A London North Regional Adoption Agency

BUSINESS CASE

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Project information

Project name	Adopt London North : a North London regionalised adoption service
Project ID	
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Document approval

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1. Executive Summary

It is proposed that a new North London Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) is created through combining the adoption services for the North London Boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey and Islington. These agencies wish to build on the success of their existing services to improve performance in meeting the needs of those children who require permanence through adoption by bringing together the best practice from each authority within the RAA. This proposal forms part of an overarching project to develop four RAA's across London.

This document describes how establishing a single agency will allow the six authorities to provide a more cohesive, efficient and effective use of resources and development of practice to the benefit of children, adopters and others who gain from adoption services. It proposes that the London Borough of Islington will host the RAA, the cost of implementation to be funded by the Department for Education. This document also sets out how the RAA will work with its partners to deliver Adoption Services.

In June 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) published a paper, 'Regionalising Adoption,' setting out the proposals for the establishment of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs). The paper gave a very clear directive to local authorities that it was the expectation for all authorities to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency by 2020. Further policy statements since then continue to support the proposed reforms to adoption and outline the provision of funding and support for the creation of RAAs. In March 2018 The DfE commenced the legislation that allows them to direct a local authority into a RAA if there is no progress being made. ***It is important to iterate therefore that the move towards Regionalisation of Adoption services is mandatory and local authorities not progressing sufficiently towards this objective run the risk of government intervention.***

The move towards the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies is led by a national agenda to better target the recruitment of prospective adopters and speed up the matching and placement of children for adoption. Funding has been made available from the Department for Education (DfE) as part of a national Regional Adoption Agency Programme, backed by legislation in the form of the Education and Adoption Act 2016, which requires local authorities to combine their adoption services in Regional Adoption Agencies, or be directed to do so if they do not choose to do so on a voluntary basis

The implementation of the new RAA will follow substantial project work being undertaken. Funding has been provided by the DfE to develop proposals, which include the scope of the operational model and organisational structure of the new RAA. The North London project has the benefit of being able to access previous learning from those RAAs already live and further progressed than this one. Project Managers across London have also worked together to ensure as much consistency pan London as is possible whilst retaining an awareness and consideration of the specific demographics of their region.

The North London RAA will be known as Adopt London North and will build upon the previous positive practice established within the North London Consortium which has acquired over the years a good reputation for delivering effective services.

There are the equivalent of circa 40 full time posts affected within these proposals.
Assumptions made:
All agencies have the resources available to actively lead on and participate in agreed work streams and achieve the deliverables within agreed timescales set out in the plan

Staff affected will retain their existing Terms and Conditions (Ts & Cs), including pension rights, holiday entitlements and sick pay policies. Staff will be transferred to the host authority under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE)

Any applicable redundancy costs will be underwritten by the currently employing LAs as this will not be funded by the DfE or the host;

Premises – ALN will be delivered from one office base. Staff have expressed that this is their preferred option and will allow for closer working relationships, the building of an appropriate culture and effective management oversight. Workers will retain the ability to hot desk in offices in other Boroughs in order to retain and build upon relationships with Childrens social workers and other key stakeholders. Potential buildings have been identified and further work is now being undertaken to establish that which best meets the needs of the service.

1.1 Finance Summary

A thorough forensic analysis of each Boroughs financial spend on adoption services has been undertaken, with resulting challenges and peer-to-peer reviews. Boroughs have not been asked to contribute sums over and above their confirmed relevant spend on adoption.

Total confirmed contributions will sufficiently fund the proposed new service, including staff and non-pay (excluding items detailed in the Partnership Agreement) and overheads attributed to the hosting of the agency.

The Principles

The principles which this business case has followed are:
- Local authorities involved in Adopt London and each of the four RAAs are committed to collaborating adoption arrangements so that the best interests of children and their adoptive families are secured and kept at the forefront of decision making.

- Adopt London will provide an overarching framework for enabling effective coordination, coherence and partnership working across London.

- Adopt London authorities, and the four RAAs will make sure that there is consistency of approach in relation to key strategic and operational decisions, e.g. about whether staff are transferred under TUPE arrangements or seconded. Project teams in the four RAAs and RAA governance arrangements should reflect the ambition to promote such consistency of approach.

- The remit of some RAAs (provisionally) should include SGOs but further work on the implications for this will need to be undertaken. North London at this time is not seeking to include SGO work in the Regional Agency.

- North London RAA is committed to working effectively together with VAAs, making sure that their unique and important contribution is maximised and that VAAs are involved in the development of the RAAs and Adopt London.

- The focus of work over the next 12 months will be on establishing the four RAAs; in phase two, developmental work on the Adopt London hub will progress. In the interim, Adopt London Executive Board will operate a virtual Pan London Hub, with a view to exploring options for joint commissioning across London, maintaining common design principles for the RAA's and exploring opportunities for further development of the Pan London Hub in phase 2.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document sets out the case for creating a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) to be named *"Adopt London North"* through combining the adoption services for the local authority areas Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey and Islington. It describes how establishing a single agency will allow the six authorities to provide a more cohesive, efficient and effective use of resources and promote the development of practice to the benefit of children, adopters and others who gain from adoption services. It proposes that London Borough of Islington will host the new adoption agency, the cost of implementation to be funded by the Department for Education. This document also sets out how Adopt London North will work with other RAAs pan London to develop a Regional Hub for the provision of some services yet to be determined.

2.2 SCOPE AND VISION OF THE NEW RAA

The proposed Regional Adoption Agency would encompass all six Local Authority areas in North London. It is estimated that approximately 60 children annually will be placed by the RAA (some in sibling groups) and 50 adopter households recruited. This is based on current activity and demand which could potentially increase over time.

The RAA will operate in partnership with three other RAAs and a developing Hub in London.

Additional adoption functions will be provided by the Hub as regionalisation plans develop, where they can further improve the outcomes for children and achieve better value.

The vision of the RAA is to achieve excellent outcomes for children and adults affected by adoption through:

Working closely with the Local Authorities and partners to ensure that children's best interests are at the heart of placement decisions which will fully meet their needs;

Targeting recruitment and establishing a wider and more diverse pool of prospective adopters;

Embedding early permanence principles and matching so that children are placed without delay in secure, loving families;

Providing creative and outstanding adoption support services;

Investing in the workforce to ensure they have the right skills and capacity to deliver excellent services;

Continually seeking to apply best practice and innovation to our ways of working;

Actively listening to and learning from children, adults and staff to develop and improve the services provided.

2.3 DELIVERY MODEL OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDATION

Whilst a number of options were considered early on including the creation of a new single entity to deliver Adoption services across North London, the preferred option is that which entails the combination of the 6 London Boroughs in the North with one Borough becoming the Host authority.

Creation of new single entities is time consuming and costly and not a preferred option elsewhere with RAAs already live.

All options considered assumed governance of the RAA through a board comprising of senior representatives from all LA's with representation from VAA's, adopters and adoptees.

The RAA will continue to be accountable to Corporate Parenting Boards and other Local Authority bodies.

The RAA will aim to provide a high quality service to our adopted children with improved outcomes; taking the best models of delivery from each of the six services. The RAA will also aim to provide savings through economies of scale. Financial modelling and deployment of resources poses a significant challenge and the detail of the proposed modelling will be subject of further approval.

The delivery model for the RAA will need to address the DfE minimum expectations of a Regional Adoption Agency as outlined below –

RAA Operating model

·   ***Single line of accountability*** *– The new body must be in a position to act as a single entity on behalf of the individual authorities.*

·   ***Core functions are transferred to the RAA*** *– As set out in the policy paper 'Regionalising Adoption', we want RAAs to be responsible for recruitment, matching and support.*

·   ***Pan regional approach*** *– The new body should have a regional reach as far as its key functions are concerned, particularly on family finding and matching.*

·   ***Recruitment, support and matching*** *– It is essential that RAAs drive forward the recruitment of new adopters utilising a wider geographical base audience to increase the scope for more matching and ultimately increasing placement opportunities. We believe this will be particularly helpful in assessing adopters for harder to place children.*

·   *Each RAA to appoint a **Head of Service** with line management responsibility for staff in the RAA.*

· **Pooled funding** – *We want LAs to pool their adoption funding into one RAA funding pot that is managed by the RAA.*

· **Partnership with the voluntary sector** – *VAAs have an important role to play in the provision of adoption services. We want RAAs to involve them in the design and implementation of RAAs and to consider their role in the delivery of services.*

The preferred option for North London addresses these requirements and proposes to work collaboratively with 3 other RAAs across London namely –

Adopt London West – Ealing

Adopt London South – Southwark

Adopt London East – Havering

2.4 OVERVIEW OF THE OPERATING MODEL

From a local perspective, the six agencies have a long history of working together and North London has a clear identity. The North London Consortium has focussed on developing joint services for Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship. Robust working relationships are already established. Adoption services have worked cooperatively in sharing practice and training opportunities. This has enabled constructive working together in developing the target operating model.

Adopt London North will therefore bring together best practice from these LAs while providing the opportunity to create clear practice improvements and enable a viable future market for recruitment. Approximately 40 LA staff, many of whom work part time, are expected to become part of the new organisation to deliver the following main services across North London:

- Recruitment and Assessment – to provide the prospective adopters;

- Permanence Planning – ensuring that children identified as requiring adoption achieve a placement;

- Matching and Placement – to match prospective adopters with children in need of adoption;

- Adoption Support – to help all affected by adoption;

More detail on the Operating Model is found in Section 3 below.

2.5 STRATEGIC BENEFITS

The key aim in combining services to create a single Regional Adoption Agency is to achieve better outcomes for all children and young people with adoption plans in the region. Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies will come together and combine adoption services into a new regional agency

to benefit children and their adoptive families, with larger operating areas giving a wider pool of adopters and children, more effective matching and better support services.

The Government set out the challenges they are seeking to address nationally through the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies in the paper 'Regionalising Adoption', published in June 2015.
In summary, these are:

Inefficiencies
A highly-fragmented system with around 180 agencies recruiting and matching adopters for only 5,000 children per year (this number has subsequently decreased to 4,350 in 2017). The majority of agencies are operating on a small scale with over half recruiting fewer than 20 adopters in the first three quarters of 2014/15 at the time of the publication of the paper. Subsequently in 2017/18 the 6 boroughs in North London approved 27 adopter households in total for 63 children adopted. This is not an effective and efficient scale to be operating at and is likely to mean that costs are higher because management overheads and fixed costs are shared over a smaller base. Having a system that is fragmented in this way reduces the scope for broader, strategic planning, as well as specialisation, innovation and investment. Large numbers of small agencies render the system unable to make the best use of the national supply of potential adopters, more vulnerable to peaks and troughs in the flow of children, and less cost effective.

Matching
The system needs to match children with families far more quickly. Nationally, the data also shows that, as at 31st March 2017, there were 2,470 children with a placement order waiting to be matched. In North London at the end of March 2018 there were 54 children with a placement order not matched to adopters. The average timescale for children between becoming looked after and being placed with an adoptive family nationally in 2017 was 457 days. The average in North London was 564 days. The costs of delay, both to children and to the system, are high. It is vital that children are given the best and earliest possible chance of finding a family, irrespective of authority boundaries and lack of trust of other agencies' adopters. It is unacceptable that children are left waiting in the system when families can be found. Successful matching relies on being able to access a wide range of potential adopters from the beginning and operating at a greater scale would allow social workers to do this, thus reducing delay in the system. It could also reduce the number of children who have their adoption decisions reversed. Furthermore, the opportunity for practice innovation created by moving to a new delivery model also has real potential to improve matching.

Recruitment
Whilst there has been growth in adopter recruitment there are too few adopters willing and able to adopt 'priority' children. Recruitment from a wider geographical base as part of a regional recruitment strategy will go some way to addressing this. Incentives also need to be better aligned so that agencies are encouraged to recruit the right kind of adopters given the characteristics of the children waiting. Recruitment from a wider geographical base than an individual local authority, that takes account of the needs of children across a number of those local authorities in a regional recruitment strategy and uses specialist techniques for recruiting adopters for hard to place children, would potentially lead to fewer children waiting.

Adoption Support
Currently adoption support services are provided by a mix of local authority provision, the NHS and independent providers (voluntary adoption agencies, adoption support agencies and small independent providers). There is a risk that the public and independent sectors are unlikely to be able to grow sufficiently to meet increased demand for adoption support. There are regional gaps in the types of services on offer and little evidence of spare capacity. The sector is currently dominated by spot purchasing and sole providers. This is not an efficient way to deliver these services. For providers to expand and therefore operate at a more efficient scale, services need to be commissioned on bigger and

longer term contracts. RAAs should enable this to be done. It is envisaged that the Hub will act as a conduit to the wider voluntary sector, providing economies of scale and opportunities for innovation

The Local Perspective
The statutory functions required of local authorities in respect of adoption are provided by each of the six local authorities within their own geographic areas. There is already a great deal of joint working between the 6 adoption agencies as part of the North London Consortium to provide parts of the current service.

Joining the six local authority services together within Adopt London North will enable efficiencies to be achieved and improvements to services for all those affected by adoption.

In terms of recruiting adoptive parents all the agencies are currently competing with each other. There is a duplication of effort and associated costs with the risk that people wanting to be considered as adoptive parents are confused about where and how to proceed with their enquiry. Adopt London North will have a single point of contact for prospective adopters, reducing the current fragmentation of services. Similarly, a single point of entry to the adoption service locally will improve access to adoption support services for adoptive families, and also for adopted adults and birth family members, who have a statutory entitlement to receive a service. Recruitment will be targeted for those children waiting in North London in order to ensure the service is delivering for those Boroughs contributing financially.

Combining the services should ensure that management overheads and fixed costs will be reduced over time. The new service will allow for the more efficient use of staff time, for example prospective adoptive parents are provided with training as part of the assessment process.   Adopt London North will deliver training courses across the whole area resulting in less duplication and more timely access to the training courses for prospective adopters. There will also be the opportunity for trialling new approaches, including the use of experienced adoptive parents as trainers/mentors.

There are currently six Adoption Panels operating across the six Local Authorities. ALN will have one Adoption Panel which will consider applications from prospective adopters and placements of children with approved adopters. Agency Decisions in relation to prospective adopter approvals will be made by the Agency Decision Maker for the RAA. It will no longer be necessary for the six Local Authorities to retain their individual Adoption Panels, but each will continue to have a designated Agency Decision Maker for considering and agreeing the plan that a child should be placed for adoption and agreeing the match to appropriate adopters. Central list for Adoption panel will continue to encourage and retain the oversight, contributions and expertise provided by elected members across the North London region.

The new combined service provides the opportunity for the provision of a service of excellence for adoption support. This will be a multi-disciplinary service in partnership with colleagues from health and education and providing comprehensive and high level targeted support for adopted children, adoptive parents, adopted adults and birth family members

ALN will aim to reduce the proportion of children whose plans are changed from adoption because an adoption placement cannot be found and the number of adoption placement disruptions. The RAA will bring the existing local expertise among managers and social workers together in respect of what makes a good match, and will be looking at a high proportion of children being referred to the RAA prior to the point of Placement Order. Early identification of children with likely adoption plans by the Permanence Coordinators, and the plans for the RAA worker to liaise with the child's social worker during the court proceedings will enable fuller and more accurate assessments of an individual child's needs to inform matching, and prepare the child. Being more strategic in terms of recruitment will also widen choice of potential adoptive families for children, which again should lead to better and more sustainable matching.

Benefits will be delivered through adopting the "best practice" from the six contributing organisations. This will be of particular value in delivering benefits from the areas of Early Permanence (concurrency and fostering to adopt), improved adoption support, making optimal use of colleagues in health and education as well as those in ALN registered as social workers and those without social work qualifications but with other relevant knowledge, skills and experience.

2.6 STRATEGIC RISKS

There is a risk to all Local Authorities who fail to join a regional agency. This would include central government directing how its services would be delivered.

Major reorganisation of adoption services in the region may have an impact on service delivery to children and adoptive families in the short term. To mitigate these risks, performance measures aligned with the revised operating model and regular monitoring arrangements will be established between the host and non-host authorities.

Separation of functions could cause delay through ineffective communication. The service delivery model promotes co-location and local delivery in all six Local Authority areas. Effective information sharing agreements and close working relationships between children's and adoption social workers will mitigate against this risk

Any future difference in opinion across the LAs as to the role and scope of ALN and future governance arrangements could delay implementation.

The organisational staffing levels proposed in this business case have been based on actual demand experienced over the past three years, however because of the current difficulties in predicting the levels of activity (e.g., numbers of children with adoption plans) there is a risk that suggested staffing levels might not be consistent with demand.

There is risk, even regionally, of not being able to recruit adopters able to meet the needs of the children waiting, leading to more interagency placements and financial viability issues. More coordinated and targeted recruitment activity is expected to address this, scope for enhanced recruitment and assessment has been built into the delivery model.

Major change will see a potentially worrying time for staff and proposed changes to ways of working could lead to a risk that ALN may find it challenging to retain its existing experienced and qualified adoption team workforce. The engagement of staff directly involved in the delivery of adoption services, and the involvement of current service users will be essential mitigation alongside keeping colleagues in partner organisations informed. The project team have been engaging with staff to ensure they are informed and enthused about the opportunities in a joint agency.

2.7 REALISING THE BENEFITS OF THE RAA

The diagram in Appendix 1 shows how key elements of the planned project work and implementation combine to achieve our desired outcomes and how these align to meet central Governments objectives set out in their paper 'Adoption: A Vision for Change.'

Benefits expected to be realized through the project include:

- Improved timescales for adopter assessments

- Higher conversion rate from enquiry to approval of prospective adopters

- Early identification of children with potential adoption plans and more children placed on an Early Permanence (Fostering to Adopt or concurrency) basis

- Reduction in the number of children for whom the permanence plan has changed away from adoption

- Increase in the percentage of children adopted for care

- More timely matching of approved adopters

- Improved timescales for placing children with their adoptive families

- Fewer prospective adopter approvals rescinded as approved adopters are not matched with a child

- Fewer adoption placement disruptions pre and post adoption order

- Improved performance measurement and management across the service

2.8 STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

Consultation with stakeholders is an integral part of the Regional Adoption Agency project.
Task and Finish groups with practitioners across North London has served as a vehicle to acquire the views and experience of staff and the adopters they work with.

Specific Listening and Sharing events have also been instrumental in ensuring the views of staff are being sought to inform the development of the service delivery model.

Views ascertained in the Adopter Voice North London consultation report (early 2018) have been taken into account when developing the service specification and have informed agenda items at task and finish groups. It is also intended that Adopters will be invited to future Listening and Sharing events.

3. RAA OPERATING MODEL

3.1 PROCESS

The target operating model for the new RAA considers its role in the delivery of the following main services across North London:

- Recruitment and Assessment – to provide the prospective adopters;

- Permanence Planning – Identifying children who need adopting;
- Matching and Placement – to match prospective adopters with children in need of adoption;
- Pre and Post Placement Support – to help all affected by adoption

3.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The table below sets out how the RAA and LAs will work together, summarising roles and responsibilities for each:

Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT		
Marketing and Recruitment Strategy	✓	
Adopter Recruitment and Enquiries	✓	
Assessment of Prospective Adopters – all Stage One and Stage Two functions	✓	
Completion of Prospective Adopter Report	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for approval of adopters	✓	
Post approval training	✓	
Matching	✓	
Post Placement training for Prospective Adopters	✓	
PERMANANCE PLANNING		
Early identification of a child possibly requiring adoption		✓
Tracking and monitoring the child possibly requiring adoption	✓	✓
Support and advice to child care social worker on the adoption process	✓	✓
Sibling or other specialist assessments if commissioned by LA	✓	✓
Direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	✓
Preparation of the Child Permanence Report		✓
Agency Decision Maker for "Should be placed for Adoption" decisions		✓
Agency Decision Maker for Foster to adopt placements under reg 25A Care Planning Regulations (specific child)		✓
Case management prior to the point agreed by the LA ADM		✓
Case management from point agreed by the LA ADM		✓

Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
MATCHING AND PLACEMENT		
Family finding	✓	
Looked After Child reviews	✓	✓
Shortlist and visit potential families	✓	✓
Organising child appreciation day	✓	
Ongoing direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	✓
Adoption Panel administration and management	✓	
Agency adviser role	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for Matching prospective adopters and child		✓
Placement Planning meeting administration and management of introductions	✓	
Support to family post placement and planning and delivery of adoption support	✓	
Ongoing life story work and preparation of Life story book	✓	✓
Independent Review Officer monitoring of quality of child's care and care plan		✓
Support prospective adopters in preparation and submission of application for Adoption Order – including attending at court	✓	
Preparation of later life letter		✓
ADOPTION SUPPORT		
Assessment for adoption support	✓	
Developing and delivering adoption support plans	✓	✓
Agree and administer financial support to adoptive families pre and post Adoption Order		✓
Adoption support delivery including: • Support groups • Social events • Post adoption/special guardianship training • Independent Birth Relative services • Support with ongoing birth relative contact • Adoption counselling and training	✓	
Financial support to adopters including adoption allowances		✓
Funding applications to the Adoption Support Fund	✓	
NON-AGENCY ADOPTIONS		
Step parent/partner adoption assessments	✓	

Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
Inter-country adoption assessments and post approval and post order support	✓	

For more detail please see the full service schedule APPENDIX 2.

As part of implementation project managers across London are exploring potential areas for the VAA to partner with the 4 London RAAs to support service delivery including consideration of the following areas:

✓ Targeted recruitment activity focusing on Early Permanence and targeted assessments for priority children
✓ Specialist adoption support training
✓ Specialist practical or therapeutic support services for children and families post placement and post order
✓ Adoption counselling and services to adopted adults
✓ Continued provision of VAA families

Practice improvements will be delivered through the implementation of new ways of working. ALNRAA will work jointly with the other RAA's and the Hub (once developed) in London to seek to explore further sources of funding to work jointly with the VAA and ASA sector, for example, in the areas of Early Permanence and adoption support to design and deliver practice improvements.

3.3 OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED ORGANISATION FOR THE RAA

Approximately 40 FTE Adoption staff would become part of Adopt London North to deliver Adoption services across North London.: The proposed organisation chart for ALNRAA is detailed in Appendix 3.

What Research and Best Practice Tells us
Research identifies several factors which contribute to timely, successful family finding and matching outcomes for children with a plan of adoption.

The University of Bristol (June 2010) and Oxford University (Feb 2015) identified within research briefs, key factors seen to enhance the adoption journey for both children and their prospective adopters.

Quality of information – all information at all parts of the process must be of high quality, factual and comprehensive. Poor quality information is identified as a direct correlation to disruption.

Local authorities with access to a **wider pool of prospective adopters** experienced less delay in their family finding and matching processes.

Family finding done at the point of **ADM decision** (rather than at the granting of the placement order) resulted in children experiencing less delay.

Delay was reduced when **case responsibility for children transferred to adoption service** at point of placement order.

Delay was also reduced when **early family finding strategies** were agreed for individual children deemed to have complex needs.

Tracking of children throughout their journey is critical and adoption workers involved in this can drive and empower the process.

Timely <u>joint</u> decision making re whether to pursue ethnic matches or sibling separation also reduced delay for children.

Post placement support (in a variety of formats) is particularly valued by adopters, contributes to positive transitions and reduces the risk of disruptions.

Proposals contained within this report have taken account of these key factors alongside the need for quality and efficiency.

Agency Roles
The new roles created in the establishment of the new organisation are:

- 1 FTE Head of Service (also ADM)
- 1 FTE Service Manager

The **Head of Service** is expected to provide leadership and vision for the continuous development of the ALNRAA, leading the strategic planning, development and management of all aspects of the Agency to ensure the delivery of high quality, effective and legally compliant Adoption services. They will manage the operational relationship with Local Authorities through interaction at Senior Management level. An ability to work in a transformation role will be essential as part of this role to drive the practice improvement and cultural change required to deliver these.

The **Service Manager** will be responsible for the operational management of the social work teams and the monitoring and driving of performance. They will deputise for the Head of Service when necessary.

The **Agency Advisers** (1.5FTE) will be centrally located and will work closely with child care social workers throughout the permanence and adoption process. They will provide quality assurance and advice to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) and act as Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel.

The **Marketing and Recruitment Officer** will play a key role in developing and delivering the Marketing and Recruitment strategy ensuring that recruitment is targeted for children who are waiting.

Other roles within the RAA related to team management, social workers, family support workers and business support staff will be included in the organisation. In designing the organisational structure, we have designed and shaped the RAA using the combined experience of managing adoption services across the local authority and voluntary sector. The operational staff numbers have been determined to meet the anticipated demands of the service and ensure the ability to deliver and sustain practice improvement to the benefit of children, adopters and others who benefit from adoption services.

Detailed work on mapping existing staff (in scope of TUPE) to the teams in the new staffing structure will form part of the HR Work Stream activities during implementation.

4. HR IMPLICATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

It is proposed that some staff for whom the provision of TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings- Protection of Employment) applies, will transfer to London Borough of Islington from the boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Hackney, Haringey and Enfield. Formal consultation will form part of the HR Work Stream and will commence following sign off of the business case. It is not anticipated that there will be any need for staff redundancies as a result of Regionalisation. For those staff currently working in Adoption services who fall out of scope of TUPE, there will be a preference exercise completed as phase 2 of the HR process. Consultation with Unions is being undertaken.

Full detail of the process and timeline is listed below:

The project plan for implementation in order to complete the TUPE transfer will be subject to the following:

- Cabinet sign off approval in mid-March 2019
- Once cabinet approval is secured the formal consultation with staff affected will commence in March/April 2019
- Recruitment to the post of Head of Service will be finalised.
- The staffing structure for the new service will be finalised subject to consultation with affected staff and trade unions to be effective from July 2019
- Staff will transfer to London Borough of Islington on their existing terms and conditions unless through consultation it is agreed they will transfer on London Borough of Islington terms and conditions
- Any remaining vacant posts within the new structure will be subject to recruitment and selection procedures
- HR processes will be put in place to formalise the process and populate the staffing structure with information provided by the boroughs concerned through Employee Liability Information process
- HR/Payroll administration process to be undertaken
- Training and support for news ways of working in a single agency
- Establishing plans for on-going professional development
- Identification of work location for all staff

5. FINANCE

Proposed Financial Contributions

- The table below shows the agreed financial contributions per Borough, arrived at through a series of robust challenge and confirmation meetings.

Borough	2018/19 prices			2019/20 Prices		
	Total pay and non-pay contribution	NLAC £	Total £	2019/20 Inflation uplift (pay) £	2019/20 Total £	Pro-rata from go-live (9/12ths) £
Islington	421,805	29,366	451,170	7,306	**458,476**	343,857
Hackney	391,582	29,366	420,947	6,555	**427,502**	320,626
Haringey	415,294	29,366	444,659	7,595	**452,254**	339,190
Enfield	226,963	29,366	256,329	3,834	**260,163**	195,122
Camden	285,646	29,366	315,012	5,415	**320,426**	240,320
Barnet	332,361	29,366	361,726	5,438	**367,164**	275,373
	2,073,650	**176,193**	**2,249,843**	**36,143**	**2,285,985**	**1,714,489**

- Pay Award for 2019/20 has been estimated at 2% of each boroughs pay budget contribution.
- Full year 2019/20 contribution, including pay uplift, is **£2,285,985.**
- Pro-rata from 'go-live' (July 2019) **£1,714,489**
- The table includes agreed 're-routing' of contributions relating to the North London Adoption Consortium (at an agreed percentage of current contribution levels)
- Table does not include the future (post July 19) costs of Inter-Agency placements, funding implications currently being confirmed at Adopt London North Board.
- Future year funding contributions, pending annual Board review, re Partnership Agreement.
- A detailed analysis of the Financial Protocol with regards to the relationship between the Partners can be viewed on schedule 5 of the Partnership Agreement.

Financial Risks

- The primary risk is that the agency is underfunded and therefore unable to deliver adequately for the children of North London. This will also impact on timescales for children waiting and influence Ofsted judgements about the service provided to Children in Care.
- Failure to provide high quality adoption support services may result in placement disruptions meaning children will return to care. The detrimental impact of this in respect of the child's wellbeing (and adopter) cannot be underestimated.

- It is well evidenced that satisfied adopters are a critical factor in recruiting new applicants. Adopters who are dissatisfied with their experience during any part of their journey may negatively influence recruitment success.
- There is a further risk to the host authority around the hosting overhead costs. The figure of 7.5% has been included in the model, but this is lower than the figures used in the other 3 Regions across London. It is also unclear at present, as to accommodation arrangements, which may lead to additional costs.
- Financial risks can be part-mitigated by an inclusionary note in the Partnership Agreement explaining the treatment of any over (and under) spends. This reduces the risk to the host but would not affect the overall financial pressure.
- There is a risk that spend against non-pay structure costs may exceed current budget allocations, economies of scale may take longer to achieve.'

6. PERFORMANCE

Nationally 3,820 children were adopted in 2017/18. This is a decrease of 13% on the previous year and down from a peak of 5,360 in 2015.

The Children Looked After Population continues to rise to 75,420 on the 31st March 2018. This is a rise of 4% from the previous year.

By comparison in North London 63 children were adopted in 2017/18 and 70 the previous year (a decrease of 10%).

Historical activity for the region is listed in the table below

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
No. of approvals North London	92	41	31	27
No. of adoptions North London	90	82	70	63

Numbers of children requiring adoption in North London have continued to reduce over the past three years, with predictions for this coming year being similar to the previous one. The region however has failed to recruit sufficient numbers of adopters to meet local need.

At the end of Q2 2018/19, returns from all 6 Boroughs suggested that there were 27 adopter households waiting for children and a further 10 households in the process of approval. This compares with 43 children with a court order stating that they require adoption and a further 23 awaiting a court order.

There is good evidence to suggest that those RAAs which have gone live earlier are now starting to reap the benefits of targeted recruitment work. For example One Adoption West Yorkshire increased numbers of approved adopters by 20% in Quarter 1 of this year compared to the same quarter the previous year. Timescales for children have also improved with the average number of days from a child becoming

looked after to being placed with adopters reducing from 439 days to 315 days. Key findings from the research report Evaluation of Regional Adoption Agencies published by the DfE in November 2018 are attached as appendix 5.

It is anticipated that a Performance Framework already in use within live RAAs will be utilised to ensure accurate performance reporting and sufficiency predictions. A quarterly performance report will be provided to the Governance Board for ALN RAA.

7. PROPERTY AND IT IMPLICATIONS

Work is currently underway to identify an appropriate building in Islington to accommodate the staff of the Regional Adoption Agency. Staff will retain the ability to hot desk in Boroughs to facilitate the sustainment and development of positive working relationships with Childrens social workers and local accessibility to adopters.

IT systems are currently being explored that will deliver an effective efficient service to the RAA and its stakeholders. Both operational and technical staff are involved in the identification of this product.

8. DATA AND INFORMATION

Data and Information will be required for the day to day operation and management of the RAA. Management Information will be generated automatically from core systems where possible. Information is required to be presented to the RAA Management team, Ofsted, Local Authorities including senior management teams and elected members, the Adoption Leadership Board, the Department for Education and other partners.
The way in which data will be shared and exchanged is detailed in an information sharing agreement.

9. PROPOSED GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

A partnership agreement setting out the agreement of the 6 Boroughs to the establishment of the Adopt London North Regional Adoption Agency is currently drafted and will be signed off by legal leads and RAA Board members in each Borough.
The agreement contains the aims of the RAA, the operational basis and the functions which are delegated to the Host.
The agreement also details the intended service delivery model, requirements for an annual plan, financial contributions, over and underspend arrangements and the premises to be provided for the purposes of the RAA. An information sharing agreement will also be incorporated into this document.
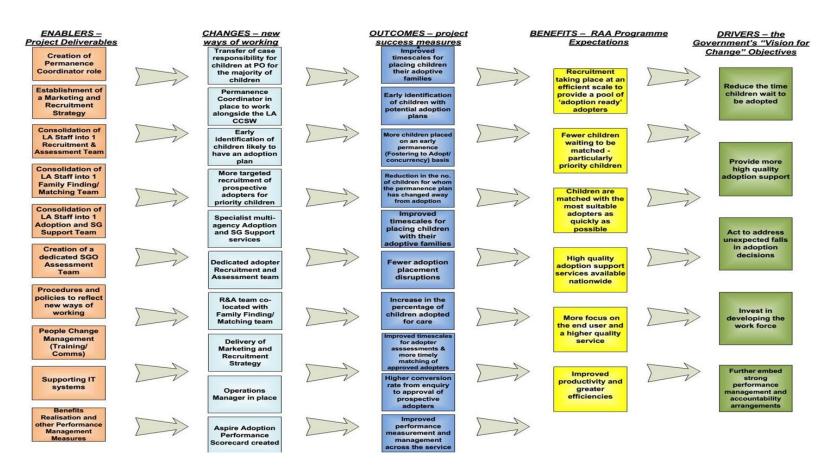Appendix 4 details the proposed governance structure of the RAA.

10. IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

The business case is scheduled for sign off at cabinets in February/March 2019. Once sign off in all Boroughs is obtained, a TUPE process for eligible staff can commence followed by a preference exercise

for staff falling out of scope of TUPE. There is an anticipated Go Live date for the new service of July 2019.

BENEFITS DIAGRAM   **APPENDIX 1**

ENABLERS – Project Deliverables	CHANGES – new ways of working	OUTCOMES – project success measures	BENEFITS – RAA Programme Expectations	DRIVERS – the Government's "Vision for Change" Objectives
Creation of Permanence Coordinator role	Transfer of case responsibility for children at PO for the majority of children	Improved timescales for placing children their adoptive families	Recruitment taking place at an efficient scale to provide a pool of 'adoption ready' adopters	Reduce the time children wait to be adopted
Establishment of a Marketing and Recruitment Strategy	Permanence Coordinator in place to work alongside the LA CCSW	Early identification of children with potential adoption plans	Fewer children waiting to be matched - particularly priority children	Provide more high quality adoption support
Consolidation of LA Staff into 1 Recruitment & Assessment Team	Early identification of children likely to have an adoption plan	More children placed on an early permanence (Fostering to Adopt/ concurrency) basis	Children are matched with the most suitable adopters as quickly as possible	
Consolidation of LA Staff into 1 Family Finding/ Matching Team	More targeted recruitment of prospective adopters for priority children	Reduction in the no. of children for whom the permanence plan has changed away from adoption		Act to address unexpected falls in adoption decisions
Consolidation of LA Staff into 1 Adoption and SG Support Team	Specialist multi-agency Adoption and SG Support services	Improved timescales for placing children with their adoptive families	High quality adoption support services available nationwide	
Creation of a dedicated SGO Assessment Team	Dedicated adopter Recruitment and Assessment team	Fewer adoption placement disruptions		Invest in developing the work force
Procedures and policies to reflect new ways of working	R&A team co-located with Family Finding/ Matching team	Increase in the percentage of children adopted for care	More focus on the end user and a higher quality service	
People Change Management (Training/ Comms)	Delivery of Marketing and Recruitment Strategy	Improved timescales for adopter assssessments & more timely matching of approved adopters		Further embed strong performance management and accountability arrangements
Supporting IT systems	Operations Manager in place	Higher conversion rate from enquiry to approval of prospective adopters	Improved productivity and greater efficiencies	
Benefits Realisation and other Performance Management Measures	Aspire Adoption Performance Scorecard created	Improved performance measurement and management across the service		

The table below sets out the RAA and LAs will work together, summarising roles and responsibilities for each:

Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT		
Marketing and Recruitment Strategy	✓	
Adopter Recruitment and Enquiries	✓	
Assessment of Prospective Adopters – all Stage One and Stage Two functions	✓	
Completion of Prospective Adopter Report	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for approval of adopters	✓	
Post approval training	✓	
Matching	✓	
Post Placement training for Prospective Adopters	✓	
PERMANANCE PLANNING		
Early identification of a child possibly requiring adoption		✓
Tracking and monitoring the child possibly requiring adoption	✓	✓
Support and advice to child care social worker on the adoption process	✓	✓
Sibling or other specialist assessments if commissioned by LA	✓	✓
Direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	✓
Preparation of the Child Permanence Report		✓
Agency Decision Maker for "Should be placed for Adoption" decisions		✓
Agency Decision Maker for Foster to adopt placements under reg 25A Care Planning Regulations (specific child)		✓
Case management prior to the point agreed by the LA ADM		✓
Case management from point agreed by the LA ADM		✓
MATCHING AND PLACEMENT		
Family finding	✓	
Looked After Child reviews	✓	✓
Shortlist and visit potential families	✓	✓
Organising child appreciation day	✓	
Ongoing direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	✓

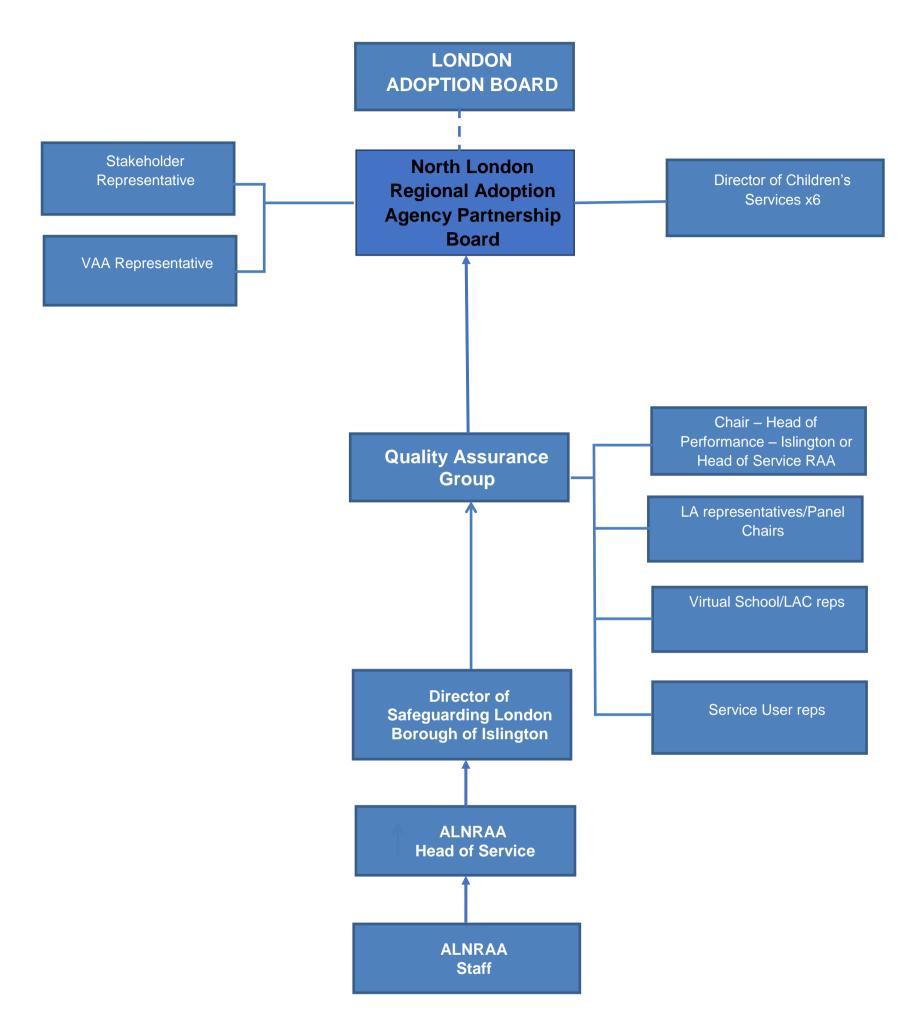| Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
Adoption Panel administration and management	✓	
Agency adviser role	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for Matching prospective adopters and child		✓
Placement Planning meeting administration and management of introductions	✓	
Support to family post placement and planning and delivery of adoption support	✓	
Ongoing life story work and preparation of Life story book	✓	✓
Independent Review Officer monitoring of quality of child's care and care plan		✓
Support prospective adopters in preparation and submission of application for Adoption Order – including attending at court	✓	
Preparation of later life letter		✓
ADOPTION SUPPORT		
Assessment for adoption support	✓	
Developing and delivering adoption support plans	✓	✓
Agree and administer financial support to adoptive families pre and post Adoption Order		✓
Adoption support delivery including: • Support groups • Social events • Post adoption/special guardianship training • Independent Birth Relative services • Support with ongoing birth relative contact • Adoption counselling and training	✓	
Financial support to adopters including adoption allowances		✓
Funding applications to the Adoption Support Fund	✓	
NON-AGENCY ADOPTIONS		
Step parent/partner adoption assessments	✓	
Inter-country adoption assessments and post approval and post order support	✓	

Proposed staffing structure Adopt London North Regional Adoption Agency (subject to change)

Deleted confidential staffing structure.

DRAFT

LONDON ADOPTION BOARD

Stakeholder Representative

VAA Representative

North London Regional Adoption Agency Partnership Board

Director of Children's Services x6

Quality Assurance Group

Chair – Head of Performance – Islington or Head of Service RAA

LA representatives/Panel Chairs

Virtual School/LAC reps

Service User reps

Director of Safeguarding London Borough of Islington

ALNRAA Head of Service

ALNRAA Staff

Evaluation of Regional Adoption Agencies (Department for Education November 2018)

Key findings

Models

LAs were free to decide the size and makeup of the RAAs and choose from one of four broad RAA models[1]:

• Single LA hosting on behalf of the other LAs
• Joint venture between the LAs and VAAs creating a new VAA
• Joint venture between the LAs and VAAs under a local authority trading company (LATC)
• Outsourcing service delivery to an existing VAA

In spring 2018 a small number of RAAs were in the initial stages of development, the RAA models were fluid and RAA projects were subject to change post-launch. However, their apparent differences meant we could place each RAA (involving between three and ten LAs) on a spectrum based on the extent to which services and responsibilities were centralised. At the far end of the spectrum sit the 'LA hosted – centralised' RAAs (3); followed by those setting up joint ventures / local authority trading companies (LATCs (2)); then 'LA hosted – hub and spoke' models (by far the most common approach (14 RAAs)); and at the other end of the spectrum sit decentralised RAAs (2).

The overriding factor that influenced LAs and VAAs choosing to work together was historic relationships. Geography also played a role as did, in a small number of cases performance of each adoption service. One of the main factors that influenced the decision over which model to adopt was the degree to which the LAs were willing to each take on, or give away, control and risk. To a large degree, LAs reported choosing to adopt a model whereby most adoption services remained within LAs because they took their statutory duties in relation to adoption very seriously, and were uncomfortable with responsibility for this moving outside of a LA.

Progress to date

There was a mixed picture of whether RAAs and RAA projects were on track with agreed plans. At the time of the fieldwork, some of the live RAAs had met their target launch date or agreed to take a phased approach to 'go live'. The

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[1] Department for Education (June 2015) Regionalising Adoption.

interviews show that in these areas they were able to build on the strength of previous relationships from an established position of trust, which meant that individuals and organisations felt better prepared and more willing to help each other to do the best for children as an RAA. This made for speedier and smoother negotiations. The interviews found that 'go live' was generally somewhere between three to six months behind planned launch dates because there were challenges in agreeing key aspects of RAA project models, such as hosting responsibilities. Further delays happened when the challenges centred on even bigger decisions like what form the RAA project should take.

Go-live

Projects often talked about 'go live' in relation to broad changes they were making that involved people, systems and resources and the new 'front door'. The interviews show that RAAs viewed key markers of 'go live' as an established public presence and profile, and a single point of entry often supported by centralised marketing (e.g. branding, strapline), centralised recruitment roles and a functioning RAA website. To 'go live' it was also necessary to have overarching structures and systems in place for governance, legal, Human Resources (HR) and Information Communication Technology (ICT), as well as model-specific aspects such as joint panels and training plans.

The interviews demonstrate the importance of "breathing space and adjustment time". A number of the early implementers said it took around six months for the new service to "bed in".

Challenges and success in launching the RAAs

At the time the research was undertaken, with more than half of RAA projects yet to go live, there was a tendency for interviewees to focus on the challenges associated with establishing live RAAs when asked about what was working well and less well so far. An overarching challenge raised was balancing the structural change the move to RAAs required with the focus on practice to improve the quality of adoption services. In the planning, 'go live' and wider implementation of the RAA, this tension was ongoing as were decisions around what would be in and out of RAAs, for example whether to include SGOs.

RAAs were experiencing ongoing challenges around securing buy in and consensus from participating LAs (including elected members, senior staff and practitioners); particularly where services previously performed well because many LAs involved could not always see the benefits the RAA model would bring. They wondered what they stood to gain in terms of performance, sharing good practice or financial efficiencies. Staffing RAAs proved difficult at times,

for example when recruiting to the Head of Service role. Staff were not always willing or able to travel the distance required to RAA hubs. There were reports of staff anxieties about losing or changing the identity of their local adoption service, and what the new service and culture would look like, and there was an expectation that this would take 12 to 18 months to establish.

Interviewees also reported challenges around agreeing financial models. Some were concerned that RAAs would cost more, although others were confident there were opportunities for cost savings. There was concern about financial risks for LAs that were hosting. There was a view that there were more "financial losers" than had been originally expected and that instead of bringing savings and efficiencies for LAs and VAAs, adoption services would actually cost more. Whilst several RAAs reported working within the "financial envelope" they had been given to set up the RAA, others believed the funding was insufficient. There was a common view that the overall set-up costs were high. Some LAs reported that they were now contributing proportionately more than they were spending on adoption and unpicking the costs to get to this point had been extremely difficult. There were cases where partners have reached agreements, for example to ring-fence their existing budgets for the next two years, but this took a lot of time and energy.

There were ongoing challenges around developing shared systems for IT, HR and legalities, regarding differential pay, secondments, terms and conditions and Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE). Developing commissioning arrangements also proved difficult for some. In some areas, joint Practice and Improvement Fund (PIF) bids had been developed and funded and were seen as an excellent way to promote joint working between the RAAs and VAAs. However, other interviewees were concerned at what they perceived as a risk to their services, such as reduced sharing of best practice and innovation and threats to business continuity.

In addition to the challenges stakeholders were facing at the time, they were also concerned about potential forthcoming challenges or negative unintended consequences. These included: structural disconnection of adoption services from the rest of children's services; inconsistent practice around Adopter Voice; and negative impact on the sustainability of VAAs.

Despite these challenges, several aspects were working well, especially where there was strong joint working and staff engagement and they were starting to see some early advantages. The interviews show RAAs have offered an opportunity to share what is working well, develop new ideas and provide an impetus to improve the quality of poorer performing services. The strength of previous partnership working has influenced the ease with which partners have

been able implement the RAA programme. When asked what was working well, most RAAs referenced partnership working as a facilitating factor and improved partnership working as an early outcome. Building on strong foundations, the process of becoming an RAA has brought some LAs closer in a very positive way, creating a sense of cohesion and perceived mutual benefits for staff, adopters and children.

Several RAAs highlighted examples where their efforts to engage operational staff in the development and implementation of RAAs had proved empowering, yet at the same time, retaining and engaging staff has been a challenge. As a result, middle managers and frontline staff have gained ownership over the process when they perhaps did not have before, remained in post, and bought in to the change process. RAAs have engaged staff in various ways depending upon the model and governance structures; these include mixed project teams comprising strategic and operational staff, separate operational boards, and task and finish/working groups, all of which interviewees said were contributing towards a smoother transition to RAAs. The interviews show that it has been important for staff to understand the rationale for the move, how RAAs should help to address the issues that local areas were facing (e.g. in relation to adopter sufficiency) and their belief that it would ultimately mean better outcomes for the children. In models where staff were TUPE'd across they were positive about the benefits, such as finding more support as part of a bigger specialist team and more regular supervision.

Emerging impact

At this stage, there were anecdotal examples of positive impacts on four areas: speed of matching, recruiting adopters, adopter support, processes and timeliness, which the longitudinal data analysis will explore. Some of the live RAAs in the Leaders Group outlined where they were starting to see early successes and there was a view at a national level that there are "exemplars that others can look up to", which the evaluation will explore further in future.

There were several reported examples of increasing numbers of adoption panels leading to more timely adoption decisions. There were some indications that RAAs had started to have a positive effect on the number of adopters recruited, but the data is not yet available at RAA-level or national level and will be analysed as part of the evaluation in future. There was evidence from the interviews that RAAs were already leading to practices that were more consistent. Examples given included the development of a consistent adoption support offer, consistent approaches in matching panels and disruption meetings, and the development of adoption packs. In several RAAs, interviewees described adopter feedback and engagement as being positive.

Staff coming together was perceived to have enabled the pooling of ideas and expertise, which is central to the programme's future, as is an increased emphasis on performance management.

Critical success factors

Critical success factors for RAAs in spring 2018 included strong, consistent and effective leadership, taking a phased and thoughtful approach together as a partnership and placing sufficient emphasis on changing culture and identity. Live RAAs from the Leaders Group emphasised the importance of working to create an RAA culture that all could identify with.

Effectiveness of support with RAA development and outstanding support needs

The interviewees suggest that support and guidance from the Department has improved over time and new features such as the leadership development programme are welcome. However, RAAs would like a greater steer on some fundamental aspects such as the Ofsted inspection requirements, more opportunities for sharing learning, and more clarity on the coaching role.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this report has provided a snapshot of stakeholders' experiences in the first steps towards regionalising adoption. It paints a picture of frustration and challenge in the early stages of implementation, but also of hope as some RAAs have worked through the difficulties and have seen the first signs of greater collaboration, consistency and improved practice and associated benefits. The picture will evolve as the RAAs develop further and more RAA projects become live RAAs. Our next evaluation report, after we have undertaken in-depth case studies, analysis of the SSDA903 and Adoption & Special Guardianship Leadership Board statistics and analysis of RAA cost data, will provide further information on this evolution and impact.