**South East Region Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board**

**NOTES: July 20 2022 10.30-12.00**

**Attendees:** Dr Mac Heath (CHAIR Milton Keynes), Lorna Hunt VICE CHAIR (Chair Adopt Thames Valley and PACT), Rebecca Eligon (SUPPORT Sector Led Improvement Programme), Alastair Lee (Data lead, East Sussex), Carole Atkin (Bucks), Ingrid Crisan (Medway), Vanessa Glenn (ADM Adopt South), Kevin Yong (CORUM and National ASGLB Sponsor), Hilary Loades (Brighter Futures/Reading), Lucy Peake (Kinship), Caroline Nicholls (for Teresa Rogers Adopt Thames Valley), Sarah Skinner - Adoption PARTNERSHIP

**Apols:** Cathrine Clarke (Corum), Raheela Khan (Slough), Sandra Carnell (Bucks), Cathrine Clarke (Corum), Richard Morris (CAFCASS), Michael Wilson (Adopt South East), Rachel Reynolds (Adopt South),

# ITEM 1. Review minutes and action log, feedback from national board and task and finish groups

**Action log reviewed and agreed:** Action No 55 and 59 and that is being discussed at national board.

**Notes from last meeting agreed.**

MH had conversation with incoming Bucks DCS and how we work with them to be part of an RAA.They are looking at a voluntary agency to enter a partnership arrangement with.

**ADCS and National board feedback**

MH recounted that a number of board members and other SE colleagues were in Manchester for ADCS conference, it was encouraging to hear considerations of permanency were given a loud voice. MH reflected that we’ve moved so far from permanency being part of one bit of the service to it being an embedded consideration. Sec of state didn’t attend ADCS conference due to political changes.

MH didn’t attend last board but LH was there. Minister is clear that any changes to contact arrangements need to be in agreement with adopters. Sarah Joel in lead with RAAs writing a report relating to this.

MH shared that an implementation board to support the recommendations from the care review will be established. DfE is going to restructure so there is a lead for each chapter. Sarah Jenning is likely to be lead for alternative care arrangements. Some parts may take longer as require legislature. Feedback at board was that funded needed and strengthening of SG and kinship, which is something this board has also discussed.

The recruitment campaign starting end of last month for older more complex children and the work of task and finish groups updated by Krish. Racial disparity subgroups are hosting roundtable discussions and these are also looking at work overseas. The Support sub group has had a change of leadership, looking at role of virtual head being key in terms of SG and adoption as well as LAC.

There is also work ongoing looking at how we work with judiciary to look at adoption for older children.

MH reflected it has been a funny time, politically. Some of the work going forward. Some challenge in regard to the national bard. MH has felt real value in being part of that board and feeding in via the various subgroups and a there is a sense of momentum across the regions in supporting the work.

The national board remains a helpful place to share the South East position.

# Item 2: Feedback on progress with SG work

MH reflected that he is not always confident that everyone around the table at this board has SG in their remit. Nonetheless given the growth of this area it is very important for us to think about how we strengthen kinship practice across the region. RE reminded the board that SESLIP has allocated us some funding to develop SG practice and the original plan was to hold a conference and launch an offer of support to the 19 LAs to undertake a self assessment against the SG blueprint, and then to follow this with training or other work to help fill gaps in our practice in the region. We did online conference with delivery focus with practitioners which over 100 people attended and we then put forward some consultancy support from Mike Hall to support the self assessment work. There was enthusiasm but lack of resource and capacity has made it difficult and very few LAs have done the work. MH asked whether we use our capacity in a different way.

LP and RE reported back that they would like to use the funding to run a series of lunch and learn 90 mins online sessions on the following topic areas.

* Peer support (Kinship is being commissioned to support this and delivery will ramp up in Autumn. Bring people together in Jan)
* Coproduction (Bucks) – new digital pathway coproduced to TPX -[www.guardians.buckinghamshire.gov.uk](http://www.guardians.buckinghamshire.gov.uk) – this one can be scheduled first
* Workforce – share some examples. Brighton & Hove (well -established), Southampton (newer).
* Contact/family time for kinship carers – so much happening at national level – Sarah Jo is doing a lot on adoption, special guardianship. Suggest this lunch and learn follows this session
* ASF—At the moment only 14% of ASF goes to kinship carers. Vas Patel, and Mot McDonald have money and are tasked to reach people. Suggest they lead on a lunch and learn and we get reps from the 19 LAs to attend.

**Decision:** The board was supportive of this direction of travel. Agreed that it is important to get the right people in the room, but not to recreate this group for SG

IC reported that Medway used the tool and worked with Mike Hall. They then engaged in activities to address the issues identified in the diagnostic. IC said Medway would welcome opportunities to join forces and do learning together, develop materials, training and wraparound support as well as benchmarking Fees to SG.

HL confirmed that they support SG within their RAA. There may be benefit in developing buddying with other workers in other LAs. We have one person and can be very Reading centred

LH said her experience of running lunch and learn online have been positive to get 100+ people.

**Action:** RE to follow up with Lucy and schedule the lunch and learn

**Action:** MH to flag at DCS meeting

**Action:** RE to set up buddying scheme

**Action:** RE to benchmark pay, training and support from different LAs

# ITEM 3: data presentation and discussion

Preliminary data from Quarter 4, 2022.

There has been a downward trend on adoption orders, Placement orders, bit of a bump coming out of lockdown. SE reflects national data

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New items added on numbers of children in system. Adoption plan without a PO, those matched but not placed

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Toward end of March there were 720 children it has fallen back to 700.The data doesn’t really show a back log, but this is a good indicator of the pipeline. There are 117 children across England waiting and about 40-50 where no links are being explored. KY noted there is a need to get more consistency from LAs on how they complete the data around family finding. It is filled in manually and is being driven by a debate around which children should be visible on linkmaker. Quite a proportion 25% have no family finding but they need to change plan away from adoption, 50% have a link/firm link, and 25% active family finding. In the SE there are only 3 children waiting more than 18 months.

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The adopter gap is growing. We have nearly twice as many families available than we need 98% positive adoption gap

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**HL –** Can I ask what has been done to look at the adopters waiting, is it just because there are others or they don’t have the ability to meet the needs of children waiting. Is it an oversupply or a mismatch. Insight from top 100 waiting adopters some were legacy cases lost in handover, some with high requirements, a lot of Asian adopters.

**KY** reflected there are 41 adopters waiting more than 18 months. One of the insights from conversation with social workers is that they think there is something wrong with them, a sort of unconscious bias. We are going to see more adopters falling into the category. What do we do with the adopters that are waiting?

VG shared that in Adopt South once you are approved you continue to get training and development which gives them confidence to consider a wider range of placements.

AL agree with KY on timeliness. Three year trend and annual trend is increasing. Adoptor timelinesswe are taking longer than England that looks like it is largely due to Adopt SE and Adoption Partnership. MW is taking action and SS is aware, there are conversations with Adopt South, LH on what others do. SS responded that we are mindful that compared to others our data is different, but also an interesting point made by KY about interpretation of contact and start dates. We’ve streamlined some practice that has been inherited. We did have people who went into a break, but also issues with medical/checks which we didn’t progressed SS concluded, we can and have provided a narrative to our board and the reasons for delay. In stage 2 our timeliness meets the performance threshold. But the actions we are putting in place now will take some time to show improvement.

SS noted we have a large number of adopters waiting and the view on what can we do about that. We are an open service and we are all trying to find those adopters to meet the needs of children. There will be adopters who have a right to be assessed and they will be approved but the child they are looking for isn’t there, and I agree with VG that adopters can open up and consider sibling groups and early permnanence with support, but that doesn’t happen for everyone and there is a tension which it is helpful to name.

CNshared that they’ve tried to tighten up at pre-stage 1, introducing a readiness checker. We found very complicated stage 1s which were affecting overall timeliness. We are trying to be firmer around pre-stage and stage 1 and then that is positively impacting on timescale at sage 2 as we are dealing with complexity earlier.

LH said more are coming to the VAA front door because RAAs can’t take them on. The messaging is important, but they will be disappointed. This is a growing issue and challenge. We have to balance that. It is one to watch.

# AOB:

KK is coming, what would we like to discuss with him in the room. Group responded that it would be good to have a discussion around how the SE ASGLB can contribute best to the national agenda?

AOB: VG updated that the Hampshire adoption team will come into scope. Leading to interesting dicussion about contact. In CPRs those decisions are made at the front door, putting together project group to look at how we facilitate learning and development through the whole process and with the judiciary. It is becoming more complex to manage especially for sibling groups where they may be placed differently including in fostering. Interesting and dynamic opportunity. It is something we could feedback

Caroline – ATV awarded EP quality mark earlier in the year.

SS – Kent County Council – received Ofsted outstanding and lots of celeberations. The group congratulated SS.

**Action log:** This action log was updated on October 5 2022

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|  | **Action** | **Responsible** | **Date issued** | **Status** |
| **64** | RE to benchmark pay, training and support from different LAs re: kinship care | RE | Oct 2022 | Open |
| **63** | RE to set up buddying scheme to pair up SG practitioners from different LAs to share practice | RE | Oct 2022 | Open |
| 62 | MH to flag issues re: SG oversight at DCS meeting | MH | Oct 2022 | Closed |
| **61** | RE and LP to set up first lunch and learn for Kinship Care week, and schedule the remaining sessions | RE LP | Oct 2022 | Closed |
| **60** | MH to write to DCS group to consider Bucks joining an existing RAA | MH | April 2022 | Closed |
| **59** | MH to raise issue of contact/family time at national board as a task to consider nationally | MH | April 2022 | Closed |
| **58** | MH to meet LP and RE to consider next steps for Special Guardianship | MH | April 2022 | Closed |
| **57** | TR/RR to feedback on top 100 analysis and actions (once surveys and interviews complete) | RR/TR | Jan 2022 | Open |
| **56** | RR to feedback on impact of sibling worker (in 6-12 months) | RR | Jan 2022 | Open |
| **55** | MH to feedback to national board the SE position on contact: contact is a critical area and important for national strategic consideration, however there needs to be focus separately on SG and adoption; and the language needs to be changed away from contact | MH | Jan 2022 | Ongoing |
| **54** | MH to invite KK to July or October meeting | MH | Jan 2022 | Complete |
| **53** | Terms of reference were agreed | All | Jan 2022 | DECISION |
| **52** | All to send any comments or amendments to terms of reference to Rebecca | All | Oct 2021 | Complete |
| **51** | Book April 2022 meeting in person in Crawley | RE | Oct 2021 | Complete |
| **50** | Item on January agenda re: 100 longest waiting children and adopters | RE/KY | Oct 2021 | Complete |
| **49** | RE to work with board to draft bid to regional recovery fund for work on SG | SG | July 2021 | Complete |
| **48** | Consider how to have a further in depth conversation about contact | MH | July 2021 | Complete |
| **47** | LH to circulate details of all party parliamentary group (added to minutes and email) | LH/RE | April 2021 | Complete |
| **46** | Medway to share SG training materials with group, RE to circulate | HS/RE | April 2021 | Complete |
| **45** | LAs to contribute to SG benchmarking pilot | All | April 2021 | Complete |
| **44** | Circulate template that Corum has developed to collect SG data in London | KY/RE | April 2021 | Complete |
| **43** | Update and circulate ASGLB South East membership list | RE | April 2021 | Complete |
| **42** | New vice chair to be confirmed at next meeting. Lorna Hunt confirmed as Vice chair | MH | Jan 2021 | Complete |
| **41** | Items for future consideration (as a consequence of themes coming out of national board) added to forward plan | RE | Jan 2021 | complete |
| **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 |
| **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 | Complete |
| 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:

* Contact and support to birth families; possible conference
* Support: Examples of best practice, benchmarking on use of ASF in the south east, can we look at subregional variation between RAAs? Which areas are securing most ASF support (for adoption/SG)/best practice
* Reasons for approved adopters waiting (is it bureaucratic/procedural, adopter choice)
* Analysis on disruption

Standing agenda items

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