**South East Region**

**Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board**

**MINUTES: October 20 2020 10.30-12.00**

**Invitees:** Dr Mac Heath (CHAIR Milton Keynes), Teresa Rogers (Adopt Thames Valley), Rachel Reynolds (Adopt South), Sarah Skinner (Kent), Lorna Hunt (Chair Adopt Thames Valley and PACT), Renuka Jeyarajah-Dent (CORUM), Lucy Peake (Grandparents Plus), Rebecca Eligon (SUPPORT Sector Led Improvement Programme), Kevin Yong (CORUM and National ASGLB Sponsor), Richard Morris (CAFCASS), Jan Fishwick (VICE CHAIR, PACT), Alastair Lee (Data lead, East Sussex), Michael Wilson (East Sussex)

**Apologies:** Hilary Sparling (Medway), Leanne Farach (Oxfordshire), Jackie Pape/Raheela Khan (Slough), Nathan Whitley (Bucks), Hilary Loades (Brighter Futures/Reading), Raheela Khan (Slough), Alison Alexander/Helen Costa (Cornerstone), Sonia Johnson (Bracknell Forest), Suzanne Chambers (Adopt South East),

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|  | **Agenda item** | **Presented/chaired by** | **Attachment** | **Approx timing** |
| **1** | Review minutes and action log, feedback from national board | Mac Heath | Attached | 5 mins |
| 2 | Discussion item: Black Lives Matter | Renuka Jeyarajah-Dent | Attached | 30 mins |
| 3 | Quarter four data | Kevin Yong | Attached | 20 mins |
| 4 | RAA round up and feedback from RAA leaders group | All | None | 20 mins |
| 5 | Bucks approach to permanency | Nathan Whitley | None | 15 mins |
| 6 | AOB |  |  |  |

**ITEM 1:** Minutes agreed and action log updated. Amended action log included in these minutes.

**ITEM 2:** Black Lives Matter discussion facilitated by RJD. RJD noted that the papers circulated were drawn from both her professional and personal experience and were intended to stimulate an honest reflective discussion among the senior leaders on this board. RJD noted that the pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the impact of adverse childhood experiences, and the data has demonstrated the disproportionate impact on people of colour. RJD presented a number of key facts and statistics relating to the lives of young black, Asian and other young people from ethnic minority backgrounds – including relating to employment, educational outcomes, stop and search, mental ill health, fines in lockdown, youth offending, school exclusions. RJD noted that as the strategic leaders of Adoption and Special Guardianship we cannot look at placements of children and considerations of permanence without also considering the facts and evidence around systemic racism and white privilege.

KY noted from the data that a BME child less likely to have adoption as a plan, and is also less likely (even when they do have a plan) to then go on be placed. KY asked the group to reflect on why this is the case? Is it practice? Courts? KY also noted that BAME children wait longer.

KY shared that through a review of adoption panel minutes they found that black single women were seen to have more detailed questioning on their motivation, and finances for example.

TR shared that in Adopt Thames Valley very few adopters are from BAME backgrounds. TR shared the work they are doing to try to be more inclusive, reach out, and make the customer journey a better experience by working with different organisation to help us with that. TR reflected that ATV has a shortage of adopters of any background, and too few adopters for BAME. TR noted that they have reflected on the relevance of BLM to their work and feels ATV will learn a lot from the outcome of their current campaign. TR noted that they are aware we have a huge journey and a lot of progress to make.

LP thanked RJD for her facilitation and said we need to acknowledge the way adopters and special guardians are treated in general. We need to acknowledge that generally SG feel they are poorly treated.

All noted that we can’t solve these issues alone.

SS set out the work they are undertaking, like ATV for a more inclusive and holistic approach.

JF said it is heartening to hear some of the practice in the room as well as to share the despair how little we have travelled since 1987. One of the things I was struck by relates to our workforce and how representative that it of the communities we work with. I want to think about what we can do or influence, that we can do as a consequence of this conversation.

AL suggested there is more work to do with the data to help build the case for change and to focus our attention. AL noted that there is analysis by ethnicity for children, but this is needed for adopters.

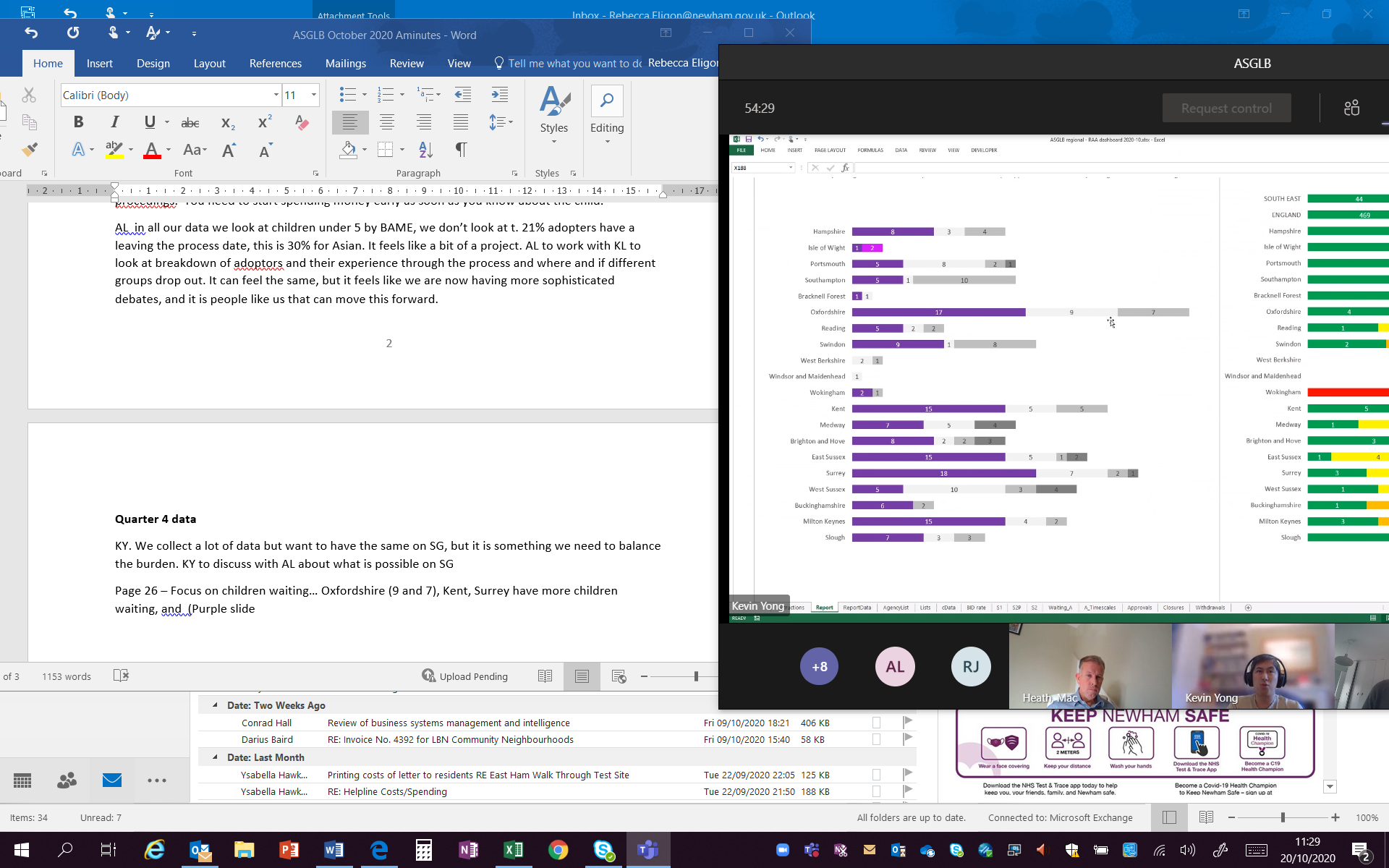
**Action: AL to work with KY to look at breakdown of adopters and their experience through the process and where and if different groups drop out.**

MH closed the discussion by noting that it can feel these discussions are replicating ones that were had in the 80s and 90s, but it feels like we are now having more sophisticated debates, and it is people like us that can move this forward.

**ITEM 3: QUARTER 4 DATA**

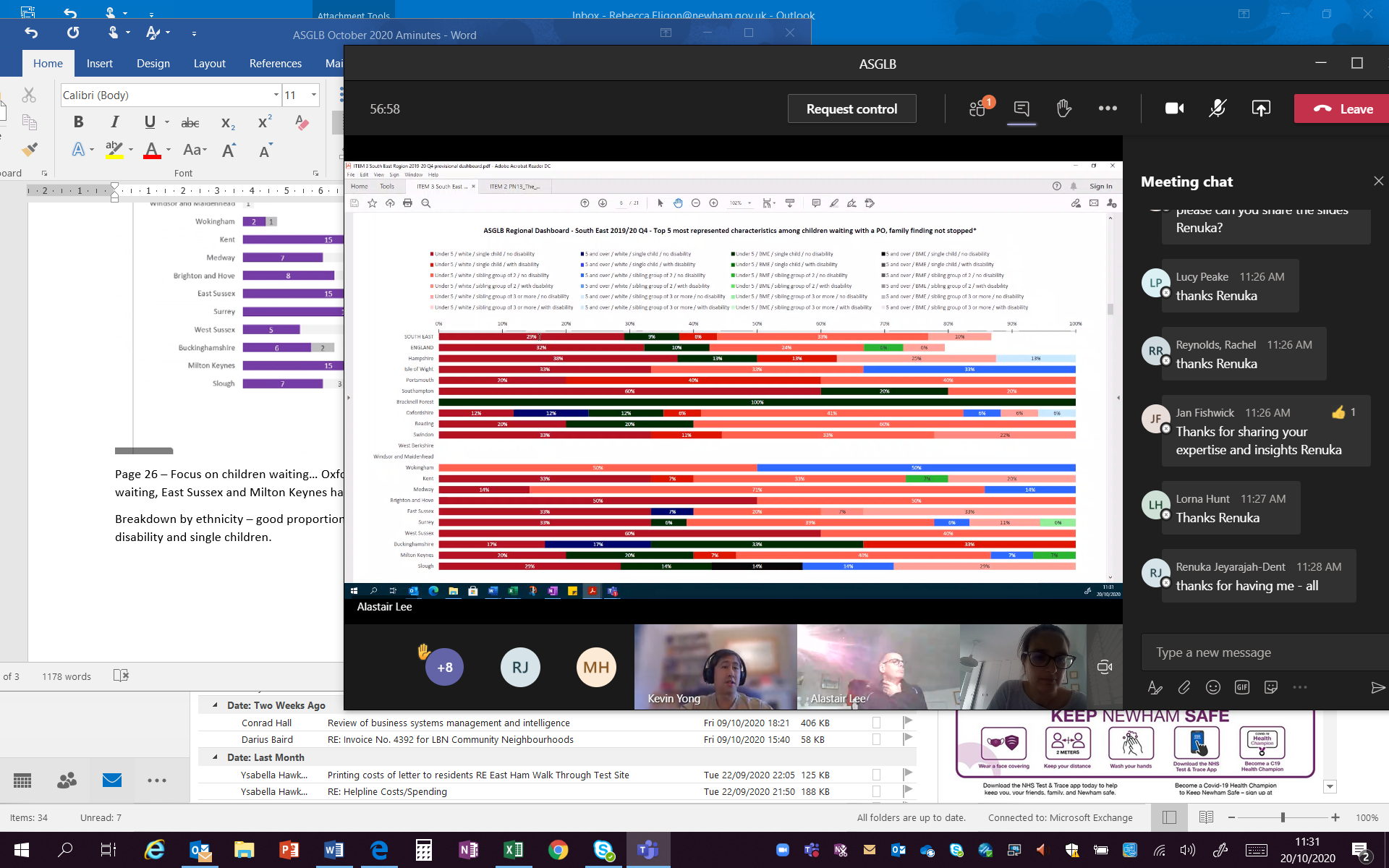
KY presented the quarter 4 data, he noted we collect a lot of data but want to have the same on SG, but it is something we need to balance the burden. KY to discuss with AL about what is possible on SG.

**Action: KY to work with AL to draw data together regarding SG. RE to follow up with KY and AL to timetable this in for a deeper discussion in 2021.**

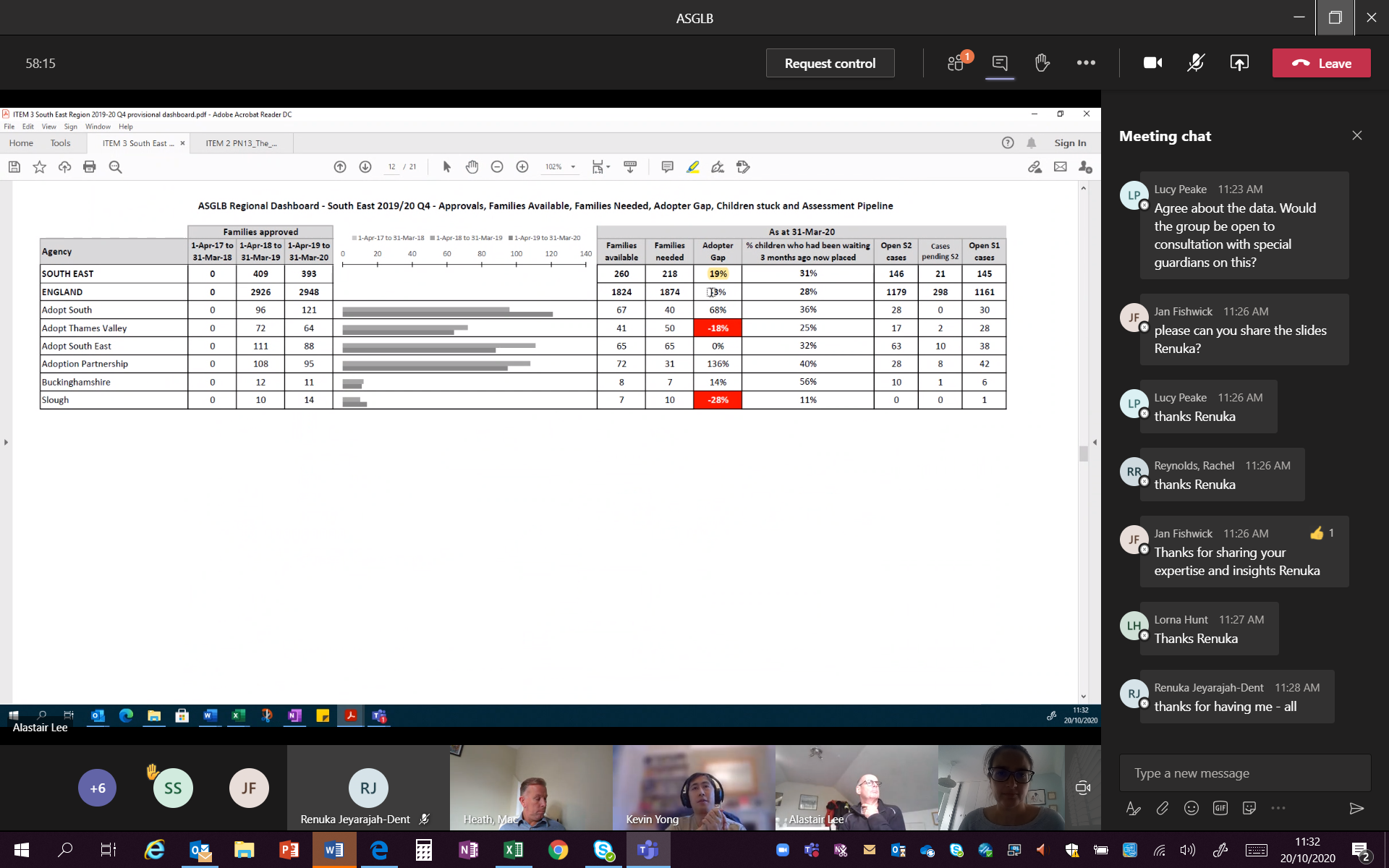


KY discussed the data on page 26 which shows the number of children waiting in Q4. West Sussex (17) Oxfordshire (16), Kent (10), Surrey (10) have more children waiting.

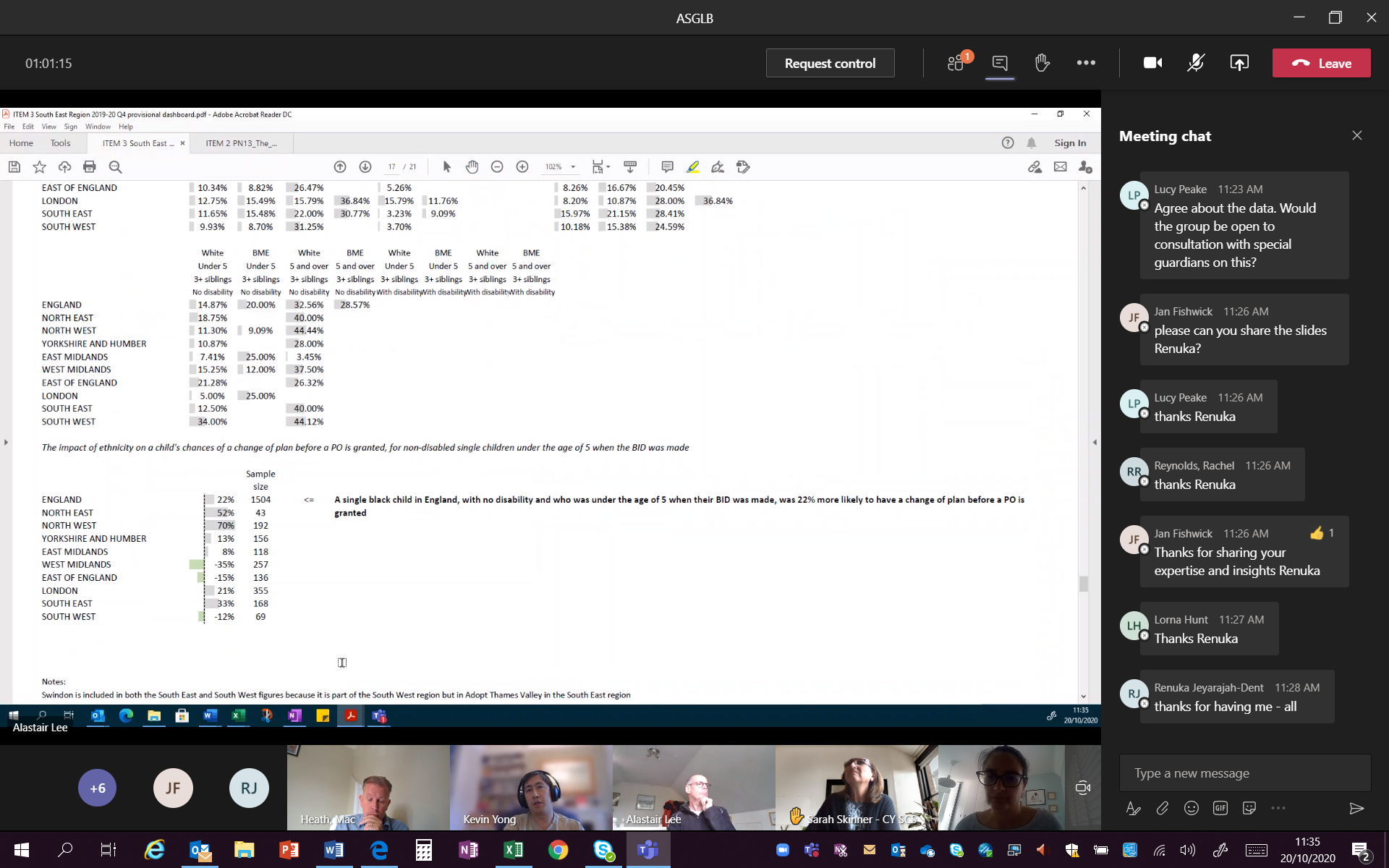
The chart below shows that worryingly a good proportion of those waiting (29%) are white, under 5, without disability and single children, a group which is traditionally seen as easiest to place, although it is worth noting that this is in line with the national trend (where 32% of children waiting are in this group).



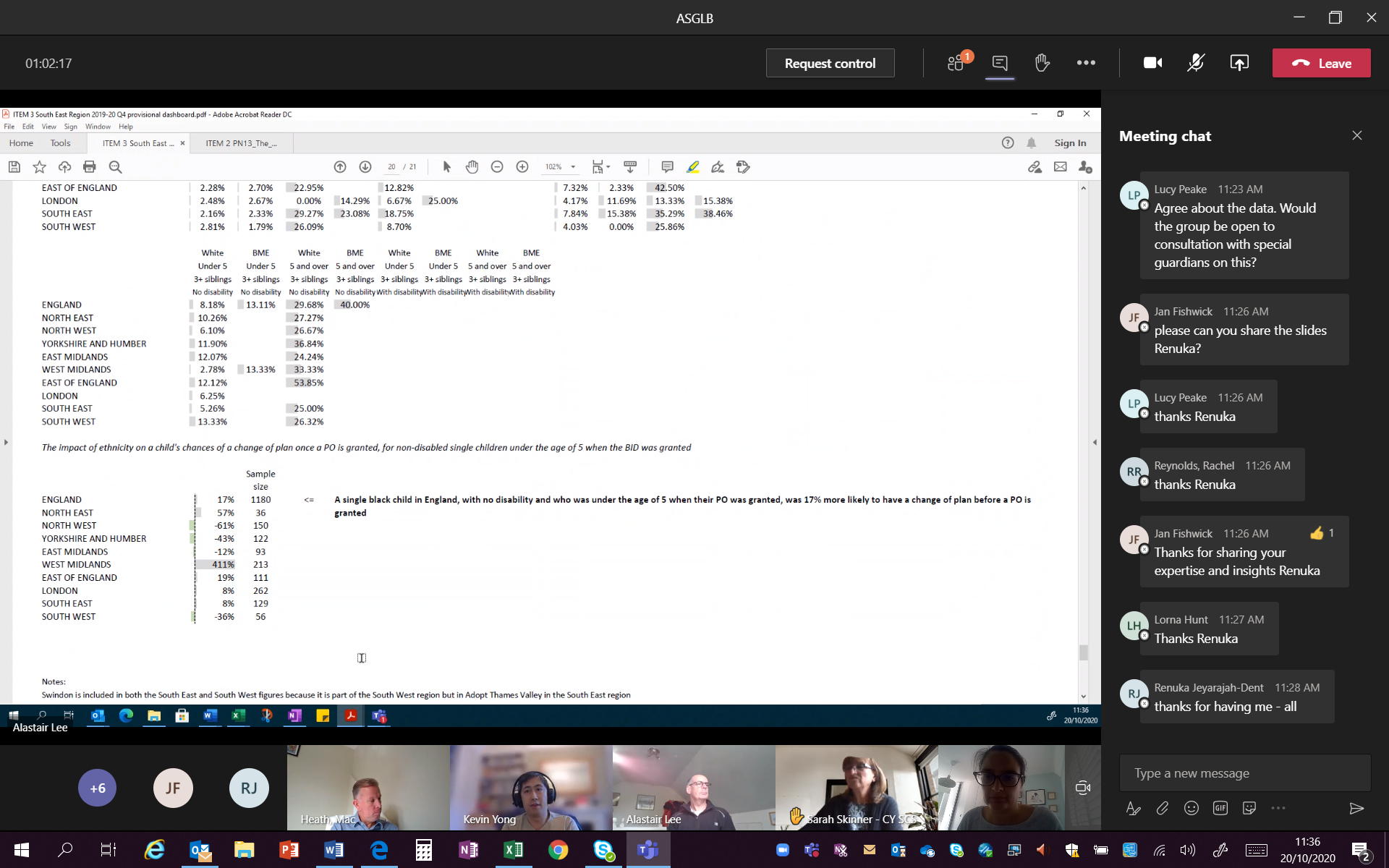
The table below describes the adopter gap in the region. Overall there are 19% more families than families needed. The region is looking so good because of two of the RAAs (Adopt South and Adoption Partnership), which on balance even out the shortfall in Adopt Thames Valley and Slough… But there are still children stuck – who were waiting at end Dec and are still waiting at end of march. Nationally about 28% and regionally 31% but a high of 56% in Bucks.



The chart below shows that a Single black child in England with no disability and who was under the age of five when their BID was made was 22% more likely to have their plan changed nationally, and this rises to 33% more likely in the South East.



Once a placement order made SE relatively good at making placements – 17% nationally compared with 8% in South East.



**ITEM 4: RAA round up**

TR from Adopt Thames Valley: noted that it has been a very busy second quarter, some of the worries we had about ADM have been resolved. ATV has been extremely busy with panels all of which are all full until next year. TR noted that there are some more complex assessments than previously. TR noted that staff have really got into their stride with virtual working, we are finding prep groups more challenging but things are moving ahead. TR noted that the impact of covid funding has been phenomenal and great that it was extended to Dec. TR noted that we will learn from what we have been able to provide through this funding. TR noted a challenge around medicals, but many adopters have been willing to fund privately so this has not been impacting on timescales.

MW from Adopt South East– Recruitment has surprised us. Staff have responded pretty well to home working. ASE is now moving to the second phase of developing prep and virtual learning, and are now looking at how to build connection and relationships when these are happening virtually. Like ATV ASE had a number of extra panels. Looking at how we develop panel practice. Strong medical advisor group and we haven’t had any assessments delayed, but seeing more complex assessments being affected by virtual medicals. We are at a point where we are looking at this at the RAA leaders group.

RR Adopt South – A very similar picture to Adopt South East and Adopt Thames Valley, not quite as strong as q1 but still very good. We have done 122 assessments, approved 55, and linked 65 children, adopter medicals seemed to have resolved itself. Calls to adoption support advice line have almost doubled, there were 600 calls last year, already reached that in 6 months.

SS Adoption partnership – Adoption Partnership is going live - Bexley, Kent and Medway in November. We are already having weekly management meetings, 45 adopters approved another 35 stage 2 assessments. Healthy pool attending virtual info events. It will be interesting to see whether the expected 200 come to first Adoption Partnership info event. Planning an internal launch event for November.

LH PACT– very high enquiries in PACT, medicals are complex but more coming through, creative approaches to introductions. We place nationally, and we are still placing in COVID tier 3 in Wirral.

LP – Last week we launched annual survey –82% of SG saying not getting support they need. LP noted that Grandparents Plus can offer more support to LAs, we have DfE funding to cover virtual or 1-2-1 support via the advice service. Need to be registered by November, can do up to 2 1-2-1s in addition to anything via ASF. LP asked ASGLB members to tell DfE that SG support is critical.

**Action: All to publicise offer of support for SGs and direct to Grandparents Plus**

RJD Corum– RJD asked ASGLB members to remember to use the Corum activity days, both virtual and face to face. SG support through psychologist, group work, please come to us. Corum is continuing to work with Adoption Partnership until end of March

RM CAFCASS – RM reflected it is encouraging to hear about the q1 data, we’ve been encouraging DFJs to prioritise placement orders that were coming to an end that can be concluded quickly. Courts are experiencing and predicting 60% throughput instead of 100% due to COVID restrictions in capacity which is going to make duration go through the roof. It is a gloomy position which is likely to place adoption cases well over 40 weeks.

MH - MK and Central beds – like the other RAAs have noted increased activity, and recruitment it will be interesting to see if that realises more adopters.

**Action log:** This action log was updated on October 20 2020

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|  | **Action** | **Responsible** | **Date issued** | **Status** |
| **40** | AL to work with KY to look at breakdown of adopters and their experience through the process and where and if different groups drop out. | **AL KY** | **Oct 2020** | **Complete in** |
| **39** | KY to work with AL to draw data together regarding SG. RE to follow up with KY and AL to timetable this in for a deeper discussion in 2021. | **AL KY RE** | **Oct 2020** | **Item in April 2021** |
| **38** | All to publicise offer of support for SGs and direct to Grandparents Plus, sign up needs to be before Nov | **ALL** | **Oct 2020** | **Complete** |
| **37** | RE to send out Adoption Guide/blueprint | RE | July 2020 | Complete |
| **36** | Send to RE to send around to group training relating to Public Law recommendations, and information on kinship care week | LP | July 2020 | Complete |
| **35** | provide feedback to KY on dashboard | All | July 2020 | Complete |
| **34** | MH to escalate need to extend flexibilities, particularly relating to timing of DBS and medicals | MH | July 2020 | Complete |
| **33** | To circulate monthly data from survey to RE so it can be shared with board members between the meetings | KY | July 2020 | Ongoing |
| **32** | Future agenda item on race, adoption and Special guardianship | RE | July 2020 | Complete |
| **31** | Standing item on agenda on feedback from RAA leaders | RE | July 2020 | Complete |
| **30** | Share content of RAA leaders work relating to barriers to adoption which includes ethnicity | SS | July 2020 | Complete |
| **29** | Share papers from Adopt Thames Valley: learning log, risk assessment and COVID 19 paper | TR | May 2020 | Complete |
| **28** | Share feedback from ASGLB SE with South East DCS group (as per bullets below) | MH | May 2020 | Complete |
| **27** | Share feedback from ASGLB SE with national board about emerging trends in the South East:   * some evidence of delay in adoption order hearings and care proceedings, * a mixed picture on enquiries with some RAAs and LAs reporting the same levels * little evidence that adoption introductions are being delayed * more demand for mother and baby placements * a particular impact on SGs of COVID-19 (particularly older and vulnerable carers) * support for the new flexible ASF arrangements * Little use of the new regulations as in the main RAAs and LAs have been able to manage | KY | May 2020 | Complete |
| **26** | Investigate if percentage of ASF that goes to SG has increased from 12% (as a result of changes brought in from COVID-19). No updated data available as of Mid July. | KY | May 2020 | OPEN |
| 25 | Update terms of reference to include focus on both special guardianship and adoption and to update existing membership | RE | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 24 | All to respond to schools admission code consultation particularly on aspects relating to adoption | All | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 23 | All to send Corum details of any Asian families who may be interested in participating in research/sharing their story | All | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 22 | Discuss with DCSs different options for greater judiciary input into the board/regional approach, and RE to approach RM from CAFCASS to encourage him to attend the board | MH/RE | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 21 | MH to consider future item on adopter mindset around trans-racial placements– which is often about placing black and mixed race children in white families, but could be placing to BAME families. | MH | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 20 | Bucks to present Bucks’ approach to permanency at next ASGLB | NW | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 19 | NW and LP to meet to consider current post-order practice and how we can improve this regionally – both quick wins and longer term. | NW/LP | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 18 | KY to produce regional and national benchmarks in data returns | KY | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 17 | KY to continue to push to improve the quality and completion of family finding data | KY | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 16 | AL to consider what information could be produced for a future detailed item at the board on SG, SG breakdown and age. | AL | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 15 | All to provide info to LP on any information relevant to the digital hub for kinship carers. | All | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 14 | ALL to contact AL if they do not have access to the restricted data on the SESLIP website. | All | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 13 | AL to let the board know of anything they can do to help with lobbying DfE about case management system suppliers. | AL | Jan 2020 | **Ongoing** |
| 14 | MH to consider whether future item or separate workshop on insights from evidence (i.e. turning data to insight) | MH | Jan 2020 | **Complete** |
| 15 | To provide feedback to KY on the adoption blueprint before Christmas | All | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |
| 12 | Bring back adoption blueprint as an agenda item at a future meeting | MH/RE | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |
| 11 | Raise adoption blueprint at RAA leaders group on 22 Nov | SS | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |
| 10 | Get feedback on centres of excellence, specifically how they have fed into adoption blueprint. Answers: Centres of excellence have funding and are in a better position to make use of those guides | KY | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |
| 9 | Circulate invites and encourage attendance at permanency workshops facilitated by CORUM | All | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |
| 8 | See if there is any insight as to the reasons underlying the small minority of less positive perceptions about virtual heads’ responsibilities around adoptees | KY | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |
| 7 | Significant item on data benchmarking and requirements at next meeting | AL | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |
| 6 | Ensure any work in the in-house fostering project at a sub-regional footprint uses those groupings flexibly | RE/PG | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |
| 5 | AL to work with complex LAC project (Mark Evans and Rosemary Perry) and in-house fostering project (RE) to see whether it is possible to map where children are (both those adopted and in long term fostering and SGO arrangements). | AL | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |
| 4 | Share presentation on mockingbird | TR | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |
| 3 | Add item on ASF preparation | RE | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |
| 2 | RE to contact the board’s PAs to get feedback as to whether to continue the download or to revert to previous emailing of documents | RE | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |
| 1 | RE to work with MH to set future meeting dates | RE/MH | Nov 2019 | **Complete** |

# Proposed agendas

Future items:

* Turning data to insight
* Data on Special Guardianship

Standing agenda items

* National board feedback
* RAA leaders’ feedback
* RAA round-up