**South East Region Adoption Leadership Board**

**Meeting notes and action log: April 19 2023 (10-11.30am)**

**Invitees:** Dr Mac Heath (CHAIR Milton Keynes), Lorna Hunt VICE CHAIR (Chair Adopt Thames Valley and PACT), Kevin Yong (CORUM and National ASGLB Sponsor), Sarah Skinner (Adoption PARTNERSHIP), Rachel Reynolds (Adopt South), Rebecca Eligon (SUPPORT Sector Led Improvement Programme), Carol Atkins (Bucks), Adina Demle (service manager from Medway- here on behalf of Ingrid), ), Hilary Loades (Brighter Futures/Reading),

**Apols:** Michael Wilson (Adopt South), Teresa Rogers (Adopt Thames Valley), East), Hilary Sparling (Medway), Vanessa Glenn (ADM Adopt South), Richard Morris (CAFCASS),

**Item 1: Review minutes and action log, any updates on national direction of travel on adoption following disbanding of board**

MH welcomed the group in its new incarnation with a sole focus on adoption. SS noted At RAA leaders, some areas have disbanded their regional meeting, some areas are considering the future. SS reflected there are quite a few who meet in other forums.

KY agreed that there are some things that we need to have the LAs there. For example the LA applying for placement orders and concurrent planning and permanency considerations. It might mean changing the make up of the board, some ADMs, coming? Otherwise we will spend our time talking about matching and recruitment rather than the whole system.

KY recognised that there is a need for something that strategically focuses on adoption. KY reflected some of the other spaces are about improving practice. The national level recognises that there is a need to engage judges/courts, looking at the strategic leaning away from adoption at courts. So there is a plan for a sector wide meeting twice a year in Sept, with the end of year data, and second on in January. The DfE want these meetings to review spending review bids.

**Action** Refresh the membership list, get a new rep for Slough.

**Action:** item at next meeting on strategic and practical direction in South East Courts

**Action:** MH to liaise with Sarah Johal around future direction of travel

MH agreed that often DCSs don’t have a lot of experience in adoption prior to senior leadership and so it can be too easy for DCSs to push the conversations over to RAAs.

LH coming from VAA said it is helpful to come in and see what they can contribute, but also regional impacts.

MH feels like there can be snowblindness – too many things, new frameworks, SEND, some of the core critical work on children can get lost.

**Decision:** Agreed to keep the group meeting quarterly and review.

**Item 2: Review and agree ToR in light of discussion at last meeting**

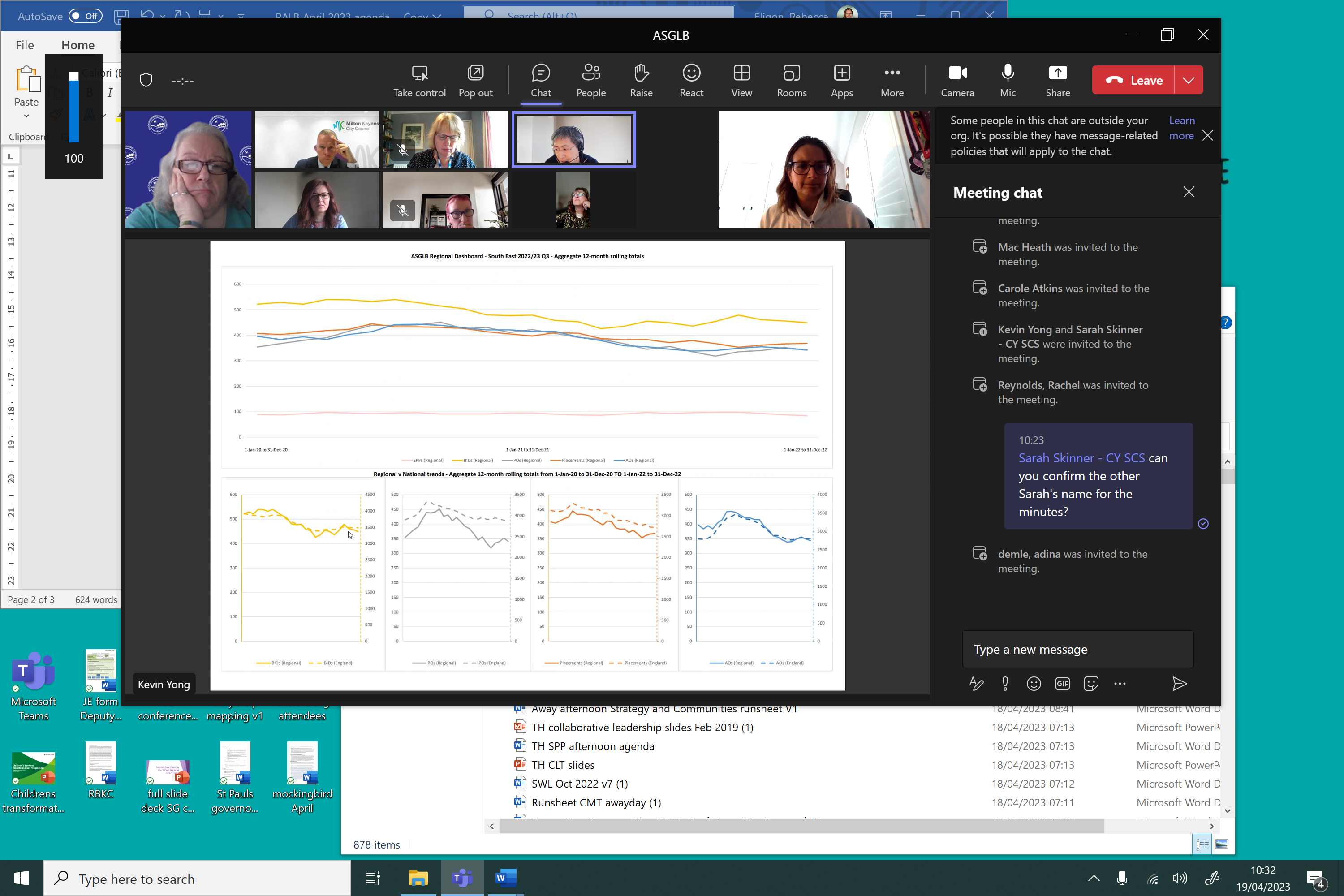
Terms of reference were agreed

**Item 3: Data presentation and discussion**

KY presented the data noting that adoption orders are declining – E Sussex in particular a massive reduction from 21 to 6.

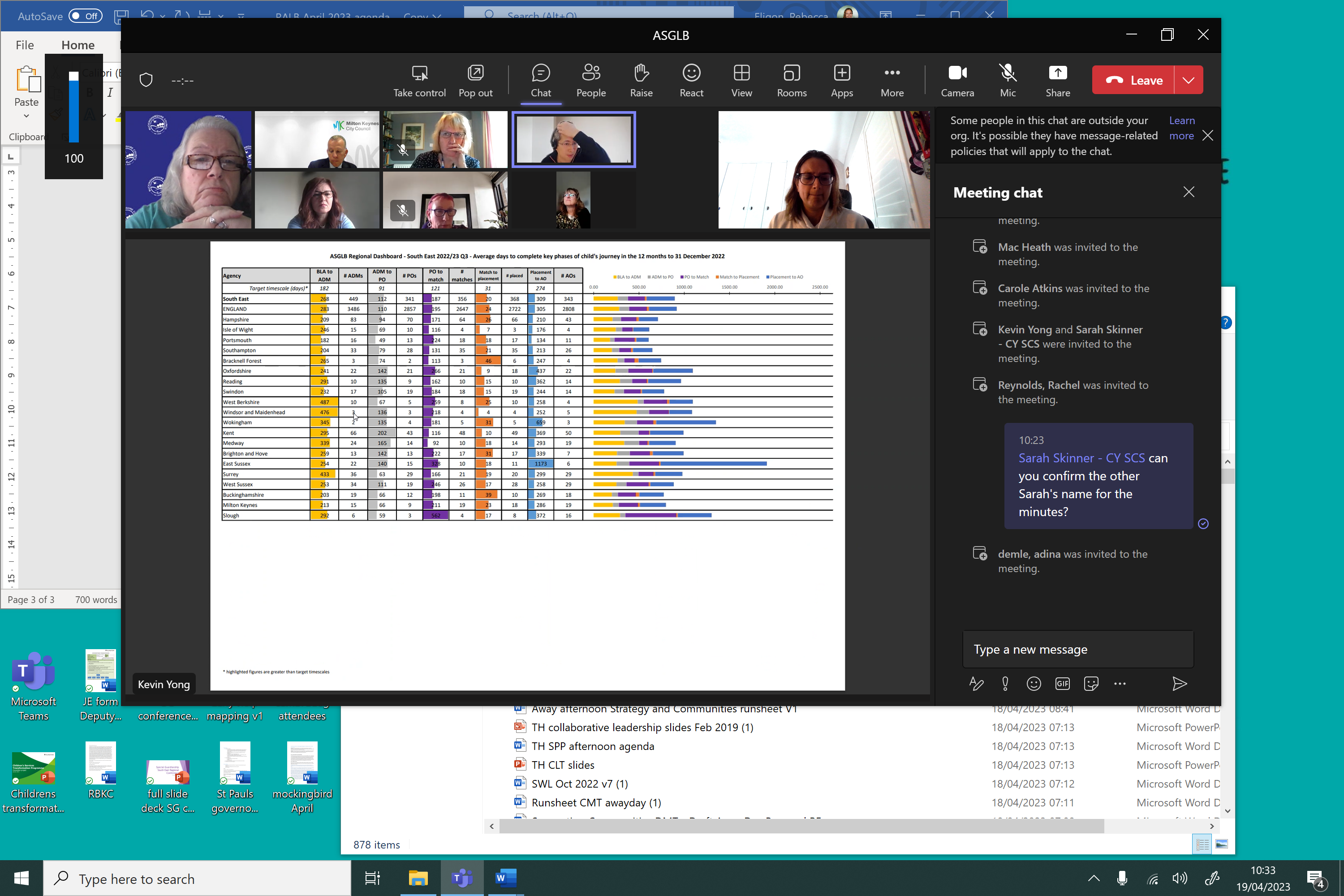
Best interest decisions. The most recent year is 21/22 for that year there may be children who still haven’t had their decision. The ones that stood out – RBWM 10%, Wokingham 15%, Slough 18%, Oxfordshire – all pretty low. What is happening there? TR may have been able to provide insights. It may be because kinship is up, what’s behind those numbers?

Early Permanence placements- Brighton and Hove haven’t had any for last 3 years. One of the few that haven’t had any, which is quite unusual. Is it about court, social work practice, why is there no early permanence?



There has been an uptick in best interest decisions, but not fully reflected in placement orders. Some regions have seen an increase due to backlog.

Placements and adoption orders have levelled off. In terms of pipeline we might start to see more. We aren’t seeing a fall in children coming into care or the proportion under 5, so that may translate to a small increase. RBWM, West Berks take longer on some decisions, Surrey has larger number of children.



Kent and placement orders – best interest decisions are quite timely, but POs are slower. SS said Kent and Medway are experiencing massive court delays. SS noted that her conversations with LA colleagues has confirmed this and that is translating to adoption orders as well.

KY reflected it is about 562 days from PO to match, about 19 months. Overall timescale from coming into care to adoption orders is much slower in East Sussex for 6 children.

Looking at children waiting – there are only 4 children waiting more than 18 months who are actively family finding, and it goes up to 15 children if we look at those waiting 12 months. We still have a surplus in the south east in terms of adopters. We need 176 families and have 322 families. 39% waiting in Sept were placed by Dec compared to 30% nationally, in north there is a sufficiency gap.

Looking at pipeline of adopters it is falling away, following national trend. So will expect it to continue to reduce. It might be that some RAAs see an increase in enquiries but the data doesn’t show it as yet. It isn’t a problem at the moment as there is a surplus but that gap might be eaten up quite quickly.

SS – in terms of numbers of families available. We have 75 families available, does that figure take into account EP carers with children. KY said the actual number will be lower due to EP numbers. KY said we could add a new code on family finding then that would give a more accurate understanding as some may be deregistered. SS said if you take out EP those on hold or not available the number reduces quite significantly. SS thought the additional code that would be helpful. Others agreed.

KY asked for PACT would that be feasible? LH said yes would be happy to do that. LH said it is interesting the northern areas are struggling to recruit. We are getting more requests from northern areas as they are trying to place closer to home for children aged 2-3 and are turning to VAAs like PACT. Which reflects the trend you have talked about.

KY let the group know they are introducing more options on sexual orientation following the ONS categories. If RAAs collect this data it will be analysed, although it isn’t compulsory. We know the proportion of LGBTQI adopters are increasing steadily. For Q4 which will be published before the summer we are publishing those that are waiting 18 months and 12 months from PO (rather than from when they came into care). The figure is 4 children, for the south east.

SS had a query on the dashboard that looked at timeliness one of the thing we tried to unpick across Michael, Sarah and Rachel around timeliness on stage 1 which is low. We have delays with DBS and health assessments. It might be helpful to understand why? It is helpful to look at both the areas that are achieving well as achieving poorly. Are we measuring correctly and like for like. RR we don’t take a particularly adopter led approach on timeliness we are quite proactive and supportive but we do take a different stance, we will support people but also have that honest conversation.

CA said in Bucks we use our readiness checker, the biggest delay is the medical advisor. But similar issues about chasing to get things through on time. A balance between pushing through stage 1 and how prepared they were at the start.

**Action:** future discussion on reasons underlying delay (DBS health assessments, courts lack of receptiveness to adoption, different policies about how quick to push adopters/whether you start them when they aren’t fully ready)

**Item 4: RAA round up and feedback from RAA leaders group**

RR – had another good year approved 94 adopters, 101 linked adopters, but 110 year before. In Adopt South we have been focused on adopters who can take siblings ad more complex needs, linked 19 sibling groups, have 37 families that can take sibling groups. 37% of 94 were approved for siblings. Only one child placed outside the RAA. Activity is up overall, Hampshire and IOW driving that, others stable or slightly down. Not sure why that is. 9 children over the age of 5 and 7 of those Hampshire children. Piloted children’s teams being in with Hampshire, without having such rigidity and we will likely expand that. Southampton is very good at embracing diverse adopters. Two full time parenting workers working with mentors that have siblings themselves. At linking the parenting worker goes in to support and that has really helped and enabled some successful placements which were wobbly.

SS – in terms of ADMs, we’ve had a significant jump in 22/23 122 ADMS compared with 2021/22 we had 86. Like Rachel placed 17 children (7 groups) most are sibling groups of 2. We are trying t o be as open as possible in our recruitment of adopters. Interesting conversation with LA social workers particularly around single applicants. I am stepping down as HoS on 30 June, Amy Coombes will be replacing me who has been in Kent for many years. Bexley outstanding. MH thanked SS for all her work over the years.

HLB - Brighter Futures had first VAA inspection, overall good with outstanding for leadership and management. We are a VAA and don’t recruit adopters, but whilst placements decisions have been consistent over 4 years, placement orders dropped by 50% last year, due to delays in court processes. It feels like our courts believe any relative will do.

LH – At PACT just finished Ofsted, pleased with outcome. Will share learning on that. Like others we are focused on siblings. EP is a big thing. But also more complex contact arrangements. For example we are aware of a 3 year old now going to be in long term care because couldn’t manage sibling contact requirements. HLB said these things are possible and the child could be placed for adoption. The foster carers were saying they wanting to adopt siblings and the court saying no because the eldest was 9 and that is too old.

MH said we need to influence family justice board, the lack of confidence isn’t grounded in evidence.

CA – we have similar problems in courts about PO decisions, we are getting more placements in mother and baby 3-4 times before they come in for adoption and then they are more difficult to place. We have been increasing approvals in last financial year but fewer EPs, 2 this year, rather than 11 the year before. But that is because we have been looking for adopters for siblings and complex. We are developing a relationship with Adopt East Midlands, as we are selling placements. Like others we have purchased very few, managing to place the majority in house. Had 5 registrations of interest in April so far. Shortlisted for 2 awards on innovation for digital products - adoption ready, foster ready and guardians guide

**AOB: topics for rest of 2023**

Themed discussions – get back to RE and MH

Possible themed discussion topics for 2023:

* Support to birth families (possible online conference area?)
* Reasons for approved adopters waiting (is it bureaucratic/procedural, adopter choice)
* Analysis on disruption

**Action log:** This action log was updated on 7 July 2023

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|  | **Action** | **Responsible** | **Date issued** | **Status** |
| **69** | MH to liaise with Sarah Johal around future direction of travel | **MH** | **April 2023** | **Open** |
| **68** | Item at next meeting on strategic and practical direction in South East Courts | RE | April 2023 | Closed |
| **67** | Refresh the membership list, get a new rep for Slough. | RE | April 2023 | Open |
| **66** | future discussion on reasons underlying delay (DBS health assessments, different policies about how quick to push adopters/whether you start them when they aren’t fully ready) | RE | April 2023 | Open |
| **65** | RE MH and LH to meet to review terms of reference, meeting dates to align with operational regional meeting and resolve membership and oversight of Kinship (meeting with Sarah Daly to agree) | RE MH LH | Jan 2023 | Closed |
| **64** | RE to benchmark pay, training and support from different LAs re: kinship care | RE | Oct 2022 | Closed (move to kinship care group) |
| **63** | RE to set up buddying scheme to pair up SG practitioners from different LAs to share practice | RE | Oct 2022 | Closed move to kinship care group) |
| 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 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** |