. This was a 13% decrease on the previous year. However, the 2021/22 figure included 'catch up' for the period of court closures as a result of the pandemic and was therefore higher than normal. Accordingly, the 2022/23 outturn suggests relative stability of Adoption Orders achieved by the partnership. Despite the challenges of the year, over one hundred children had permanency in forever families achieved by the RAA and partners.

### Disruptions

A 'Disruption' of an adoptive placement is the premature ending of a placement of a child that has been placed for adoption. Very sadly, between 01 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 there were a total of 2 children in 2 separate placements subject to disruption. Every disruption is a tragedy and Adopt North East and its partners are committed to learning from all disruptions and implementing any lessons learnt to prevent, as far as is possible, future disruptions.

Disruptions are sensitive and difficult for everyone involved. As a consequence, a separate Annual Learning Report is prepared by the Agency. However, for the purposes of this Annual Report, the following in-year learning by the Agency is summarised in very general terms.

- ***Practitioners across the partnership must work to create an open and honest environment during Introductions to ensure that any concerns or issues which arise are shared in a timely and appropriate way so that decision-making for the child is evidence informed.***

Learning from in-year disruptions emphasises the importance of communication during Introductions. Social Workers must ensure there is time for the child, adopters and foster carers to be able to voice any concerns that they may have, particularly prior to the Mid-point Review of introductions. This will ensure any areas of concern are explored. Social Workers have a responsibility to facilitate an open and honest dialogue and to be an accessible point of contact for concerns to be raised. Best practice suggests that in-person opportunities to share information should be made available to both adopters and foster carers throughout the duration of introductions.

- ***Quality Assurance processes across the partnership must ensure that Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) – as the primary written document detailing the child and their birth family made available to adopters – are written in a way that clearly communicates all relevant information***

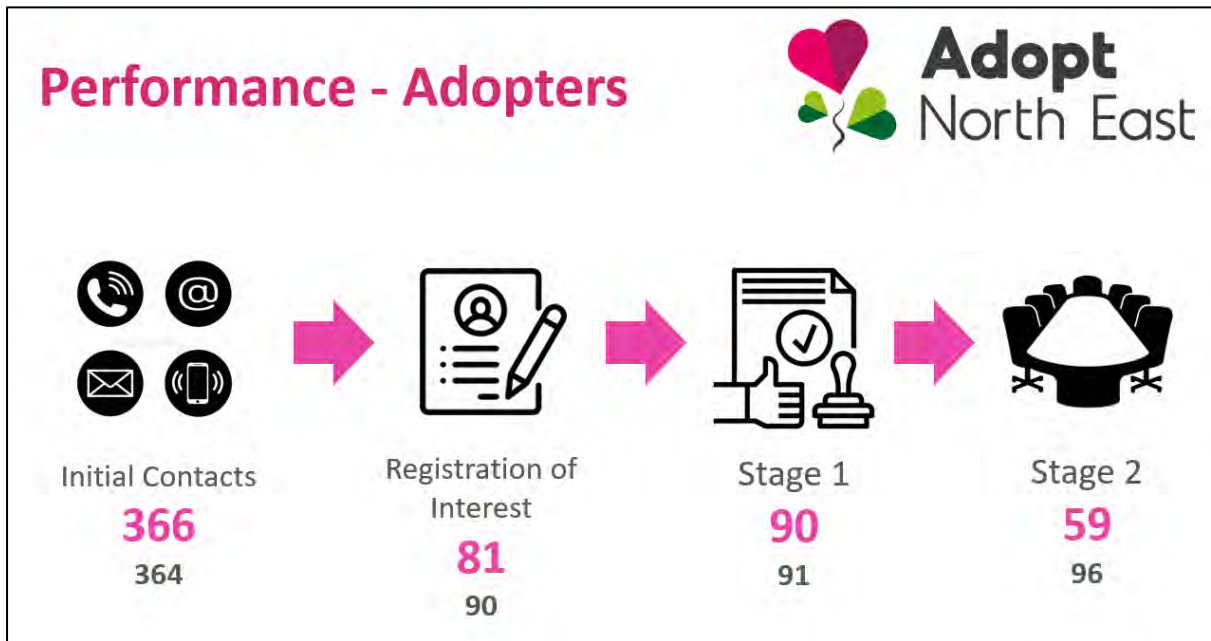
The partnership has a commitment to high quality Child Permanence Reports because of the primacy of the report in informing an Agency Decision that the child should be placed for adoption and in subsequent family finding for the child. Learning from in-year disruptions suggests that some Child Permanence Reports may not be as clear in communicating information when prepared with the child as future reader in mind. Whilst reports about potentially distressing information should always be sensitively written, the author should always ensure that relevant information is not omitted or minimised because the report is a key source of information for adopters and other professionals about the child and their birth family.

- ***During the first few weeks of a placement, support services must be responsive and proportionate to need***

The early weeks of an adoptive placement are regularly described as stressful and intense to all members of the care team around a child. It would assist the partnership for there to be guidance around best practice during this period, including visiting frequency and the support options available for adopters, when the intensity of support needs to be increased in response to emerging need. Such guidance will ensure greater consistency of practice, contribute to improved transparency about the support available for the children and families we work with and, hopefully, deliver more timely support to reduce the risk of placements disrupting.

# Adopt North East Performance for those wanting to Adopt

## Infographic



### Overview

Adopt North East has responsibility for recruiting, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters.

The Agency has as one of its five strategic priorities **to recruit the right forever families for children needing adoption**. It also seeks to deliver **a positive experience for those wanting to adopt**.

### 2022-2023 Report

There was a total of 366 Contacts with the Agency from those expressing interest in becoming adopters in 2022/23, very similar to 364 in 2021/22 and a small but sustained increase on the 346 Contacts in 2020/21 and 334 in 2019/20.

There were a total of 81 prospective adopters starting Stage 1 of the process – Registration of Interest – compared with 90 in 2021/22, 132 in 2020/21 and 98 in 2019/20. The outturn is a 11% decrease on the previous year. Regrettably the 2022/23 outturn represents the lowest number of applications to adopt received by the Agency since its start. Despite robust and proactive marketing by the Agency, this reduction in activity is attributable to the significant impact of the cost-of-living crisis upon the adult population leading to greater income, employment, and lifestyle

uncertainty. These factors have very sadly suppressed interest both locally and nationally in adopting, with a national decrease of 11%.

During the reporting period 59 adopters were approved, a decrease from 96 in 2021/22 and 106 in 2020/21. This was, sadly, a 39% decrease from the previous year. This is of significant concern and evidences the challenges in recruiting adopters being experienced by the Agency. This reduction was higher than the national outturn of a reduction of approvals by 21%. This variance was in part due to some exceptional issues in Quarter 4, with a higher number of deferrals from Panel than usual. Nevertheless, whilst there is some cause for cautious optimism that the numbers of assessments and approvals are increasing within the new reporting period, the outturn evidences that 2022/23 was an incredibly challenging year.

The Agency remains acutely aware of the need to ensure sufficient adopters are recruited, assessed and approved to meet the needs of the children referred. The Agency acknowledges that there is no simple or single solution to the challenge and, as a consequence, takes a systemic approach with has included:

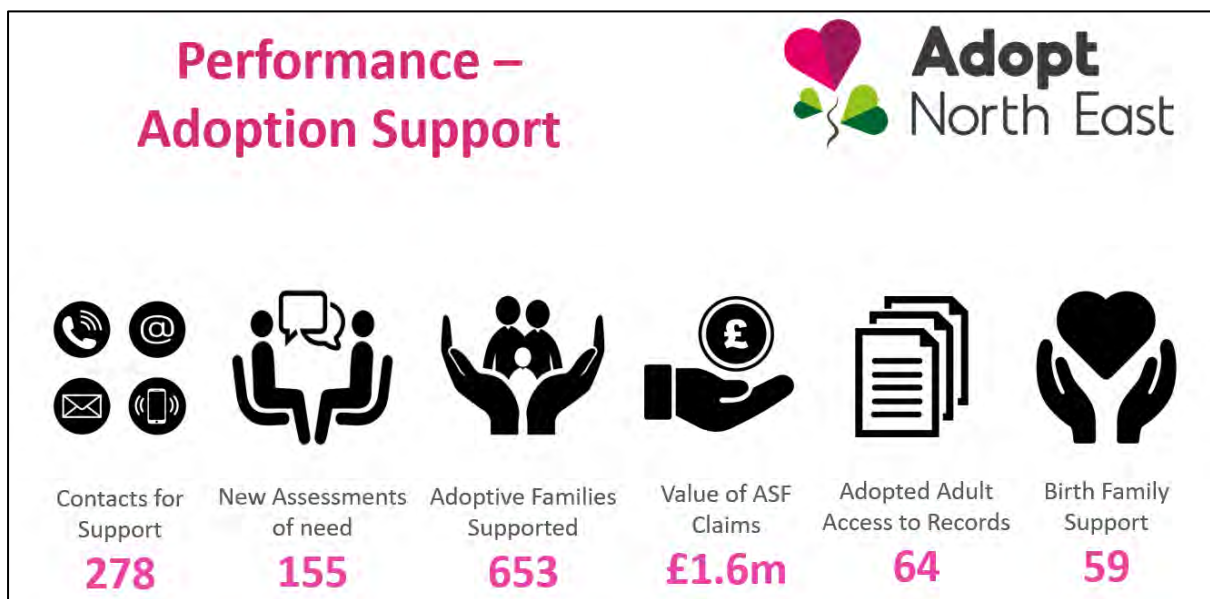
- Continuing to strengthen Adopt North East's identity, profile and brand as an Adoption Agency through regular, evidence-informed marketing and communications
- Forming a strategic partnership with other Regional Adopyopn to develop and increase pan-regional sufficiency in Early Permanence placements across the North East
- Reviewed and strengthened the Agency's 'Front Door' for enquirers about adoption, improving responsiveness through the creation of a small, specialist team
- Continued to embrace an inclusive approach to adopter recruitment, particularly in relation to considerations around health, mental health and wellbeing, accommodation and financial, employment and housing status
- Continued to ensure effective partnership with Local Authorities to enable foster carers who express a wish to adopt children in their care to be fast-tracked as appropriate
- Effectively used performance management information to target recruitment activity
- Worked to maximise the matching considerations of prospective adopters through earlier profiling of children and strengthened after-approval support

Finally, 10 families with queries about inter-country adoption were supported during the reporting period. The Agency commissions the Inter-Country Adoption Centre (IAC) to act on its behalf for all requests for information, for the assessment of prospective adopters and for support of adopters until the child enters the UK with their adopters. The Agency does so to ensure that prospective adopters receive the

highest quality service relating to issues outside of the normal practice of Adopt North East, including specialist knowledge of UK immigration laws and the legal framework of the child's host country.

## Adopt North East Performance for adopters, those adopted and those affected by adoption

### Infographic



### Overview

Adopt North East provides support to all parties affected by adoption, including adopters, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth relatives, through the provision of Post Adoption Support and Post Box arrangements (indirect post-adoption contact).

Adopt North East commissions specialist services from PAC-UK, a national organisation, for adopted adults, birth parents and relatives within the family network affected by adoption.

### 2022-2023 Report

There were a total of 278 Contacts made to the Agency for Post Adoption Support excluding contacts in relation to the Post Box Service in 2022/23, up from 256 in 2021/22 and 177 in 2020/21. This was a 9% increase on the previous year. Year-on-year increases in requests for Post Adoption Support are attributable to new forever families being created and work undertaken by the Agency to increase awareness of

the services offered. It may also be attributable to difficulties that emerged for adoptive families as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

There was a total of 155 Assessments of Adoption Support Needs undertaken by the Agency in 2022/23 compared to 124 in 2021/22. This is an increase of 25% over the previous year reflecting the increased demand for support.

There were a total of 653 claims made by Adopt North East to the Adoption Support Fund in 2022/23 with a value of £1,663,917. This was an increase on the 622 claims in 2021/22 with a value of £1,431,615, and the 540 claims to the value of £1,032,505 in 2020/21. This was a 5% increase in the number of claims on the previous year and an increase in value of £232,302. This evidences robust and consistent year-on-year increase in activity by the Agency to access support available for adoptive families.

During the reporting period the Agency participated in Phase 2 of the Adoption Support Fund pilot relating to the use of Outcome Measurement Tools. This national programme focused on the implementation of 'before and after' measurements of child and family functioning and wellbeing to improve the understanding of effective adoption support.

During the reporting period the Agency decided to transition from its case management system 'module' to a purpose-built bespoke workflow to enable more granular performance management information to be available. The new system went live at the start of 2023/24.

Throughout the reporting period, Adopt North East has offered both in person and online support groups (via the MS Teams platform) to all adopters with children living with them already or those who have been linked or matched with a child(ren). The support groups sessions are topic specific, and the Agency utilises an expert as a 'guest speaker'. During the year, topics have included:

- Understand your child's behaviour
- 'A story that needs to be told' Talking about their life story with your adopted child
- Introducing Theraplay
- What would you like to know about therapeutic parenting
- Issues around Education for adopted children
- The impact of Secondary Trauma on parents of adoptive children
- Post Box and managing unplanned contact with birth families
- Supporting your adopted child who is experiencing suicidal ideation and is self-harming
- Understanding Autistic Spectrum Disorder

- 'Parents - the real experts on their children' - A potted guide to Filial therapy
- FASD Thriving Families: Supporting, Scaffolding and celebrating

Feedback about the Support Groups from participant adopters include:

***“Brilliant, informative session. Reminded me of the importance of using Therapeutic Parenting and good examples of how to use it. The question and answer session was useful ... It was great to get expertise around common struggles”***

***“Thank you for arranging the webinar. I found the presentation incredibly helpful and it has spurred me to prepare straight away for engaging my 6 year old further in her life story. It was heartening to hear how others had approached this and the difficulties they had experienced. Thank you also for your meditation and humour during the webinar - it set the tone brilliantly.”***

***“We felt the session was very honest. We appreciated that the presenter pulled no punches with his answers. His response to our question gave us a different way of looking at the situation”***

During the reporting period, Adopt North East continued to partner and commission PAC-UK to provide specialist services for birth parents, relatives and adopted persons. PAC-UK is a national organisation with expertise in these areas. Feedback from service users include:

- ***PAC-UK were very empathetic and patient***
- ***Friendly and helpful service, delivered in a confidential manner. Exemplary. Thank you***
- ***The response was prompt, thorough and friendly***
- ***PAC-UK were really helpful. So, thank you so very much, I am one step closer to my personal closure and trauma***
- ***From the initial contact call and throughout the subsequent therapy sessions my needs were responded to with the utmost sensitivity***
- ***I feel like this service has had a positive impact on myself and my partner overall. We have been more positive since using the service and knowledgeable***



- ***After my life turned upside down, PAC-UK were there with me and provided me with a safe space. I now look forward to the future more than ever***

## **Adopt North East Feedback**

### **Compliments**

#### **Infographic**

## Compliments



**Adopt  
North East**

We started discussing adopting again and then we reached out to Adopt North East. Because we had adopted with the Agency before, it felt a bit like a family and we knew we would be fully supported. Adopt North East put all our fears to one side. After we spoke to the Agency, we felt ready to do it again. It has been lovely to come back and we have enjoyed the process

Thank you for bringing warmth, patience and kindness

I feel so lucky to have you as our post adoption social worker. You go above and beyond and the difference it has made to our girls and to us has been huge.

We just wanted to say a huge thank you for supporting us through our assessment... you have gone above and beyond to help support our adoption journey

Thank you so much for helping me with my letter which you emailed me from my Granddaughter's adoptive Dad After advising me to send card through ANE post box, it is now in the post and hopefully will reach her before Christmas. Once again thank you

### **Overview**

Adopt North East regularly receives the feedback of users of its services, much of it complimentary. This feedback provides assurance about the quality of practice and the experience they have of services.

### **2022-2023 Report**

For the annual report, one comment is provided with consent which captures the spirit and effectiveness of so much of the work undertaken by the staff of Adopt North East:

*Can I just say that our Post Adoption Support Social Worker has been an absolute life saver for us. We have a fantastic relationship and she is literally my angel... She is a credit to Adopt North East. We now have therapy in place for our children and we finally have therapy for ourselves also. I can't thank you enough.*

## Complaints

### Infographic



### Overview

Complaints are direct service-user feedback and accordingly, an important source of learning.

Adopt North East makes every effort where possible to deal with a concern informally. However, where no satisfactory resolution can be reached, complaints are investigated within the statutory process. Stage 1 Complaints are investigated by the Team Manager responsible for the management of the case. Stage 1 response letters are quality assured by the Senior Manager for Adopt North East. Stages 2 and 3 Complaints are managed by the Corporate Complaints Team with findings reported to the Senior Manager for Adopt North East and the Assistant Director of North Tyneside Council.

Complaints are a standing agenda item at the Adopt North East Management Group Meeting. This enables review and reflection and any relevant learning to be shared and taken forward as improvement work.

### 2022-2023 Report

During the reporting period, Adopt North East had 5 Stage 1 Complaints, 0 Stage 2 Complaints and 0 Stage 3 Complaints. All complainants received a detailed written response from a manager of the Agency, detailing the investigation undertaken, any

findings, explicit confirmation as to whether the complaint was or was not upheld and, where appropriate, actions that the Agency would then take. The continued low numbers of formal complaints are attributable, in part, to a focus by the Agency on trying to resolve complaints at an informal stage. 5 recorded complaints were resolved informally during 2022/23.

The small number of complaints within the reporting period is such that no meaningful patterns can be established, based on frequency and type of complaint or the distribution of complainants. However, complaints – irrespective of number – can and should inform service and practice development and improvement.

From a review of the five Stage 1 complaints received during the year, some inevitably relate to disagreement by the complainants with the decisions of the Agency. These complaints are sensitively handled and often require a more detailed explanation of the reasons for a decision. No complaints led to findings that decisions had been in error.

In relation to other matters of concern to complainants, the following general points of learning may be noted:

- Although the preparation and distribution of Life Story Work is the responsibility of the child's Local Authority, when there is delay Adopt North East needs to ensure that it satisfactorily chases up on behalf of adopters (3 complaints)
- Where there is unavoidably delay in assessment work, this needs to be clearly communicated to adopters and a new timescale provided (2 complaints)
- Case recording needs to be entered in a timely manner by Social Workers to ensure that, should the need arise, cases can be continued by other Workers (1 Complaint)

## Independent Review Mechanism

### Infographic



### Overview

The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is a review process established by law which enables prospective or existing adopters to review a decision by the Agency that they are not suitable to adopt. The IRM is not an appeal process in that it cannot overturn the decision of the Agency. It does however make a fresh recommendation following consideration by an independent Panel to the Agency on the suitability of adopters. The IRM does not have the power to consider whether adoption should be the plan for a child, or whether a child should be placed/matched with a particular prospective adopter or deal with complaints.

### 2022-2023 Report

Within the reporting period there were no cases subject to the Independent Review Mechanism.

## Inspection Findings

### Infographic



### Overview

Regional Adoption Agencies are not currently subject to inspection by Ofsted. However, Ofsted note that during their inspection of Local Authority Children’s Social Care they *‘do take into account the interface between the individual local authority and the RAA’* noting:

*[Ofsted] focus on how the local authority discharges its functions through the RAA and how it ensures that the RAA meets the local authority’s needs. We always look at this through the lens of the local authority.*

Toward the end of the reporting period, Ofsted indicated that during 2023/24 they will be undertaking a Thematic Inspection of Regional Adoption Agencies. It is anticipated that these will take place in the Autumn of 2023.

### 2022-2023 Report

During the reporting period, one ILACS Short Inspection and one Focused Visit relevant to adoption took place. Both provide assurance about the positive work of the Agency.

The Short Inspection of South Tyneside Council in December 2022 concluded:

*South Tyneside is part of a regional adoption agency (Adopt North East), which is meeting the needs of children with a plan for adoption. The quality of the recruitment, assessment and support of adopters is good.*

Additionally, a Focused Visit of Northumberland County Council in relation to the local authority's arrangements for planning and achieving permanence took place in July 2022. Whilst focused on practice by the Local Authority, of relevance the Inspectors noted the positive feedback about the introduction of the UEA Moving to Adoption model of introductions by the Agency and partners, commenting:

*[Northumberland] Child Permanence Workers and foster carers speak positively about a practice model which has been recently introduced... They appreciate that children's introductions to adoptive parents are completed at the child's pace and promote continuing contact with foster carers post placement where appropriate.*

## Other Learning Opportunities

### Infographic



### Overview

As a learning organisation, Adopt North East is committed to commissioning regular peer reviews of its services. Opportunities for reflective challenge by peer organisations offer a wealth of learning and they have been and will continue to be

an essential part of our improvement journey. Additionally, there are occasions when national or international learning is of direct relevance. Where this is the case, Adopt North East will reflect on its services in light of such learning, making such changes as are informed by evidence and best practice.

## **2022-2023 Report**

### Local Government Association Peer Review

In the reporting period, Adopt North East commissioned and was subject to a Peer Review undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA). The Peer Team was led by an experienced ex-Director of Children's Services and included adoption experts. The Team was asked by the Executive Board to consider, following three years of operational delivery of adoption services by the Agency, the overall progress in delivering the vision and ambition of its partners for excellence in adoption services, with a particular focus on Leadership, Management and Governance and the sufficiency of adopters for the children of the partnership with plans of adoption.

Between 01-04 November 2022, the Peer Team spent three days with Adopt North East and its partners, speaking to 65 stakeholders and gathering information and views during 26 Focus Groups, as well as from additional research and reading. The Team made a number of findings, concluding:

*We consider that [the Adopt North East partnership] have the firm foundations needed to deliver effective services through the regional adoption agency. The agency knows itself well. [The partnership has] made good progress and recognises there is more to do.*

The Peer Team made nine recommendations. The recommendations were as follows:

1. Review the Executive Board arrangements to ensure there is capacity to drive forward the partnership.
2. Review the Operational Board arrangements to ensure all partners are accountable for being the drivers for change.
3. Urgently agree a new financial model that reflects activity and is informed by an improved sufficiency plan.
4. Request ANE to provide a schedule of potential cost reductions reflecting budgetary processes across the five authorities
5. The Executive Board to review the most recent performance data for 22/23 in order to assess the impact on sufficiency and develop shared mitigations.
6. Establish a sufficiency strategy for adoption
7. Adopt NE should share more information with practitioners across the partnership about the pipeline of adopters coming through.

8. Continue to strengthen pan-regional arrangements and explore reciprocal arrangements for interagency placements with ATV and Coast to Coast.
9. Continue to use opportunities to strengthen a shared culture across the partnership

These nine recommendations were accepted in full by the Executive Board. The Board has subsequently overseen the delivery of these recommendations.

#### Leiland-James Corkill Child Safeguarding Practice Review

Leiland-James Corkill was thirteen months old when he sadly died. Tragically he died in the care of Cumbria County Council whilst placed with adopters assessed and approved by the Council. One of the adopters was subsequently found guilty of his murder and jailed for life. A Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership was undertaken. This made a number of recommendations relevant to practice by Adopt North East. This included amongst other changes:

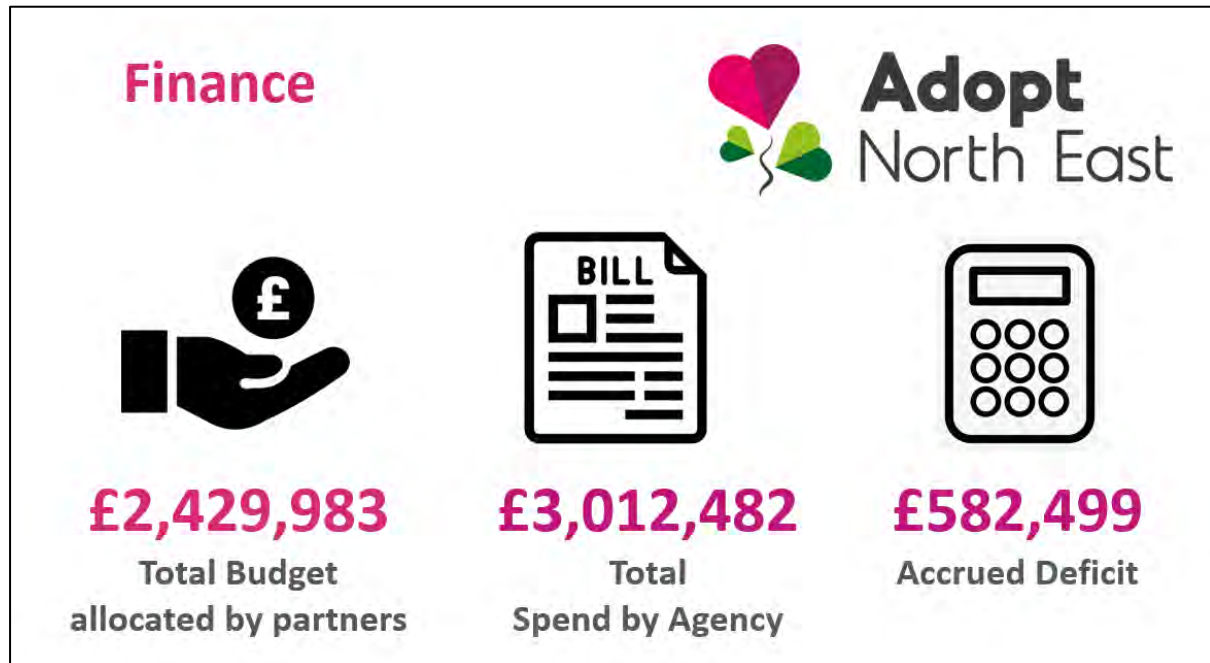
- Strengthening checks relating to the health of adopters at Stage 1
- Strengthening the review process of approved adopters
- Strengthening the assessment and consideration of the financial circumstances of prospective adopters
- Strengthening the assessment of and engagement with the support network around prospective adopters through the introduction of Network Meetings
- Strengthening the approach of the Agency to visiting children placed with adopters, including the use of unannounced visits

The Senior Manager undertook briefing sessions with all staff and also with partner Local Authorities to ensure that learning from the tragedy improved practice across the partnership.



# Adopt North East Finance

## Infographic



## Overview

The budget of Adopt North East is set by the Executive Board. The budget is provided by the five partner Local Authorities. The financial management of Adopt North East is overseen through the governance arrangements in place for the Regional Adoption Agency. This includes Quarterly Outturns to the Senior Leadership Group and Executive Board. Additionally, the Senior Manager for the Agency has monthly meetings with the allocated Finance Officer from North Tyneside Council who host the RAA. This ensures robust financial monitoring, with variance challenged and scrutinised.

## 2022-2023 Report

The budget for Adopt North East set by the Executive Board for 2022/23 was £2,429,983. Actual spend for the year was £3,012,482, an accrued deficit of £582,499. This deficit related to an accepted shortfall in the income target for the Agency derived from fees paid to the Agency by other agencies matching children with Adopt North East adopters. This shortfall was partially but not wholly offset by an in-year reduction in some areas of planned spend. Accordingly, an additional contribution from partner Local Authorities ensured that the Agency spend was reconciled.

During the period, the Executive Board of Adopt North East accepted the recommendation of the Local Government Association Peer Review that the Board work to 'agree a new financial model'. This work is ongoing. It is anticipated that a new model will be adopted for 2024/25.

## Adopt North East Improvement Journey

### Infographic

**Our Key Priorities 2020/23**  **Adopt North East**

Adopt North East is committed to delivering **excellent** adoption services that **transform** children's and families lives for the **better**.

We will:

- **Recruit the right forever families for children needing adoption**
- **Deliver a positive experience for those wanting to adopt**
- **Provide effective help and care to adopters, those adopted and those affected by adoption**
- **Develop a passionate, skilled group of specialist staff, committed to best practice**
- **Meet the needs and ambitions of our partner Local Authorities**

### Overview

In September 2020 Adopt North East established a three-year strategy to deliver the vision and ambition of its partner Local Authorities for ***excellent adoption services that transform children's and families lives for the better.***

The key priorities of Adopt North East to deliver the vision for excellence are:

1. Recruit the right forever families for children needing adoption
2. Deliver a positive experience for those wanting to adopt
3. Provide effective help and care to adopters, those adopted and those affected by adoption
4. Develop a passionate, skilled group of specialist staff, committed to best practice
5. Meet the needs and ambitions of our partner Local Authorities

## 2022-2023 Report

The reporting period represents the final phase of delivery in relation to the Agency's 2020-2023 Improvement Plan. Since its inception, the Improvement Plan has been subject to monthly tracking of progress by the Adopt North East Management Team to ensure delivery of actions relating to the five priorities.

Key actions that have been completed within the reporting period in 2022/23 that have contributed towards delivery are noted in tabula form:

<b>1. Recruit the right forever families for children needing adoption</b>		
	<b>Adopt North East said it would...</b>	<b>In 2022/23 Adopt North East has...</b>
1.1	Develop a detailed <b><i>understanding of the adopters the Agency needs</i></b> to meet current and projected sufficiency, based on the profile of the children being referred to it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed Performance Management Information of the children being referred</li> <li>• Implemented a monthly 'Hard to Place' Performance Meeting</li> </ul>
1.2	Work with experts in media communication to effectively <b><i>raise the profile of the Agency and target adopter recruitment</i></b> at the prospective adopters that the Agency needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivered three 'large' thematic recruitment campaigns (Summer, Spring and Autumn) and targeted recruitment activity including health, police and education professionals, LGBTQ+, minority ethnic and faith communities and continued to raise awareness of the needs of children requiring adoption</li> </ul>
1.3	Refresh the <b><i>Agency's information offer</i></b> to prospective adopters to ensure that it is attractive, compelling, informative and of high quality, with both <b><i>content and design informed by national best practice</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued to strengthen the content on its redesigned website</li> <li>• Established a monthly Comms Group of staff committed to developing its marketing and communications</li> <li>• Designed and launched new Information Leaflets</li> </ul>
1.4	Map, understand and target the key employers, faith and community groups and leaders of influence within the region to <b><i>raise awareness of the Agency</i></b> and the need for adopters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted a number of large regional employers</li> <li>• Partnered with My Adoption Family, a charity supporting minority ethnic adopters</li> </ul>
1.5	Strengthen the quality of the Agency's assessments of adopters, the adoption support available and the work of Panel to ensure prospective <b><i>adopters are supported to appropriately maximise their matching preferences</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertaken training on recruitment of adopters for siblings</li> <li>• Undertaken Secure Base Training</li> <li>• Launched a monthly Waiting Adopter Group</li> <li>• Reviewed and strengthened the training offer</li> <li>• Participated in the pan-regional Early</li> </ul>

		Permanence Project
1.6	Develop the Agency's strength of practice in delivering <b>targeted, child-specific recruitment activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertaken two Activity Days</li> <li>• Held Virtual Profiling Events</li> <li>• Commissioned bespoke DVD Profiles of children</li> <li>• Used Child Specific Adopter Recruitment Advertising</li> </ul>
1.7	Explore whether <b>partnering with other Adoption Agencies</b> could contribute to the delivery of sufficient families for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Met regularly with the two other Regional Adoption Agencies and regional Voluntary Adoption Agencies to map and strengthen regional adopter sufficiency</li> <li>• Fully participated to the North East Early Permanence Project which aims to increase regional sufficiency</li> </ul>

## 2. Deliver a positive experience for those wanting to adopt

	Adopt North East said it would...	In 2022/23 Adopt North East has...
2.1	Increase the <b>range and scope of opportunities for adopters to feedback</b> to the Agency their experience of their journey to better inform learning about what the Agency does well and what the Agency needs to change, <b>strengthening the involvement of adopters in service design and development</b> by enhancing their voice as stakeholders in the work of the Regional Adoption Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held a bi-monthly Adopter Reference Group – known as North East Adopter Voice</li> <li>• Surveyed service users as part of the Peer Review of Post Adoption Support</li> </ul>
2.2	Ensure that <b>feedback</b> from adopters is an <b>integral part of the Quality of Practice framework</b> of the Agency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to deliver a systematic approach to recording feedback</li> </ul>
2.3	Ensure that those choosing the <b>Non-Agency Adoption</b> pathway are <b>effectively supported</b> to do so	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implemented a new pathway for those enquiring about Non-Agency Adoption</li> <li>• Significantly strengthened the information available on the Agency website about Non-Agency Adoption</li> <li>• Developed new Practice Guidance relating to Non-Agency Adoption</li> </ul>
2.4	Ensure that <b>Training for Prospective Adopters</b> is <b>strong, evidence-based</b> and <b>addresses vulnerabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewed and strengthened training content</li> </ul>

<b>3. Provide effective help and care to adopters, those adopted and those affected by adoption</b>		
	<b>Adopt North East said it would...</b>	<b>In 2022/23 Adopt North East has...</b>
3.1	Map and understand the actual and <b>likely demand for adoption support</b> to inform what the support offer should be;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implemented the learning from a Peer Review of Adoption Support undertaken by a national Centre of Excellence</li> </ul>
3.2	Develop the <b>model of delivery</b> of support by the Agency, introducing a <b>tiered approach to meeting need</b> , increasing the amount of support delivered directly by the Agency;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Successfully bid for funding to develop a pan-regional Centre of Excellence for Adoption Support</li> <li>Delivered Support Groups for adopters</li> <li>Delivered Summer and Christmas Events for the adopter community</li> <li>Supported staff to access specialist training in therapies to strengthen the quality of assessment and provide a foundation for delivering more support in-house</li> </ul>
3.3	Effectively <b>manage, monitor and quality assure</b> the support commissioned by the Agency to ensure that the support is of <b>best value</b> and <b>meets the needs</b> of children and adopters, achieves positive change and improves outcomes;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worked throughout the reporting period to move therapeutic providers onto a 'Flexible Provider Framework' in partnership with Commissioning colleagues of North Tyneside Council.</li> <li>Held a Providers' Gathering</li> </ul>
3.4	Develop and deliver <b>effective Post Box and Access to Records services</b> on behalf of the partnership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced the delays in Post Box</li> <li>Undertaken Business Analysis of commissioned adoption support with a view to strengthening the quality of service and best value</li> </ul>

<b>4. Develop a passionate, skilled group of specialist staff, committed to best practice</b>		
	<b>Adopt North East said it would...</b>	<b>In 2022/23 Adopt North East has...</b>
4.1	Establish itself as the <b>employer of choice</b> within the Region for practitioners passionate about adoption, recruiting and retaining those committed to evidence-informed best practice and the highest professional standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued to be the employer of choice as evidenced by recruitment rounds where there has been significant interest in posts from high calibre applicants.</li> <li>Continued to undertake a bi-annual staff survey</li> </ul>
4.2	Develop a <b>strong and compelling Workforce Development Strategy</b> to ensure that all Agency staff have the right skills, knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewed and updated a Workforce Development Strategy co-produced with the staff group.</li> </ul>

	and expertise to transform the lives of children and families for the better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintained regular Whole Staff Events as learning opportunities, including two Annual Staff Conferences</li> </ul>
4.3	Ensure that the <b>operating model</b> of the Agency supports the delivery of excellence in adoption through the efficient and effective delivery of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embedded the three-team structure within Recruitment, Assessment and Support</li> <li>Updated and reviewed webhosted Policies and Procedures</li> </ul>
4.4	Maximise the use of <b>Information Technology</b> solutions to support the efficient delivery of services and the quality of practice;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued to utilise Rapid Process Improvement Workshops for Liquidlogic which have improved the case management system</li> <li>Enabled applicant adopters to book on-line for Information Events</li> <li>Enabled adopters to book on-line for Support Groups</li> <li>Held regular Virtual Information Events and Virtual Adoption Panels</li> </ul>
4.5	Explore where the use of <b>evidence-informed practice</b> by the Agency and partners could contribute to improved outcomes, for example in assessment, family finding, moving into adoption and post-adoption contact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued to embed the evidence-informed model of introductions (UEA)</li> <li>Commissioned Secure Base Training</li> <li>Scoped alternative format for the assessment of adopters</li> <li>Commissioned cultural sensitivity and faith literacy training</li> </ul>

## 5. Meet the needs and ambitions of our partner Local Authorities

	Adopt North East said it would...	In 2022/23 Adopt North East has...
5.1	Develop, strengthen and fully engage with the <b>governance mechanisms</b> in place to ensure the Agency's five partner Local Authorities have sufficient oversight and assurance regarding the operation, performance and financial management of the Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthened governance arrangements in light of the findings of the LGA Peer Review, increasing the frequency of meetings</li> <li>Participated in a review of the funding model for the Agency</li> </ul>
5.2	Commission and participate in a <b>range of quality assurance activities</b> , including internal and external Learning Reviews and regional and national benchmarking exercises to assess the performance of the Agency against comparators and national best practice to inform ongoing service development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implemented the findings of the Peer Review of Post Adoption Support</li> <li>Commissioned and participated in a Peer Review by the Local Government Association</li> <li>Continued to develop the amount of performance management information available to the partnership</li> <li>Continued to learn from Disruptions</li> </ul>
5.3	Co-produce with partners an agreed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed the performance management</li> </ul>

	<b>Performance Management Information framework and Quality of Practice Framework</b> for the Agency as well as <b>shared policies and procedures</b> for practitioners across the partnership	<p>information available</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued to co-produce a range of policies and procedures</li> </ul>
5.4	Strengthen <b>connectivity between the Agency and its partners</b> , particularly with Local Authority Children’s Social Workers and their Team Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued to develop strong and constructive working relationships with its five Local Authority partners, including monthly Family Finding Meetings and monthly Operational Leadership Group Meetings</li> <li>Introduced RAA ‘Link Workers’ for each of the five partners</li> <li>Delivered Lunch and Learn Sessions in relation to Early Permanence</li> </ul>
5.5	Establish, develop and maintain effective <b>links between the Agency and the wider adoption system</b> , including Voluntary Adoption Agencies, the Judiciary, Regional and National Adoption Leaders, research and third sector organisations and the Department for Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regularly met with stakeholders within the wider adoption system, including with other RAA’s, VAA’s, the judiciary, CAFCASS, the third sector and research bodies.</li> <li>Delivered training on adoption to the local CAFCASS Team</li> </ul>

## New Service Plan 2023-2025

### Infographic

**Service Plan 2023-25**





**More Adopters**



**Earlier Placements**



**Stronger Support**



**Higher Quality**



**Deeper Partnerships**

## Overview

Since it was established in December 2018, Adopt North East has been committed to delivering the vision and ambition of its partner Local Authorities for ***excellent adoption services that transform children's and families lives for the better.***

Between 2018 and 2020 the Agency's Service Plan reflected the need for Adopt North East to develop as a newly established Agency. The eight priorities were:

1. Effective Leadership and Governance, and Organisational Development
2. Robust Financial Management
3. Robust Performance Management
4. Effective Quality of Practice
5. Increased Adopter Recruitment
6. High Quality Adoption Support
7. Efficient and Effective Family Finding and Matching
8. Business Improvement and Efficiency

From 2020 the Agency changed its Service Plan to the following five priorities:

1. Recruit the right forever families for children needing adoption
2. Deliver a positive experience for those wanting to adopt
3. Provide effective help and care to adopters and those adopted
4. Develop a passionate, skilled group of specialist staff, committed to best practice
5. Meet the needs and ambitions of our partner Local Authorities

In March 2023, the Executive Board of Adopt North East refreshed priorities for the Agency, including for the first time a commitment to Early Permanence and a more explicit commitment to strengthening the quality of practice. The five new priorities for Adopt North East are:

1. More Adopters
2. Earlier Placements
3. Stronger Support
4. Higher Quality
5. Deeper Partnerships

Each priority has a number of associated actions. A full report of progress toward delivery will be contained within the 2023/24 Annual Report in July 2024.



# **Adopt North East Annual Report**

## **Author/s**

This Annual Report has been prepared and written by Nik Flavell, Senior Manager of Adopt North East.

## **Date of Report**

This Report was completed on 31 August 2023.

## **Approval of Report**

This Report has been approved by the Executive Board of Adopt North East on 13 September 2023.

## **Accessing the Report**

Copies of this Report will be made available upon request. This Report is also made available, in full, on the Adopt North East website.