



Annual Report

2019-2020



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1. Introduction

ASW is the regional adoption agency that undertakes the adoption functions on behalf of the Local Authorities of Devon, Plymouth, Somerset, and Torbay.

2019-2020 represents the first full year of service and ASW is building a good reputation as an adoption agency.

The provision of an adoption service is a statutory requirement. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the structure for an adoption service. Under the Adoption Act 2002 s3, each Council must continue to maintain within its area an adoption service designed to meet the needs of children who may be adopted, their parents, their natural parents and former guardians. These services are referred to as the Adoption Service, (Adoption and Children Act 2002 s2 (1)). An adoption agency refers either to a local authority or to a registered adoption society under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 s2 (1)

On 1st October 2018 Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, Somerset County Council and Torbay City Council, combined their adoption services to form ASW.

ASW was the 11th regional adoption agency to go Live and has been at the forefront of this development. In March 2020 there were 22 live regional adoption agency's across the country.

Whilst each local authority retains overall responsibility for their adoption services and continues to retain overall responsibility for their children looked after, most adoption functions are delegated to ASW.

ASW has responsibility for recruiting, assessing and supporting prospective adopters, for non-agency adoption work including partner adoptions and for intercountry adoptions.

ASW is responsible for family finding for all children with adoption plans in the ASW region.

ASW provides support to all parties affected by adoption, including adopters, adoptees, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth relatives.

An Inter Authority Agreement sets out the terms and conditions for the establishment and operation of ASW between the parties, including the key objectives of ASW; the principles of collaboration; the governance structures for ASW; and the respective roles and responsibilities the parties have during the currency of the agreement.

This report is the first full year annual report of ASW. It fulfils the obligations in the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011), the Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to each local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report below.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 31st March 2020. Plans for children are dynamic and develop every day and the picture will have changed at the point this is read. Our task has been to place children promptly in adoptive families that have been robustly assessed and are well prepared for the challenges of adoption. We support children and their adoptive families throughout their childhood and adolescence.

2. Working with Devon, Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay

Since going live, ASW has had responsibility to discharge the four local authorities' responsibilities as an adoption agency. The working relationship between the local authority and ASW has been fundamental to its success so far and partnership working has been embedded at all levels.

The lead members for children's services of all four local authorities sit as members of the ASW Strategic Partnership Board, alongside the directors of all four local authorities' children's services. Representatives from our local Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Families For Children and Barnardo's also sit on our Strategic Partnership Board.

The Assistant Directors for each local authority's children's services attend the six weekly Operational Board meetings, which provide an important opportunity for operational issues to be raised and shared.

Working nationally, the regional adoption agency leaders meet together, on a 6-weekly basis, with representatives from the Department for Education, to consider national issues and to share good practice.

3. Headline Activity Data

1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 Adopter Sufficiency

In the year 2019-2020 ASW approved an average of 5 new adoptive families a month.

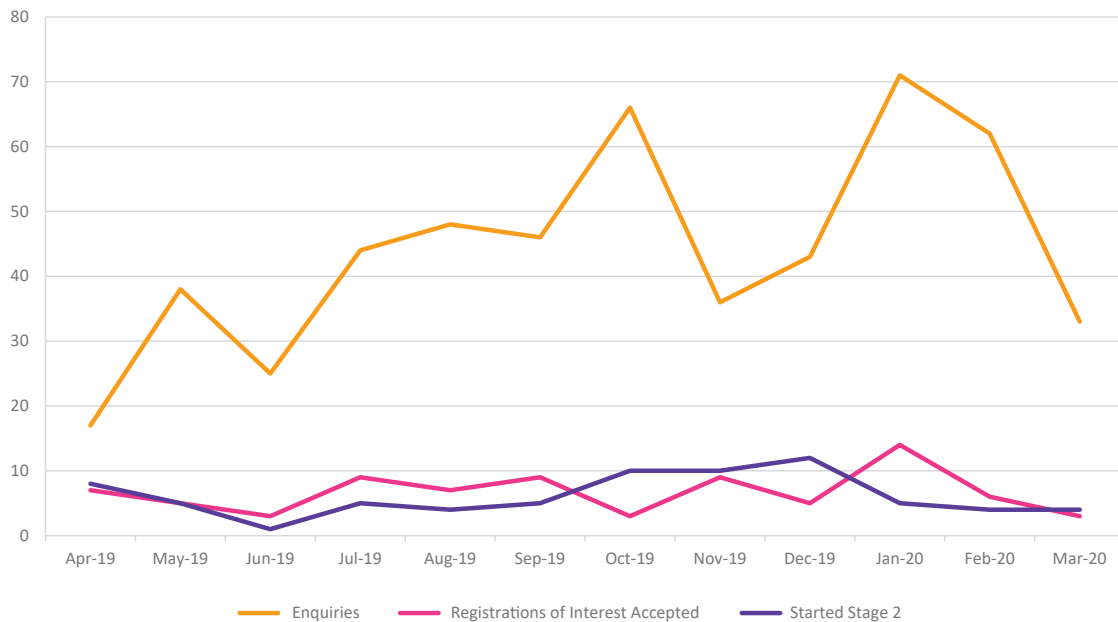
Adopter sufficiency remains an issue locally and nationally, and the ASW Service Manager sits on the regional adoption agency leaders National Recruitment Steering Group. Recognising the challenge of adopter sufficiency, the Department for Education (DfE) has given the regional adopters agency leaders group £645,000 for marketing. Just prior to Christmas 2019 the DfE announced an additional £1m for regional adoption agency leaders to spend collectively with voluntary adoption agencies, on recruitment in 2020-21. The national campaign was due to start at the end of March but due to Covid-19 this has been delayed.

Locally the teams have worked to boost recruitment and have been very active. During the 2019 National Adoption Week the team staged, amongst many other activities, Facebook Live events making good use of the region's adopters and sharing expertise.

The team have an active presence on social media, local radio and television, and the numbers of potential adopters are increasing.

4. Marketing

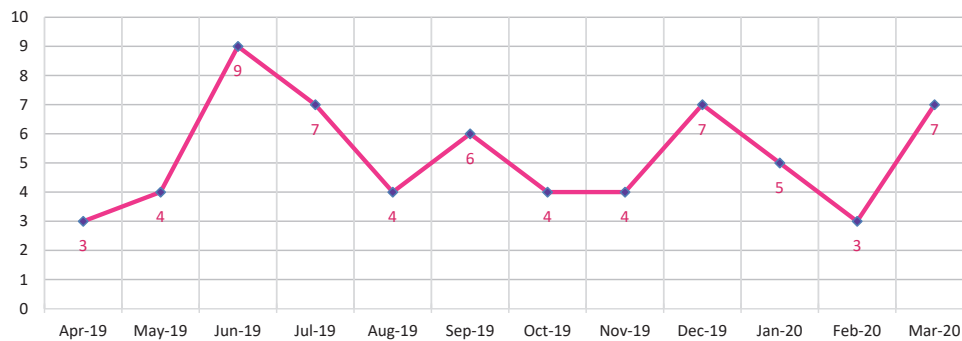
Throughout 2019-2020 there was no paid-for campaign for ASW. Instead, marketing and communications have been managed organically through social media, sharing adopter stories and videos, website updates, event promotion, Facebook Live events, newsletters, and tapping into awareness days and celebrations - the main annual event being National Adoption Week in October 2019 where statistics reflected higher numbers of visits and engagement. As the chart demonstrates the number of enquires of people considering adoption was rising, until March 2020 when numbers plummeted due to the impact of Covid-19.



5. Recruitment and Assessment

| Month | Enquiries | Registrations of Interest Accepted | Started Stage 2 |
|--------|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Apr-19 | 17 | 7 | 8 |
| May-19 | 38 | 5 | 5 |
| Jun-19 | 25 | 3 | 1 |
| Jul-19 | 44 | 9 | 5 |
| Aug-19 | 48 | 7 | 4 |
| Sep-19 | 46 | 9 | 5 |
| Oct-19 | 66 | 3 | 10 |
| Nov-19 | 36 | 9 | 10 |
| Dec-19 | 43 | 5 | 12 |
| Jan-20 | 71 | 14 | 5 |
| Feb-20 | 62 | 6 | 4 |
| Mar-20 | 33 | 3 | 4 |

6. Adopter Approvals

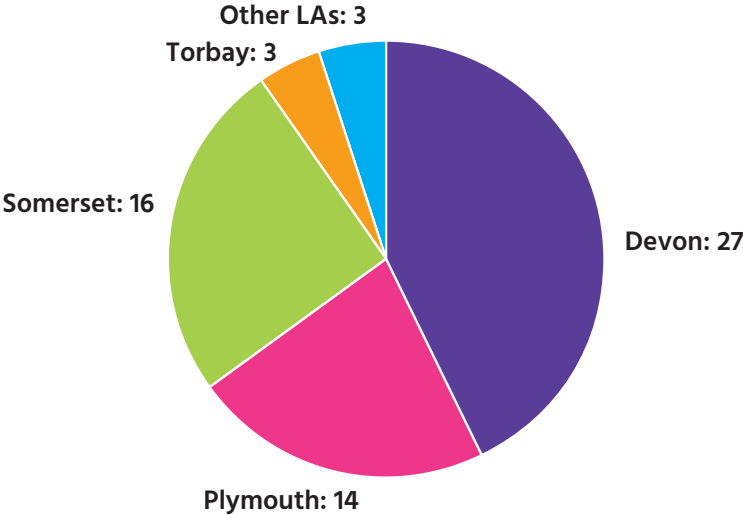


It can take some time before those enquiring about adoption go on to make their application. The process of assessment takes approximately 6 months, so there can be significant time lag between recruitment campaigns and approvals. We noticed approvals rising significantly in June and this is attributable to delays around coherent systems coming into place from our go live a few months before.

In 2019 -2020 ASW approved, on average, 5 new adoptive families a month.

A total of 63 families in the year were approved.

Approvals by Adopter's LA



7. Non-Agency Adoptions

ASW commissions Families For Children to undertake assessments for non-agency, step-parent adoptions in the region. In 2019- 2020, Families for Children undertook 19 assessments on our behalf.



8. Family Finding the National Picture

The Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB), who collate and analyse adoption statistics on behalf of the Department for Education, reported the following national trends;

Adoption numbers are falling

Alongside the regional adoption agency agenda, the national challenges facing the sector outlined through analysis by the National Adoption Leadership board are:

- The number of placement orders granted has declined nationally
- Nationally figures from the ASGLB tell us that there are:
 - 2200 children waiting for adoptive families
 - 1400 adopters not matched
- Nationally, the gap between the two gets bigger every quarter as recruitment of adopters has struggled to keep up with the number of children needing families.
- The key area of pressure nationally and locally is adopter sufficiency.
- Work is being undertaken at a national level to increase recruitment and to target adopters for the children waiting longest.
- We need to maximise all opportunities within our region.

This is reflected in the ASW region.

9. Agency Decision Maker Best Interest Decision

By quarter by LA

| Local authority | 2018-2019 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | TOTAL 2019-2020 |
|-----------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|-----------------|
| Devon | 59 | 13 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 47 |
| Plymouth | 28 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 33 |
| Somerset | 64 | 17 | 13 | 7 | 11 | 48 |
| Torbay | 24 | 7 | 2 | 9 | 2 | 20 |
| Total | 175 | 45 | 35 | 35 | 33 | 148 |

Best interest decisions have gone down in Devon, Somerset and Torbay which reflects the national trend, whilst those in Plymouth have risen.

10. Placement Orders

| Local authority | 2018-2019 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | TOTAL 2019-2020 |
|-----------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|-----------------|
| Devon | 46 | 7 | 11 | 11 | 7 | 36 |
| Plymouth | 27 | 7 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 22 |
| Somerset | 55 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 3 | 32 |
| Torbay | 19 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 12 |
| Total | 147 | 28 | 30 | 28 | 15 | 102 |

11. Placed for Adoption

| Local authority | 2018-2019 | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | TOTAL 2019-2020 |
|-----------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|-----------------|
| Devon | 36 | 13 | 13 | 6 | 7 | 39 |
| Plymouth | 27 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 18 |
| Somerset | 31 | 13 | 3 | 10 | 8 | 34 |
| Torbay | 25 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 16 |
| TOTAL | 119 | 33 | 26 | 22 | 24 | 107 |



12. Placing Children with Adopters

One of our key principles has been to place children from the ASW (ASW) region with ASW adopters.

- 77% of ASW children were placed with in house adopters
- 106 children were matched in 90 families
- 69 matches were with ASW families and 21 with a voluntary adoption agency and 3 matches with the child's foster carer

ASW placed 107 children with 90 families.

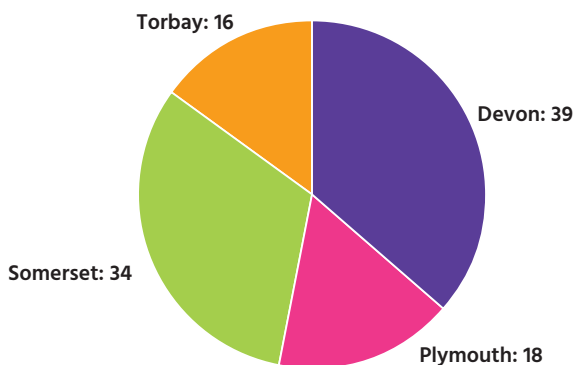
There were 4 children where their introductions to their prospective adopters were halted:

- A 9-year-old girl from Devon. There is now a possible link for her that is being pursued
- A brother and sister from Plymouth. They have been subsequently matched.
- A 5-year-old girl from Somerset, for whom we continue to family find.

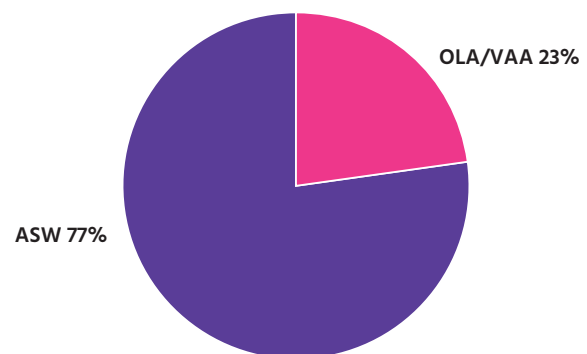
At the end of March 2020, ASW had 66 children with placement orders who were not yet placed. Out of those 66 there were 14 sibling groups, and 11 children with special needs.

Reflecting a national concern, there remains a group of priority children for whom ASW is still family finding for internally and nationally.

Children Matched by Child's LA



Matches Agreed by Adopter's LA



13. Adoption Support

Adoption support has been an area of significant growth within ASW. We are striving to ensure local access to support within each local authority, to respond to the high level of need reported by families where assessment and services are required.

The level of work undertaken by ASW in this area reflects the ongoing challenges and support required by adoptive parents in meeting their children's needs. It is well established that early life adversity has a long-term impact on children who can present with a range of attachment and post traumatic disorders. This is coupled with longer term issues of identity and having to come to terms with loss and change. The commitment of ASW staff will assist them to be equipped and able to support adoptive families effectively.

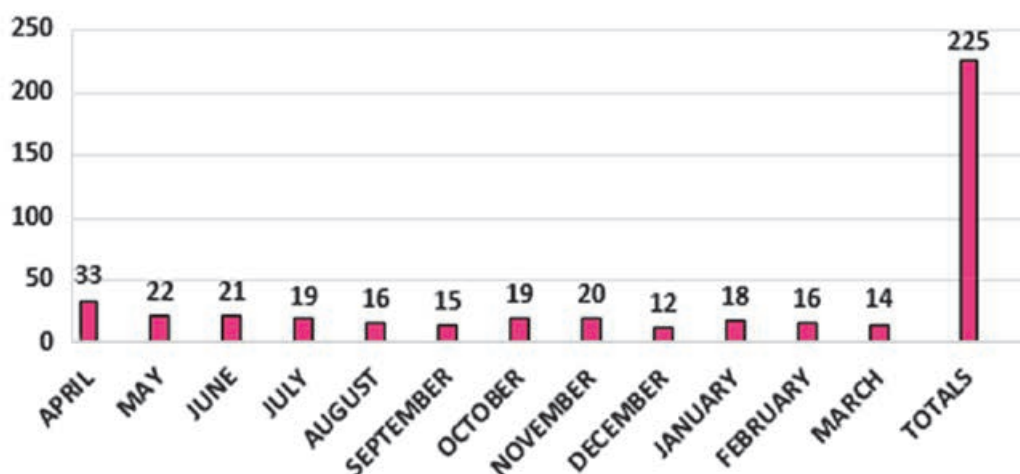
The types of support requested by adoptive families vary but frequently include requests for advice on strategies on;

- Helping their children settle within the family
- Talking about and telling their children their adoption story
- Dealing with child on parent violence
- Education related matters
- Dealing with developmental trauma and how to parent therapeutically

Over the course of the year ASW took 225 new referrals from families requesting support for their families.

At the beginning of the year the team were supporting 315 families and by the end of the year this had risen to 525 families being actively supported by staff.

Number of Referrals



14. Adoption Support Referrals

Average 18.75 referrals a month.

When ASW first went live in October 2018, referral rates were high, possibly due to ASW adopters being more aware of support available due to the publicity of the formation of ASW. There was also a pause in some local authorities taking on new work ahead of ASW going live, which work was then picked up by ASW. There has been a gradual, but fairly consistent, drop in referral rates since going live which is largely due to adopters across the whole region having better access to group support, training and events, reducing the need for them to access more formal support.

Social Workers' caseloads have risen in the year. From an average of 24.6 families per social worker in April 2019 to an average of 27.9 in March 2020. This increase is in red and amber rated families, i.e. families where we are more concerned, and are offering more focussed support.

At any one time there are approximately 30 families, across the region, that we are particularly concerned about and are working closely with the child's local authority to support the family and prevent breakdown.

15. Post Order Disruptions

15 adopted children came into care in 2019-2020

- 8 Devon children, 1 has returned home
- 1 child in Plymouth
- 5 in Somerset
- And 1 in Torbay

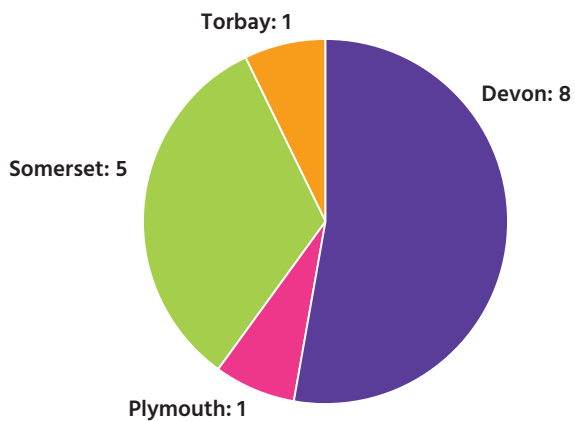
The children ranged in age from 9 to 17 years old.

With each family, significant support had been offered with substantial therapeutic services and other interventions. The resources of the local authorities children's teams would also have been called upon to try to keep the child living within the family. All the young people had significant trauma histories.

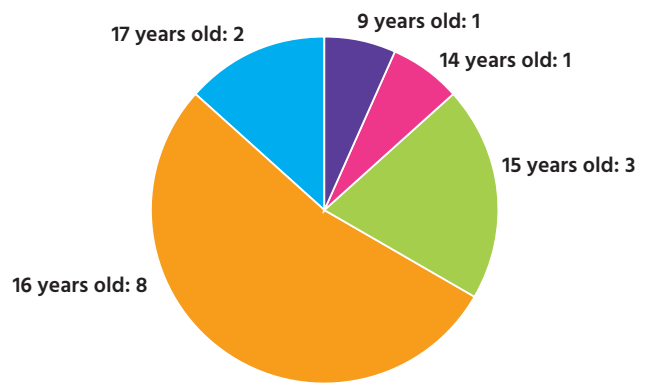
When adopted children do come into care, most adoptive families wish to continue to be significantly involved with their child, and this is supported with therapeutic work accessed by ASW.

ASW is working to provide a consistent support offer so that every adoptive family can receive the same level of services irrespective of where they live. Practice standards are in development for responding to requests for support and ASW has put in place a range of training courses and support groups across the region.

Adopted children who came into Care by Child's LA



by Age of Child



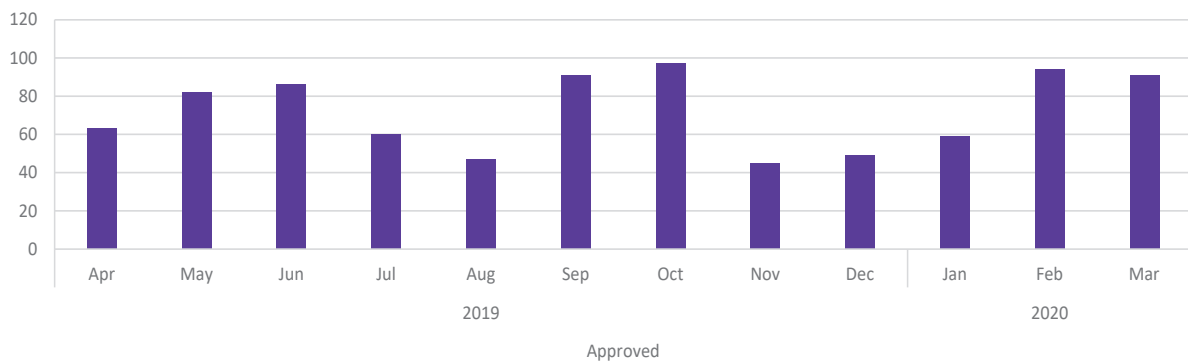
16. Adoption Support Fund

During this period 791 applications have been made and £2,126,076 has been secured for therapeutic services for adoptive families in the ASW region.

This is an increase on funding accessed for families from the 2018-2019 period of circa £100k.

A total of 864 families across the region accessed funding for therapeutic support through ASW.

Number of adopted children receiving a service



17. Birth Relative Support

Following the collapse of After Adoption, who held the contract with Somerset, all birth parent support has now come in house to ASW. A member of their staff has joined our team and has set up a successful birth parent group in the Somerset area. Plans are in place to build upon this existing model and expand across the region.

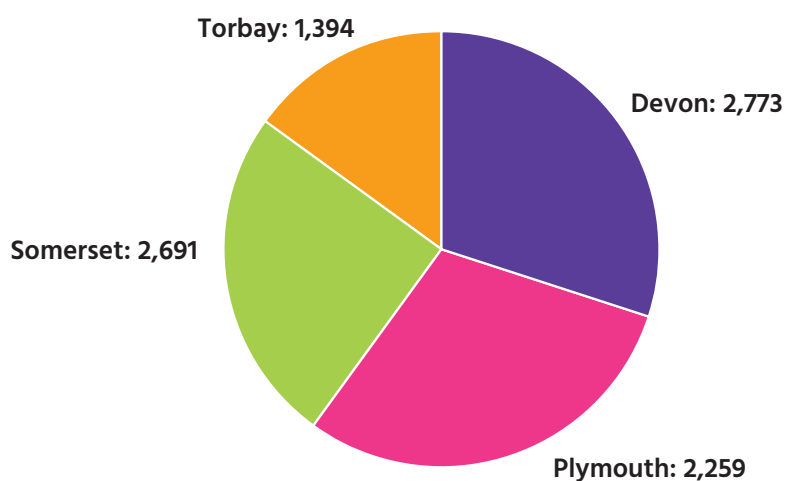
Feedback from the birth mothers attending the group has been overwhelmingly positive. One birth mother said: 'Thank you for your advice and caring ... the group was so helpful ... I will be more confident next time. It was good to hear other people who understand what you are going through.'

The letterbox service supports adopted children and young people to keep in touch with their birth families through adult to adult exchanges mediated by ASW. Each local authority had formerly operated a unique stand-alone service, and these have now been brought together with common practice standards across the region. All exchanges are now managed in one database.

ASW coordinated 9,117 exchanges throughout the year.

From an adopter: 'I thought you would also like to know that I have been recruited by my local adoption agency as an adoption mentor. They asked me lots of questions at the interview about letterbox contact and I was able to say how you have helped me build and develop my relationship with birth mum and keep on track.'

Letterbox Exchanges 2019-2020



18. Voice of the Service User

Adopt South West has commissioned Adopter Voice, part of the national organisation, Adoption UK, to ensure we are listening and developing services based on the lived experience of their adoptive families. Adopter Voice is used with the Adopter Advisory Board for ASW to engage with adoptive families and ensure their views are anonymously gathered and discussed. Reports are then shared with the leaders in Adopt South West.

The Adopt South West team is developing ways in which children can feed back their views of the service they and their families receive. ASW runs a fortnightly group in Exeter for adopted young people and we have plans to extend this across the region.

19. Birth Records Counselling

We listen carefully to the voices of our adult adoptees who come back to us to access to their records, to understand their view of what an adoption service should look like. They also teach us about how we should record events in a child's life and about the language we should use. In any one month we were supporting between 64 and 98 adults to access their records.

20. Annual Adopters Conference

For the 2019 annual conference for adopters, speaker Betsey De Thierry presented on the impact of trauma and how to support a child in education. Whilst this conference was for adopters and over 100 attended from across the region, as part of our partnership, working staff from virtual schools, CAMHS, children's services, local voluntary adoption agencies and adoption support agencies were invited.



21. Complaints and Allegations

In the year 2019-2020 ASW received 18 stage 1 complaints; 2 are currently open, 2 had no finding, 5 were not upheld, 8 were partly upheld, 1 was resolved upon receipt. One stage 2 complaint was received, and this was not upheld. There were no stage 3 complaints.

Our learning from the complaints is about communication, particularly through the sensitive time of moving children from foster care into their adoptive family. In February 2020 the University of East Anglia held a conference on transitions for ASW staff, local authority staff and foster carers. This has helped all staff to understand the importance of keeping the child at the centre of our thinking and planning.

Management oversight, before moving prospective adopters into stage 2 of the assessment process, now takes place to ensure that all checks and references are complete, and a plan made with the allocated SW to ensure that any issues are followed up at the earliest opportunity.

ASW has made changes with the process for non-agency or step-parent adoptions, enabling checks to be progressed in a timelier way.

Seven complaints relate to post adoption support. A number of complaints in the first 6 months of ASW going live from Somerset birth families and adopters about letterbox exchanges. The team has worked hard to get to a point last year where all of the Somerset exchanges have been put onto the Hepworth Database. Since then we have had no more complaints regarding exchanges. One of the birth mothers who made a complaint is now co-leading our birth parent support group.

One of the complaints is a data breach that was reported, investigated and responded to correctly.

Two complaints were about delays in adoption support fund work starting. Following investigation, we understood that there had been issues around communication with providers. We have amended our process accordingly.

All of the complaints regarding the adoption support fund work were dealt with, at stage 1, by a phone call from the team manager and were not escalated to stage 2.



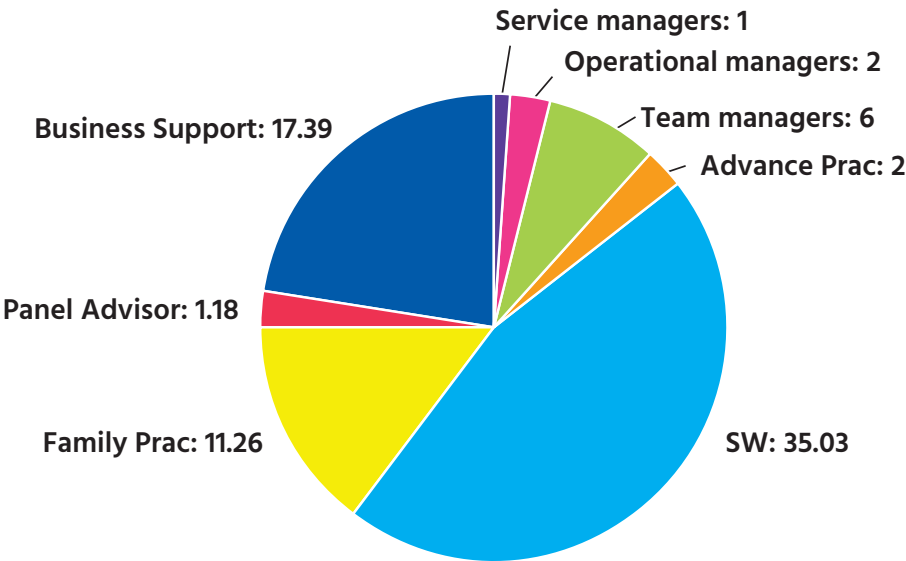
22. People

Adopt South West has 75.86 FTE members of staff including Business Support. ASW is conscious of its role in corporate parenting and welcomed a care leaver apprentice into its Business Support Team.

We have had high levels of staff retention and a high level of interest in joining ASW in most of the region. We have struggled to fill two social work posts in the Somerset area, one in adoption support and one in family finding. These continue to be covered by an agency worker and a social worker on a short-term contract. A manager on long term sick covered by an agency manager. A number of staff have taken maternity leave.

Working across a wide geographical area has presented some challenges for staff, and a pragmatic approach is encouraged to reduce travelling time as much as possible. The impact of Covid-19 lockdown in the last month of the year inevitably reduced travel to zero, and has pushed staff into thinking in the longer term how to adapt practice to reduce travel.

AdoptSW staff by FTE



23. Workforce Development

An annual Workforce Development Plan is in place with the priorities being to have all practitioners trained in Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and a thorough understanding of the principles of Theraplay. All of our practitioners are trained to Level 1 for Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), and later in the year, staff will be trained in Level 1 Theraplay. We want this embedded in all of our work with adopters right from the very beginning, through their training, assessment, matching, transitions and early placement.

As part of our partnership working, course spaces that could not be used for a variety of reasons by our staff, were offered to children's and fostering teams. Staff see such training as an investment in themselves and the model provides a firm basis from which effective services and interventions are provided to families across the region.

Staff were also offered training in other areas such as chairing child appreciation days, parenting through trauma and in order to support our work with the adoption support fund procurement.

Further training and support is offered through individual and group supervision sessions that are held at regular intervals, and staff can access further training through webinars on the 'Adopters Hub' website, for which we have a subscription.

Staff can access training run by Devon County Council.

A full-service event takes place each year. Our first one was a celebration of ASW's first year and the teams' hard work in coming together. A video message was received from the children's minister at the time, Nadim Zahawi and two of our Assistant Directors attended to thank staff. Staff worked on their learning over the preceding year and the goals for the service in the forthcoming year.



24. Ofsted

Adopt South West has been part of Devon's ILACS 2020 Ofsted inspection.

Feedback for ASW was positive.

'The local authority ensures that children from Devon receive a timely and supportive service from the regional adoption agency. Adopters are recruited, trained and supported well.'

25. Quality Assurance

ASW has developed a Quality Assurance Framework and uses this to reflect on and develop our practice. This is also used to strengthen our work with local authorities and to support them in considering best practice in permanence for children.

Other quality assurance processes in ASW are thorough: routine auditing of cases with moderation by senior managers, regular staff supervision and appraisal, quality assurance of reports by managers, receiving adopter feedback following adoption panel, monitoring and learning from feedback from our service users and listening to voice of users through the Adopter Advisory Board.

26. Data and Eclipse

Understanding performance has presented significant challenges across the year as, in spite of considerable work, our case management system, Eclipse, has remained unable to report on our data. Devon's management information team has needed to prioritise other areas and has been unable to provide performance reports. An improvement plan is now in place to address this. The adoption and special guardianship leadership board data has been completed and ASW has used this, along with data supplied by our local authorities, to try to understand our performance. The data shared in this report comes largely from the ASGLB reports. The team have worked hard to develop spreadsheets in order to support us in our understanding of our work, and some of the data presented in this report is from those.

27. Finance

ASW is funded by the local authorities for whom it undertakes adoption services. The funding formula was based on existing spend on adoption services, plus adjustments for additional responsibilities. The budget was set for a 20% saving on interagency fees

The table below shows the total annual budget and the budget framework percentages agreed for 2019/2020.

| Partner | % Proportion | Contribution |
|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Devon County Council | 37.04% | £1,732,924 |
| Plymouth City Council | 22.46% | £1,050,796 |
| Somerset County Council | 23.55% | £1,101,791 |
| Torbay County | 16.95% | £793,009 |
| Total | 100.00% | £4,678,520 |

- The Inter Authority Agreement, underpinning ASW, states that any underspend is taken to earmarked reserves. The ASW held £105,536 in reserves from 18/19.
- In 2019/20, the outturn position was £153,966 overspent, mainly due to interagency fees of £225,026 offset by an underspend of £71,060, of which £24,651 related to staffing. A total of £168,437 was spent on agency workers (approximately 2-3 FTE across the course of the year) however the vacancies, mainly in the Northern Assessment team, have created a net saving.
- The £105,536 held in reserve was used to offset the total overspend, and the remaining £48,430 was a shared risk split proportionately among the 4 local authorities.
- The 20/21 Budget has increased in line with the staff pay award, however, it has found savings in several areas including subscriptions, advertising, ICT and commissioning. The interagency budget continues to be a potential pressure.



28. Partnership Working with Local Authorities

The importance of partnership working underpins the ASW governance arrangements.

The Strategic Partnership Board is made up of the Lead Members for children's services and the Directors and Chief Officers for children's services for each of our four Local Authorities. We also have representation from local voluntary adoption agency partners – Barnardo's and Families For Children. The Strategic Partnership Board is the key decision-making body of ASW. It provides oversight, advice and endorsement of the strategic direction of ASW as reflected in the agreed statement of purpose. The board receives performance information, where available, monitors the operations of ASW and determines funding arrangements.

The Operational Board is chaired by the host, Devon's Assistant Director, and Assistant Directors from each of the local authorities sit on this board. Its aim is to develop good practice and joint working between agencies, whilst monitoring and reviewing ASW functions and resolving any operational difficulties. The board provides the avenues for maintaining strong communication links between agencies and stakeholders.

ASW works closely with children's services in order to provide the best outcomes for children needing adoptive placements.

ASW managers also meet routinely with the local authority heads of children's services. Through these arrangements, efforts are made to ensure that ASW key aims are achieved and that children are placed in a timely manner with families who are appropriately prepared and supported (in the long term as necessary) to meet their needs. Examples of best practice are shared, and practice guidance has been developed. There has also been discussion and negotiation around aspects of practice which may have differed from the pre-ASW era. Clarification about roles and responsibilities has been achieved through the agreed service specification document.

ASW managers attend tracking panels in all LAs, where they are held, to ensure we are aware of children who may need adoptive families at the earliest possible stage. ASW gives advice at this point, particularly regarding best interest decisions, sibling assessments and fostering for adoption. ASW also start to track children if they may need an adoptive placement.

As part of our partnership working, ASW coordinated two conferences for professionals across the region. The first one was presented by Julie Young from the University of East Anglia on contact and social work. Family practitioner staff from across children's services for all four local authorities were invited. This was the first step in developing a common understanding of how we plan for contact. The University of East Anglia returned in the early spring to present to 150 social workers, family practitioners, and foster carers on transitions, moving children from care to adoption.

ASW has also trained children's services staff from across all four local authorities in how to make reports related to adoption effective and purposeful, and how to prepare for panel attendance.

ASW has also presented on life story work and this has proved extremely popular, with 96 staff from Devon applying to attend the workshop events. ASW staff have set up repeat courses across the region.

29. Commissioning and Procurement

Before the joining together of Somerset, Plymouth, Torbay and Devon's adoption teams into Adopt South West, commissioning and procurement teams worked with the separate authorities to identify and rationalise existing contracts and service arrangements.

Services that the adoption teams used, both before and after the transformation, are through a blend of commissioned contracts and by staff directly employed by ASW. The commissioning and procurement teams worked with ASW to plan and prioritise the transformation of services into the current regional adoption agency.

The first project was to develop a framework for the Adoption Support Fund providers, which engaged all providers large and small. This framework also implemented consistent quality assurance and process across ASW. This process was a true culture change for ASW staff and providers and involved significant engagement with all stakeholders. It has been a long road but ASW now has a thriving provider framework guaranteeing compliance with all regulations, developing the provider market, embedding quality assurance and value for money and reducing the time required for administrative processes, especially for social workers.

This approach has been implemented by the commissioning and procurement teams across all of the services ASW requires. This has ensured that careful analysis of services and the delivery models used to deliver them, has helped ASW to obtain its services in the most effective way for its adopter families. All services have now been fully option appraised, and a detailed commissioning and procurement plan developed, for all the services purchased by ASW. This includes those delivered internally by the ASW team.

All of this has been achieved through the commissioning and procurement teams working in close partnership with the ASW teams. They have provided advice, guidance, support and quality oversight to the ASW Operational Leadership Team.



30. Service Priorities for 19-20 to 20-21

ASW has the following key aims for the coming year:

1. Decisions about adoption for children in care are made in a consistent way and informed by the evidence about what is in the best interests of the child.
2. Recruiting a sufficiency of prospective adopters to continue to place the majority of ASW children with families assessed and approved by ASW.
3. Close working relationships with local authority children's teams in order to promote permanence for children at the earliest possible stage.
4. Regular meetings with all agency decision makers (ADMs), IRO leads from across the region, virtual schools, medical advisers and designated nurses.
5. Continuing to offer training to children's teams on Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) and life story work.
6. Developing practice to ensure that all children are well prepared for the move to their adoptive family, and that introduction plans are child focused and that children and families are supported after placement.
7. To achieve all of the above whilst remaining in budget.
8. To keep accessing adequate funds from the Adoption Support Fund and make best use of these across the region by commissioning services that meet the needs of our families and expanding the market of adoption support services.
9. To embed quality assurance processes across the full spectrum of ASW services.

31. Challenges for the Year Ahead

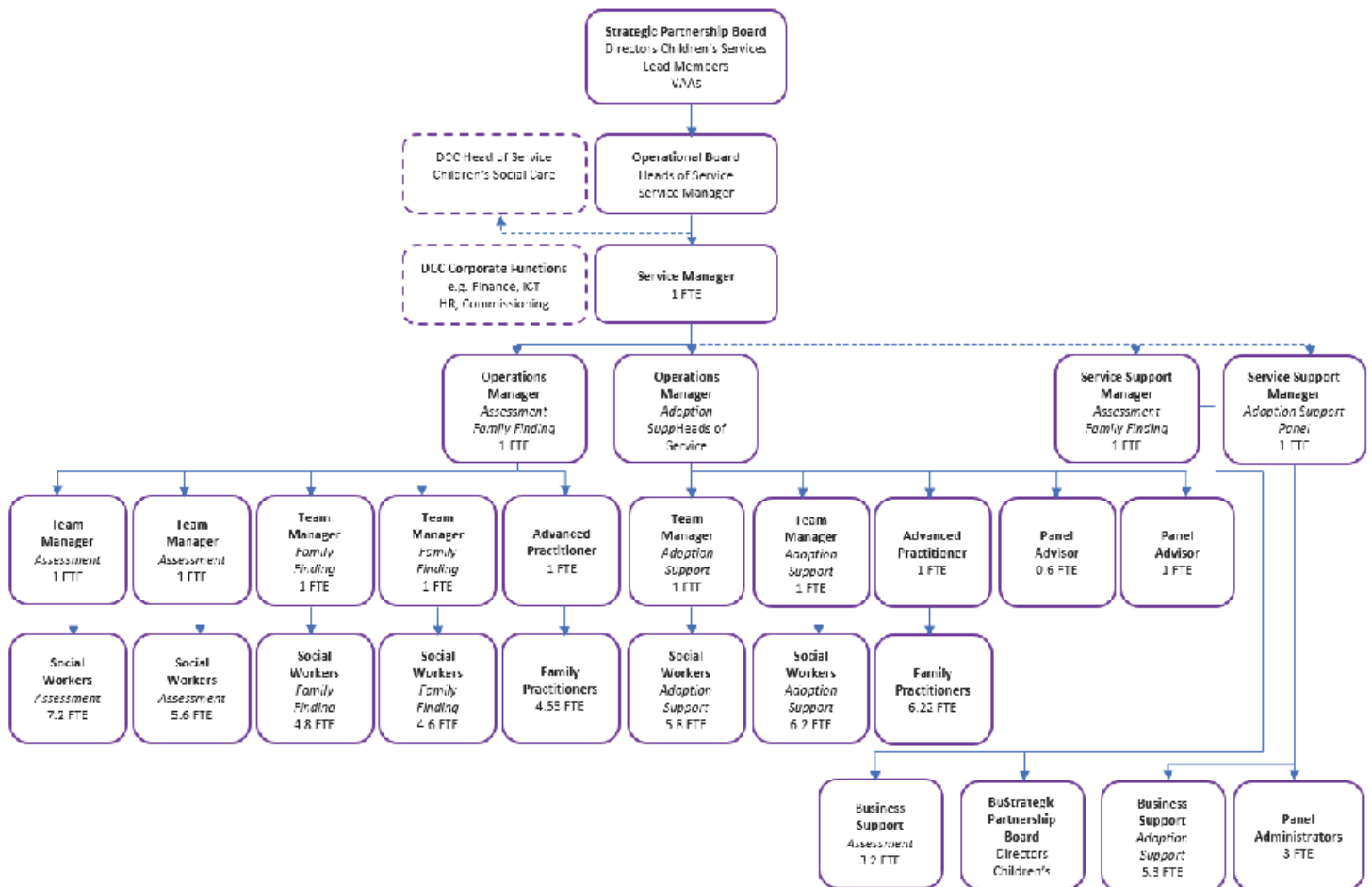
1. Covid-19. Just as the year was coming to an end, the global pandemic meant that all areas of work needed to be examined.
2. Being able to recruit a sufficiency of adopters for ASW children at a time when there are difficulties nationally in doing so. If ASW is unable to do so, there will be continuing pressure on budgets from outgoing interagency fees.
3. Maintaining current staffing levels and managing capacity across all teams as a result of higher than anticipated demand in all areas of work.
4. Addressing issues of capacity with medical advisers in Somerset to ensure children are placed without delay.
5. Having an effective case management system to understand our performance better.

32. Conclusion

- Demand has been high in all areas of work undertaken by ASW.
- A total of 107 children have been placed in new families through adoption.
- These are some of the most vulnerable children in society. The courts do not make placement orders without being completely satisfied that a child cannot live with their birth family whatever support is provided to help them to turn their lives round. Legally removing parental responsibility and a parent's legal rights in respect of a child permanently is a decision which courts will only take when they have enough evidence that 'nothing else will do.'
- Whilst we've placed the vast majority of our region's children with ASW families, we are still needing to look outside for some of our children and this is likely to remain a pressure for the next year.
- The impact of these children's early experiences means that adoptive families are likely to need ongoing support throughout their child's childhood and adolescence.
- Demand for adoption support services has been high and this is likely to remain a pressure area for the coming year.
- In the first 18 months of operation ASW has:
 - Established our brand identity.
 - Consolidated our staff group.
 - Consulted with adopters as key stakeholders.
 - Established a quality assurance framework.
 - Worked closely with our birth parents.
 - Supported the development of both ASW staff and our colleagues in the local authorities.
 - Delivered the service in accordance with requirements detailed in the Inter Authority Agreement.

The local authorities have successfully supported the evolution of ASW. This has been achieved through partnership working and other arrangements in place with the local authority children's services. This will continue under the strategic direction of the Board and delivered through ASW staff that have been both committed and enthusiastic about the service and progress so far.

Appendix 1: Adopt SW Structure Chart



Appendix 2: ASW Panel report

1. Context:

This is the second annual report for ASW since regionalisation in October 2018.

This report has been produced by ASW panel advisors, Lucy Hextall and Amanda White, with contribution from the Independent Panel chairs Rachel Cook, Alistair Macintosh and Dylan McLees-Taylor.

2. Panel Membership and Venues:

This year has been a more settled period for the central list of panel membership. Aside from one resignation from an Independent panel member and the resignation of two medical advisors. The Independent panel member did not feel that they wished to continue with being part of the ASW panels while the medical advisors had moved out of their roles resulting in them being unable to continue to attend.

The central list continues to have a wide range of panel members with a wealth of experience and skills. In December 2019 appointments were made of seven new panel members. These appointments enhanced the social workers representation, included a birth parent representative, and the remainder have either personal or professional experience of adoption. As part of this recruitment process the male representation for panels has increased by two members. In total there are forty-six members on the central list.

The last recruitment process looked at reducing the gender imbalance and lack of diversity within the panels. It is apparent that there remains a gender imbalance and lack of diversity within the central list. This is an ongoing feature and continues to be a priority when considering individuals who express an interest in becoming a panel member.

In relation to social worker representation required for every panel, there are currently six independent social work members and five local authority social work members from Plymouth, Somerset and Devon.

ASW continues to hold panels in four venues across the region six times a month. Two panels are held in the north of the region (Taunton and Cullompton) and two panels held in the south (Totnes and Plymouth) of the region.

It has been of note, that the response to Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the need to hold virtual adoption panels. The initial virtual panel held at the end of March has been successful with the central membership, social workers and prospective adopters adapting to the significant change. Panel processes have been adapted to accommodate the challenge of a large virtual meeting and to support the attendees in having a positive experience. This is being seen as an opportunity to inform potential development and improvements for efficiency of panels moving forward. The period for virtual panels being in place is unknown however, it is anticipated that this will provide the opportunity to test holding panels at short notice, supporting attendance of those travelling long distances and facilitating additional panels.

3. Overview of the Role of Panel in Quality Assurance:

The quality of the reports to Panel; the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR), the Child Permanence Report (CPR); and the Adoption Support Plan/Adoption Placement Report (ASP/APR) has varied; with some examples of good practice but others where considerable additional work has been needed.

In this period, panel had identified an inconsistent quality of PARs being presented for panel recommendation. For example, PARs that lacked an evidence-based and also lacked social worker curiosity. There were a number of spelling mistakes and factual inaccuracies which impeded the ability to read the assessment.

The appointment of two panel advisors, one in March 2019 and the other in July 2019, has provided consistent quality assurance on all paperwork presented to panel. Feedback from panel members, through appraisals and panel monitoring, confirms an improvement in the quality of documentation being seen at panel. This includes an improvement in the timeliness that panel receive the quality assured paperwork.

In October 2019, ASW facilitated training on PAR writing which has had a positive impact on the quality of the PARs. Examples of an evidence base being used can be seen within the reports. There has also been a noticeable difference in the length of the PARs, these now being more succinct.

Overall, the PARs remain of a high standard with many striving to achieve the Coram BAAF guidance of between 15 and 25 pages. The CPRs are now routinely updated prior to matching panel which is a very positive development and further evidence of the benefit of now having dedicated panel advisors.

Panel feedback has been consistent, relating to the varied quality of CPRs across the four local authorities, so the panel advisors undertook a review. The main observation of this review is the lack of consistency within each local authority of the quality of CPRs. It appears that the quality is dependent upon the experience of the social worker completing the reports. Where reports are completed by social workers with adoption experience, the reports reflect a more child focused style, demonstrating an understanding of the multi-function of the reports.

The ASP/APR also provides a wealth of detail. Often the following are the questions panel require clarification on:

Post adoption contact, the wording of the post adoption contact section is in line with the court care plan.

The inclusion of photographs and whether these are sight only; including the reason for not allowing a birth family member to retain photographs.

Clarity on the plan in relation to all full and half siblings and the rationale for any decision making for them.

Details of 'settling-in' letters to be provided by the adopters and the timescales. Contact with foster carers post placement with specific timescales.

Support to birth family, have birth parents been referred for birth counselling and engaged with this?

Panel continues to offer formal feedback on any updates/corrections to the documentation presented at panels. At this time, the quality of the CPRs remains a focus.

Medical advice continues to vary across the panels. Medical advisors sit on three of the four panels. The medical advisor for Somerset does not sit on panel unless asked to do so. However, panel advisors have access to the medical advisor should they require any advice for panel. In instances where the medical advisors are absent from the other panels, they provide a short medical summary for panel to consider.

A current theme identified by panel is a delay in the agency meeting the required timescales for prospective adopter approvals. Indicators suggest that there has been a delay with statutory checks, particularly medicals including where follow-up specialist information has been required.

4. Learning and Development:

Annual appraisals of panel chairs and members have been ongoing within the central list. Not every central list member has had an appraisal in this period however, appraisal dates have been scheduled and this has been addressed with the panel chairs. All panel chairs have had their appraisals.

Panel members have continued to receive twice yearly panel training which has included areas such as Theraplay, sibling assessments and a talk from a birth grandmother. The issue of running to time as a panel was identified as a development need for all panels. There was a specific workshop within the November 2019 panel training which looked at the evidence-based matrix in facilitating panel members' formulation of questions.

Learning and development is promoted through the quarterly panel newsletter where research, 'Ted Talks' and articles are shared with panel members. For example, the guidance around obesity has been shared to support panel members' understanding. Opportunities to discuss themes such as obesity are also given at the end of panels. Additional information is also shared via email to central list members and the panel team when relevant information/training is highlighted.

Panel chairs have observed each other's panels to establish good practice that can be shared across the regional panels. In addition, the panel chairs are member of the South West Adoption Consortium (SWAC) Chairs group which provides an opportunity for chairs and vice chairs from throughout the South West to meet and share best practice.

Panel recognises the importance of meaningful two-way feedback. At the beginning of each panel meeting, the applicants and prospective adopters are asked about their experiences of the process to date. After each panel, the panel advisor prepares detailed feedback for the presenting social workers in relation to the paperwork and social worker's style of presentation. Applicants and prospective adopters are asked to provide written feedback in relation to Panel but to date, there has been limited feedback provided.

Meetings between the Panel Chairs and the ASW. These continue to take place twice a year, with the Panel Advisors now joining these meetings. Quarterly meetings between the chairs, vice chairs, panel advisers and operations manager have now ended and it was considered the issues discussed should form part of panel training for all panel members.

5. Overview and Analysis of Panel Activity

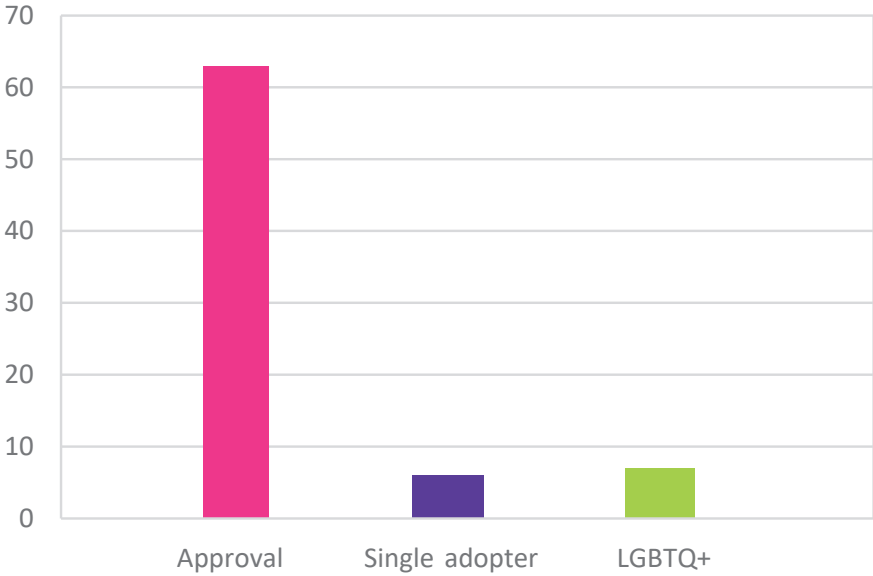
There have been noticeable periods where panels have been cancelled due to no approvals, matches, de-registrations or child plans for relinquishment being booked for those dates. This particularly included a period in late 2019 for the north of the region had three panels cancelled. In addition to this, early 2020 panel booking requests were reduced. There is no particular indicator as to the reasons for reduced panel bookings.

In respect of panel monitoring the timeliness, in line with the Department for Education (DfE) Adoption timescales, ASW data tells us;

- 63% of assessments for prospective adopters were within the four month timescale from stage two to panel.
- 27% of the assessments were within the overall timescales of six months from the start of the assessment.

This correlates with what we are seeing in the delays of medicals, checks and references and issues arising causing delay in stage one of the assessment process. It also suggests that ASW are making positive efforts to reduce any further delay as can be seen by the stage two data above.

Adopter Approvals



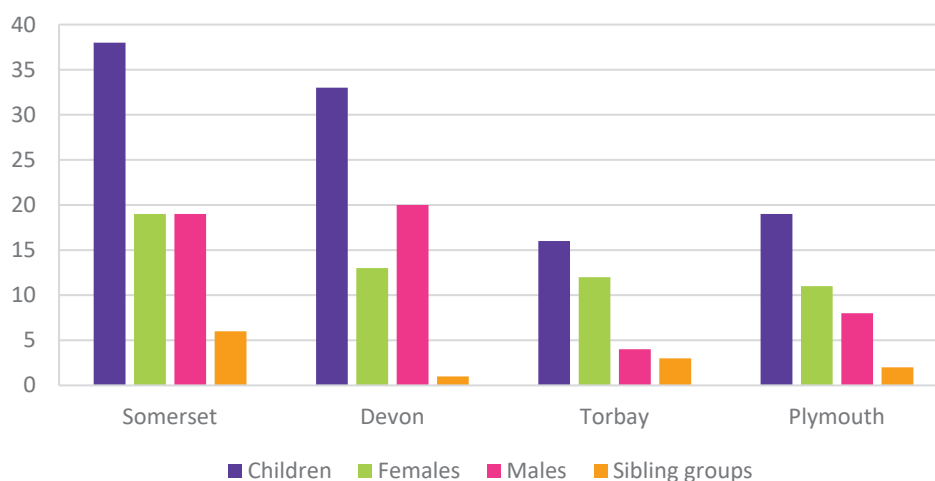
It is noted that all single adopters approved were female. The data also confirms the dominance of White British/White European identity of ASW approved adopters. The current process of capturing the matching timeliness data through panel requires improvement as we are not confident in providing accurate data. Where delay has been identified as part of the monitoring it has been linked to older children, sibling groups and children with additional needs. This is a factor which is nationally well known.

Children matched

The number of matches (106) within this period is on an increasing trajectory compared to the annual report six month data of 2018/2019 (40). The predicted gender balance is usually perceived to be a higher ratio of girls to boys for adoption. The data shows across the region of the overall matches a ratio of 51 males to 55 females.

It is confirmed from the data that; of the sibling groups matched one sibling group placed by Plymouth City Council disrupted during transitions and for Somerset County Council, one match disrupted in introductions. There have been disruptions following placement for adoption, during this reported period.

73% of children have been matched with ASW adopters and therefore, it is known that they are within the ASW region which supports the delivery of post adoption support.



6. Summary and Reflections:

This year has seen stability across the panels with a sustained panel membership. We have seen members from the central list covering a number of panels which has supported consistency and development across the panels. It is anticipated that the virtual panel process (Covid-19) will further encourage panel members to sit within the different panels that would normally have been in different areas of the region.

In response to the focus on improving quality across the four local authorities in CPRs, guidance and workshops are planned to take place from May 2020 onwards to both managers and social workers delivered by the ASW panel agency advisors.

With the consistency of having dedicated panel/agency advisors there has been enhancement and development in data collation however, it is noted further development is required to include cultural and genetic heritage, early permanence placements data and permanence timeliness.

Panel training has enhanced panel members' curiosity and the expectation will be to seek clarity of the decisions made in relation to siblings/half siblings and any assessments that have considered together or apart/ sibling relationships.

Reflection of panel activity over this period has highlighted the lack of diversity of prospective adopters, gender imbalance in single adopters and the low number of LGBTQ+ adopters. Whether this meets the needs of the children waiting to be adopted across the region needs to be considered within the sufficiency strategy of Adopt South West. Panel will continue to monitor and raise this, with panel advisors highlighting to the agency against the expectations set from the ASW sufficiency strategy.

Focus for the year (2020/2021) where our focus will be upon:

- Learning from the introduction of virtual panels to inform practice developments.
- Development of a dedicated adoption panel page within ASW, to offer a user-friendly guide to applicants in knowing what to expect visually from panels.
- Continue to review the central list and any specific recruitment to address the lack of diversity.
- CPR workshops to commence and learning from these to be embedded in practice.
- Develop a process of data capture to include timeliness across the regions.

Panel Activity Data.

This report covers the period of 1st April 2019-31st March 2020.

| Description | 1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020 |
|---|---|
| Adoptive families/placements recommended as suitable to adopt. | <p>63 approvals</p> <p>Of these, 6 were female single adopters.</p> <p>Of these, 7 approvals were LGBTQ+ adopters. 4 of the approvals were female couples and 3 were male couples.</p> <p>Of these, 4 individuals identified as BAME all other individuals identified as White British/White European.</p> |
| Children matched. This includes single children, sibling groups and ASW children matched with out of region adopters. | <p>106 children</p> <p>Of these 106 children, 28 were part of a sibling group (one group of 4, two groups of 3 and the remainder sibling pairs). Of those fostering for adoption: 31</p> <p>Somerset County Council: 38 children matched, of whom there were six sibling groups. Of those it was an equal gender split of 50/50 males and females.</p> <p>Devon County Council: 33 children matched of whom there was 1 sibling group. The ratio was 20 males to 13 females.</p> <p>Torbay City Council: 16 children matched of whom there were 3 sibling groups. The ratio was 4 males to 12 females.</p> <p>Plymouth City Council: 19 children matched of whom there were 2 sibling groups. The ratio was 8 males to 11 females.</p> <p>1 child was matched who identified as BAME.</p> |
| Number of Relinquished Babies presented to panel. | 3, of whom all were males. 2 of the children were from Somerset and 1 from Devon |
| Number of panels held | <p>61 across the region</p> <p>10 panels have been cancelled over the year due to no bookings.</p> |
| De registrations | 7. Of these, 6 were where the adopters agreed to the de-registration. |

Comparative panel activity data (2018/2019 annual report)

| Description | 1st October 2018-31st March 2019 (please note this is for a 6-month period due to regionalisation) |
|---|--|
| Adoptive families/placements recommended as suitable to adopt. | 40 approvals Of these, 1 was a female single adopter. Of these, 1 approval was LGBTQ+ adopters. They were a female couple. |
| Children matched. This includes single children and sibling groups. | 59 children Of these 59 children, 14 were part of a sibling group. All were sibling groups of 2. One sibling group consisted of one sibling from Somerset and one sibling from Torbay. Somerset County Council: 13 children matched of whom there was the one sibling group that was Somerset and Torbay. The ratio was 6 males to 7 females. Devon County Council: 26 children matched of whom there were 5 sibling groups. The ratio was 9 males to 17 females. Torbay City Council: 9 children matched of whom there was the one sibling group that was Somerset and Torbay. The ratio was 3 males to 6 females. Plymouth City Council: 11 children matched of whom there was one sibling group. The ratio was 5 males to 6 females. |
| Number of relinquished babies presented to panel | There were no relinquished babies during this period. |
| Number of panels held | 32 across the region. 5 panels have been cancelled over the period due to no bookings. |
| De registrations | 3. |

Appendix 3: Adopt South West newsletter for adopters

Adopt South West Newsletter



20 March 2020

adoptsouthwest.org.uk | adoptsouthwestsupport@devon.gov.uk

Hello and welcome to our latest newsletter

- [Coronavirus update from the DfE](#)
- [Helpful suggestions to manage the current climate](#)
- [Cancellation of events and courses](#)
- [Parent groups](#)
- [New parent groups](#)
- [Transitions Workshop](#)
- [Life story sessions](#)
- [Education Psychology Clinics](#)
- [Adoption UK update](#)
- [Therapeutic Parenting Courses](#)
- [RIO group in Somerset](#)
- [Save the date!](#)
- [The Adopter Hub](#)
- [SEND updates](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Out of hours support](#)

Firstly, we hope you are all well and managing the best you can during the current climate. We are looking closely at how we can support families which need our help over the forthcoming days and weeks given the impact on services due to coronavirus.

We want to reassure you that Adopt South West is doing everything we can to plan and be prepared for what may be ahead of us, using the latest information. We are monitoring and adapting our guidelines and advice to staff and managers to respond to emerging issues and changes. As the situation develops we will increase our offer of virtual support, while keeping things running as normally as possible. We recognise that many families are going to really struggle within the next few weeks and the months ahead and, as a team, we are looking at how we can creatively support you.

We are looking at how we can support our adopters and offer virtual alternatives through webinars, online meetings, Skype and telephone calls – some facilitated by us and some by therapists we work closely with.

We are extending our advice and support line opening times from Monday 23 March, so the lines will now be open from **9.00am-4.00pm** and we have additional staff to help with any increase in the volume of calls we receive until further notice. Remember you can call us on **0345 155 1076**.

We also have additional staff to help deal with any letterbox issues, so please do email our secure mailbox if you have any concerns about how your letterbox exchanges or contact arrangements will be affected at : childsc.adoptsouthwestletterbox-mailbox@devon.gov.uk.

There is also a requirement to cancel some family events and planned training. We are in the process of contacting parents which are directly affected by any cancellations of any of our events. Please be prepared that we may limit some services while we focus on safeguarding our children at this difficult time. A number of therapists and organisations that deliver therapeutic support to our families have also been in touch because some face-to-face therapy is put on hold. Some therapists are able to offer alternatives, such as Skype and phone calls. So, if you are worried about how this impacts you and your family, please do contact the therapist/provider directly in the first place. The Adoption Support Fund has been in contact and are offering more flexibility as to how therapies are delivered, where possible.

Please make sure you are following our [Adopt South West Facebook page](#) as this is quickest way for us to communicate with you regarding any updates on events, workshops etc. And we will also update the [events page on our Adopt South West website](#).

Coronavirus update from the DfE

The Department for Education fully appreciates that you, families and providers will have queries about the Adoption Support Fund given the current Coronavirus situation.

We want to reassure you that we are closely monitoring the developing situation and following Government guidance.

We and our contractors, Mott MacDonald are operating business as usual and have put in place a contingency plan to minimise any potential disruption. We will update you should any changes occur to this.

This document provides [responses to frequently asked questions](#), and [information on transitional funding arrangements](#) which we hope you will find useful.

Sent on behalf of the Department for Education

To note: most therapy is not face-to-face. Some are being undertaken by phone or Skype with parents, but most of the 1:1 therapy will children has been cancelled.

Helpful suggestions to manage the current climate

Adoption UK - <https://www.adoptionuk.org/covid-19-advice-for-adoptive-families>

Adoption UK have stated that the spread of COVID-19 has meant that for the foreseeable future we will be getting daily updates that will affect our lives. We recognise that people are going to have to make big changes and that adoptive families will have extra challenges to face over the coming weeks and months. The resources below will help, support and guide you all during this time. We have included hints and tips on how to lessen anxiety as well as a host of interesting and fun learning and activity resources for different ages and advice on self-care.

- [How we can help](#)
- [Managing Anxiety](#)
- [Education Resources](#)
- [Self care](#)

A few tips for preparing for COVID-19 in a trauma informed way

from [The Inspired Treehouse](#)

- Do not ignore what is happening, because your children - especially those with histories of trauma - will pick up on the fact that things are unexpectedly different in their worlds. But do try and avoid making them more nervous.
- A good message is to talk about the virus and how “we’re working together to keep more people from getting sick by pausing school and other places crowds maybe... *“it’s so good so many people are working to help one another out!”*”
- Focus on what will stay the same...little things, that you’ll still get up and eat breakfast, you’ll still have lunch, you’ll still sleep in your bed, etc. Give a nice long list.
- If you sense a child is becoming anxious, call it out casually: “I noticed you might be kind of anxious about something...I’m wondering if it has anything to do with XYZ?”
- Provide visual structure for your children at this time. Make a visual plan for the day, introduce it in the morning, and work your way through it during the day. It will take extra effort on your part, but will help them with any anxiety and these unexpected changes.
- Outdoor play, baths, sensory play, etc. will be helpful activities.
- Remember that unexpected change, loss of routine and structure, and increased stress in the world will be big triggers for many of your children. Focus on co-regulation, keep expectations appropriate, and be kind to yourself and them.
- Deep breaths, deep breaths. We can do this together.

Activities, dealing with anxiety and explaining coronavirus

- [10 Ways to Help Children Worried About the Coronavirus](#) by Fi Newood a psychotherapist and mum to three adopted boys.
- [Coronavirus - social story](#) is a good visual narrative from LittlePuddins.ie which is useful for children with special educational needs and autism
- [‘A story about Coronavirus’ – help support your children to understand coronavirus and to reduce worries](#) from Elsa Support, a [good website with many calming resources](#)
- Young Minds information on Coronavirus if you’re worried: <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-re-anxious-about-coronavirus/>
- Young people: Looking after your mental well-being: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people/looking-after-your-wellbeing/#collapse7546>
- Information on supporting teenagers with positive mental health: <https://stem4.org.uk/mindyour5-for-teenagers/>
- Suggestions for home educating to start you off [via Facebook](#)

Games and activities for children and early years when at home

- Interactive game to suggest positive activities to boost your mood: <https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/games/boost-your-mood/>
- Build your happy place – interactive tool to build an ideal room: <https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/games/build-your-happy-place/>

- Wall of Expression – feeling worried? Frustrated? Write on the wall and watch the worries crumble away: <https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/games/wall-of-expression/>
- Play the balloon game and watch your worries float away: <https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/games/balloon/>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies>
- <https://www.boomerangtv.co.uk/games>
- <https://www.activityvillage.co.uk/games>

Beacon House resources

Beacon House Therapeutic Services and Trauma Team is creating video resources for all ages to soothe, regulate stimulate and connect during this challenging time. They will posting them on Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/BeaconHouseTeam> and on their [YouTube channel](#).



Cancellation of events and courses

As stated above, we are very sad to announce that the following events have been cancelled **until further notice**:

- Family Farm Days (all days)
- Music and Mindfulness Sessions across Devon and Somerset
- Apricot Centre Art Day
- RIO group (all sessions)
- Easter and May Half Term Events (all events), including the Bear Trail which was due to be held on Saturday 16 May
- Therapeutic Parenting Course - due to start on Tuesday 21 April
- Beyond Attachment Workshop – presented by Plymouth Virtual School on Thursday 7 May
- Theraplay Workshops (all workshops).

Parent groups

We need to cancel our face-to-face parent groups until further notice. However, we recognise the importance of these groups and often parents describe these groups as a lifeline; so we have been busy seeing how we can continue this support in a different way. If you attend a group, please email us adoptsouthwestsupport@devon.gov.uk to find out how we can provide alternative support to you during these current times.

New parent groups

Plymouth

We are also in the process of developing parent groups for other areas within the region. A new parent-led support group is due to commence in Plymouth. This may have to be cancelled given the current situation, so will be post whether this goes ahead on our website events page and social media.

Honiton

We are also keen to develop a parent group in the Honiton area. We were planning to hold a coffee morning in April after the Easter school holidays, but this now won't go ahead. Nonetheless, we want to continue to plan for this group, so please do email our lead social worker for this group, Emma Wise emma.wise@devon.gov.uk, who will be happy to give you a call to discuss this further.

Barnstaple

We are planning some new focussed groups in Barnstaple which will be delivered by Dr Emma Greatbatch.

- **Thursday 14 May - Therapeutic parenting through the teenage years** (this may have to be cancelled or take place virtually).
- **Wednesday 16 September - Blocked Care and Blocked Trust**
- **Wednesday 18 November - Trouble-shooting PACE**
- **Wednesday 9 December - Managing conflict therapeutically**

Please book now, as places are limited, by emailing us adoptsouthwestsupport@devon.gov.uk The first workshop on 14 May will be delivered using a different method (rather than face-to-face.)

Taunton

We are also pleased to offer similar focussed groups in Taunton, which will be delivered by Dr Emma Greatbatch

- **Wednesday 9 September - Blocked Care and Blocked Trust**
- **Wed 21 October - Parenting Teens**

Please book now, as places are limited, by emailing us adoptsouthwestsupport@devon.gov.uk

Transitions Workshop

Run by Adopt South West and Somerset Virtual School

Opportunity to look at why transitions in education can be difficult and what you and the school can do to help. (Please note this may be cancelled given the current situation).

To book a place, please email adoptsouthwestsupport@devon.gov.uk

Life story sessions

These sessions will offer an opportunity to discuss your child's life story book with a member of the team.

The team can provide advice on how and when to use your book, rewording books to make them easier to share with your child and on how to compile a life story book for those children who haven't got one.

- **Wednesday 25 March**
- **Monday 27 April**
- **Monday 18 May**
- **Thursday 25 June**
- **Friday 24 July**

Please book by contacting Roger Prouse, 01392 383974 roger.prouse@devon.gov.uk

Education Psychology Clinics

Available to parents whose child attends a Devon School

Until further notice our Education Psychology Clinics will no longer take place face-to-face. We will continue to offer the same dates and time slots, but this will be happen via Skype or by telephone. If parents prefer to have a face-to-face meeting, this will have to be postponed for a later date in the year. These clinics offer an opportunity to speak with an education psychologist on any school related issue.

This could be anything from transitions, challenging behaviour before and after school, or simply feeling that school do not understand fully how trauma and attachment impacts learning, development and behaviour within the classroom. (These are only available to families with children at a school in Devon).

Please email us to book an appointment: adoptsouthwestsupport@devon.gov.uk

Exeter

Appointments are available monthly with Lata Ramoutar or Joanne Withers, Educational Psychologists along with one of the post adoption support social workers.

Now booking appointments for:

between 9.30am-12.30pm on Tuesday, 17 March, 14 April, 12 May, 9 June and 7 July

Totnes

Monthly appointments are available with Dr Dan Nicholls, Educational Psychologist along with one of our Post Adoption Social Workers.

Now booking appointments for:

between 10.00am-1.00pm on Thursday 19 March , 23 April, 21 May, 25 June and 16 July

Barnstaple

Monthly appointments are available once a month with Cath Murch, Educational Psychologist along with Louise Copp, Post Adoption Social Worker and will start again in September.

Now booking appointments for:

between 10.00am-1.00pm on Friday 1 May, 5 June and 10 July.

Adoption UK update

The Chatter and Play group in Plymouth has also been suspended until further notice. Here is the official update from Adoption UK:



Following the announcement on 16 March from the Government, Adoption UK have taken the decision to suspend all community group meet ups, events and face-to-face groups with immediate effect until further notice.

We understand how important the groups are to adopters and their families, especially with the current developing situation. Adoption UK's priority is the safety and welfare of our volunteers and members, so we are exploring ways to continue to support adopters while meeting social isolation requirements.

Adopter Voice is your chance to influence and improve adoption services where you live, regionally and nationally.



Message from Adopter Voice Advisory Board

The Adopter Voice Advisory Board are delighted to say that we have been asked to work closely with adopters and Adopt South West for a further year.

If you haven't heard of Adopter Voice or the Adopter Advisory Board then the summary below might be useful.

The Adopter Advisory Board is an **independent group** of adoptive parents with knowledge of the adoption sector, designed to act as a consistent, reliable and accessible barometer of the lived experience of adoptive families across the Adopt South West area.

The main functions are:

- To seek and represent the collective views of adopters
- To inform agencies about the experiences of adopters in accessing and using adoption/adoption support services their area, making recommendations for the improvement of services
- To act as a sounding board for adoption agencies with specific questions about the experiences of adopters in their area
- To promote and support the co-design, co-development and, in some cases, the co-delivery of services.

So, this is a great opportunity for two-way engagement and communication between families and leaders of Adopt South West to improve practice and services.

Have your say! This year we are going to have at least four forums across the Adopt South West area to find out about and collect your views, we also plan to meet regularly as a Board, to have an online survey and continue with our Facebook group.

But we really need more adopters to get involved and there are lots of ways of doing this

- Through the [Adopter Voice South West Facebook group](#). (find us on Facebook 'Adopter Voice South West' and ask to join)
- Let us know you are happy to be consulted or approached to hear your views by letting us know on the Facebook group or emailing Sarah on yelland@adoptionuk.org.uk
- Join the Adopter Voice Advisory Board or become an Adopter Voice champion/ advocate/ ambassador – email Sarah for more details yelland@adoptionuk.org.uk

We will be really delighted to hear from you!

From Sarah Yelland, Adopter Advisory Board Chair and the rest of the Adopter Voice Advisory Board.

Adopt South West continues to actively support Adopter Voice and we currently have Adopter Voice Champions seeking and representing your views. Find out more about [Adopter Voice on their website](#) or email adoptervoice@adoptionuk.org.uk

What's coming up...?

Transition workshops

We are planning on delivering a series of workshops within the region which will be focusing on transitions within schools. These will all be run by Dr Cath Murch, Educational Psychologist for Babcock. The workshop will help to focus on:

- what does transition mean for adopted children and young people
- what does transition mean for parents
- how can we help transitions go as well as possible and become learning experiences.

Dates available are:

Exeter • **Tuesday 9 June 2020 from 11.00am to 12.30pm**

Totnes • **Friday 12 June 2020 from 11.00am to 12.30pm**

Barnstaple • **Wednesday 10 June , 10.00am to 11.30am**

Currently these are planned to be face-to-face, but we are thinking about ways to deliver these virtually if/when needed, otherwise they may need to be cancelled.

To secure your place and book onto the workshop please email us your name, and the workshop location you would like to attend adoptsouthwestsupport@devon.gov.uk

Therapeutic Parenting Courses

Mendip therapeutic parenting course

We are really pleased to announce that we will be delivering a therapeutic parenting course in the Autumn within the Mendip area. If you would like further information on this course and to express an interest in attending, please email us adoptsouthwestsupport@devon.gov.uk

Exeter therapeutic parenting course

We are also pleased to announce a further 15-week therapeutic parenting course with Dr Cas Schneider in October 2020.

This model of therapeutic parenting is well established and we always receive fantastic feedback from parents, so don't miss out! The course is divided into three modules, with module one helping parents to develop their understanding of attachment as well as their child's behaviour and their own. Module 2, focuses on the importance of creating a safe base for children, with module three focusing on parenting with PACE and how to respond to behaviours as a therapeutic parent.

Exeter, between 10.00am -1.00pm on Tuesdays:

- 13, 20 October 2020
- 3, 10, 24 November 2020
- 1, 8, 15 December 2020
- 5, 12, 19, 26 January 2021
- 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 March 2021

(Please note there are 17 dates, but two will be dropped once we have had confirmation from Dr Cas Schneider).

Barnstaple therapeutic parenting course

There is also a 10-week therapeutic parenting course in Barnstaple which commences on Thursday 10 September . This will be facilitated by Dr Emma Greatbatch

Barnstaple between 10.00am- 2.00pm on Thursdays:

- 10, 17 September 2020
- 1,15, 22 October 2020
- 5,12, 26 November 2020
- 10 December 2020

If you are interested in finding out more information regarding this course, or to register your interest, please email us.

Important information: Please note that all these courses will be funded by the Adoption Support Fund, where you will need to sign consent for the funds to come out of your child's fair access limit. We have to secure funding before the course starts, therefore if you decide to drop out of the course or stop attending for any reason, we will NOT be able to return this money to your child's Fair Access Limit.

To book your place or if you have any queries regarding these courses, please email us adoptsouthwestsupport@devon.gov.uk

Weekend session?

Are you interested in attending a weekend or evening therapeutic parenting? If so, please do [get in touch](#) with us as we are keeping a list of people who would like to complete training but are unable to attend our 15 week therapeutic parenting courses. If we get enough interest, we hope evening and/or weekend courses will be able to run.

RIO group in Somerset

Do you care for a young person who is secondary school age? Would they like to come and join our youth group for young people who are living with a guardian or are adopted?

In Somerset we are looking to mirror what Devon have been offering to their young people through the RIO (Really I'm Ordinary) group. They enjoy spending time as a group, the sessions will include a food based cooking activity, playing games such as pool, table tennis, football, basketball and crafting depending on the venue. We will also have a couple outings per year, last year Devon RIO went to flip out trampoline park and laser tag.



We are looking forward to planning some exciting activities this year and suggestions are welcome. If your child/young person is interested in attending then please email adoptsouthwestsupport@devon.gov.uk and let us know the option that best suits you, from these two options below:

Option 1: Every two weeks on a Tuesday, Somerset

Option 2: Every two weeks on a Monday alternating the venue for sessions in a different location

We are looking to start the group in the next year. However, some things need to be confirmed. We are looking to identify where the need is for the group.

If your young person would like to attend the RIO Youth Group can you please email the address above to say which venue would suit you better. We will then collate the information and work out which location will be most beneficial to the majority.

Save the date!

Its never too early think about Christmas!

Please keep **Saturday 5 December** free from 2.00pm-5.00pm as we will be holding our Christmas party again at the same venue, Somerset. This is always a lovely time to meet new friends and share some festive spirit.



The Adopter Hub



Throughout coronavirus (COVID-19) we are expanding the use of '[The Adopter Hub](#)' and we have some log-ins available for families to gain access. This is an online resource for the adoption community which is run by PACT (Parent and Children Together) and is a great resource given we are social distancing and schools are now closed.

The Hub was developed as a result of listening to adopters and working with them to provide accessible tools to empower adopters to access the support they need. The trained Adopter Peer Supporters are “experts by experience” and able to provide a listening ear through our one-to-one live webchat service. Sometimes hearing from someone who has experienced a similar situation to us is all we need to help guide us through.

The universal suite of support tools includes:

- One-to-one live webchat - online peer support
- Our specially developed Introduction to Attachment 12 module eLearning course
- A programme of webinars with topics selected by adopters
- Resources covering a wide range of subjects

The suite of tools also includes a safe and secure online adopter forum accessible only to adopters.

If you would like to know more about the Hub, please watch the [introduction video here](#).

If you think you would find this resource helpful, please email us and we can discuss this further with you. Email adoptsouthwestsupport@devon.gov.uk

SEND updates

Are you feeling informed about special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and the SEND Local Offer?

Find out more and if you haven't already signed up for updates, read the information in the area where you live:

- [Devon SEND updates](#) and [SEND news and the Early Help Improvement Programme](#)
- [Plymouth SEND updates](#)
- [Somerset SEND updates](#)
- [Torbay SEND updates](#)

Resources



Calm zone for young people

[Childline have created a website](#) that provides calming techniques, exercises, games and videos for young people to help them feel better when they feel anxious, scared or sad.

My Two Mums (The Myths of Gay Adoption)

A TEDx talk by Lynne Elvins | TEDxBristol
<https://youtu.be/NAcuH7n-dLc> Lynne and her partner Emma, became the first gay couple to be approved for adoption in Bristol, in 2004.



When people announce they are going to have children - the normal reaction is "congratulations!" When you're a gay couple who announce that you are going to adopt, you can get a very different reaction. Lynne and her partner Emma, became the first gay couple to be approved for adoption in Bristol, UK, in 2004. Lynne takes us on the incredibly moving and thought-provoking journey her family embarked on with their adopted son Steven.

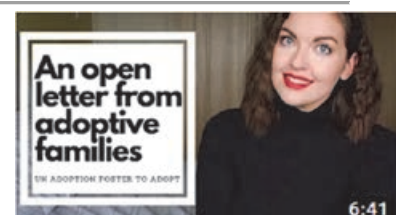


My Name is Leon, by Kit Da Waal

My Name is Leon is a novel narrated by nine-year-old boy who is taken into care and has been as compulsory reading for every foster carer, adopter and social worker! The book was shortlisted for the Costa First Novel Award.

Aimee Vlog on YouTube

Are you following [Aimee vlog?](#) She was recommended to us by an adoptive parent and shares her own personal journey of fostering for adoption and takes us on a journey with her.





The Curly Hair Project

[The Curly Hair Project](#) is a social enterprise which supports people on the autistic spectrum and the people around them. They use animated films, comic strips and diagrams to make our work interesting and easy to understand!

We have a number of resources including books which we you can loan to you, and various books suitable for parents, children and teenagers. If you have a particular book in mind or would like us to email you the list of books we have. Please email us adoptsouthwestsupport@devon.gov.uk We can also recommend guides and websites.

Out of hours support

If you need urgent support and it is out of hours, you will need to contact the local authority out of hours/emergency duty team for the area you live in. The numbers are:

- **Devon: 0345 600 0388 or 0845 600 0388**
- **Plymouth: 01752 346984**
- **Torbay: 0300 456 4876**
- **Somerset: 0300 123 23 27**



Contact us

Room 255, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon EX2 4QD

adoptsouthwest@devon.gov.uk

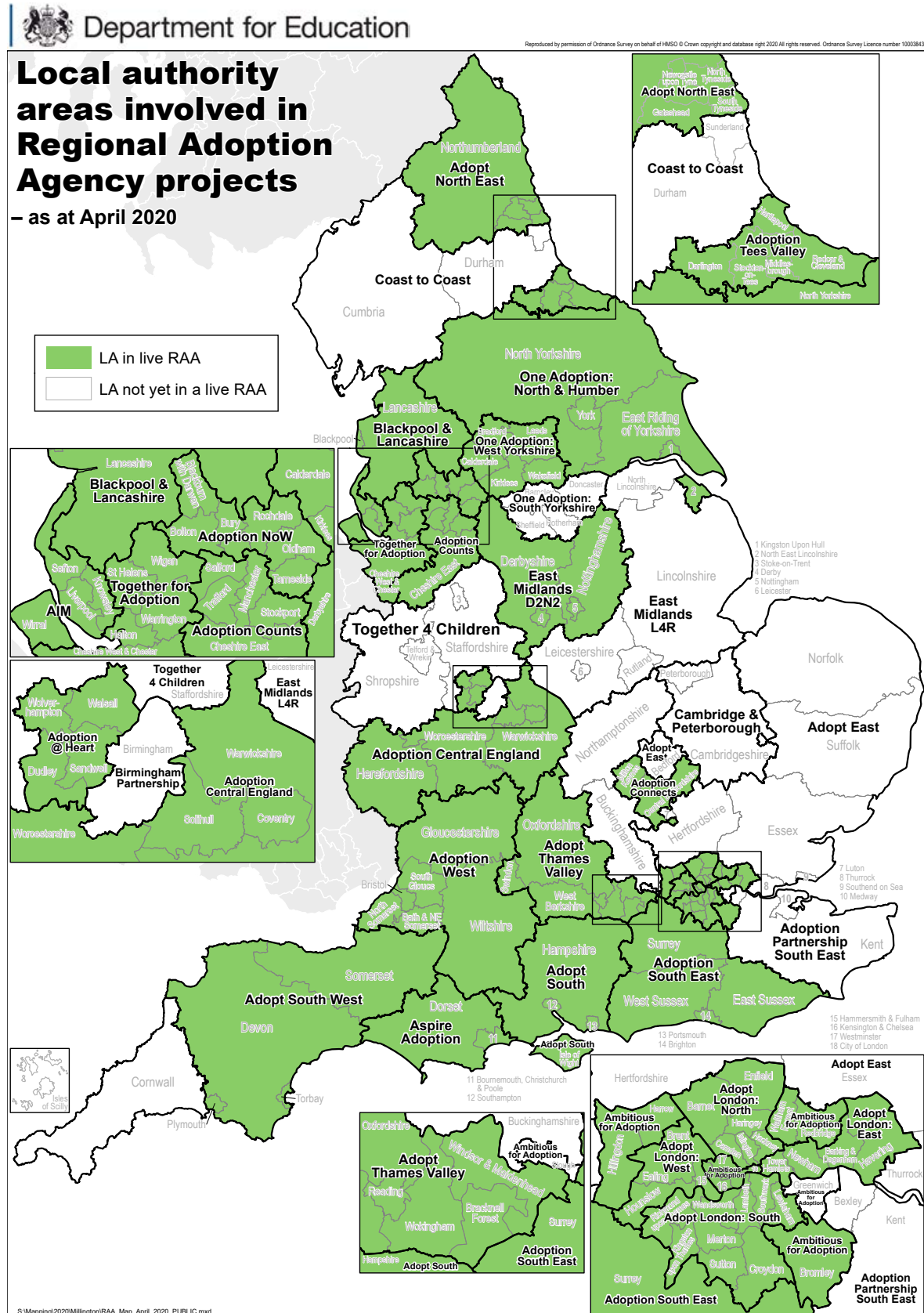
Call 0345 155 1076

adoptsouthwest.org.uk

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Appendix 4: National regional adoption agency Map





Annual Report
2019-2020

