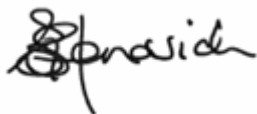


Report for: Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee: 16th January 2020

Item number: To be added by the Committee Section

Title: **Adoption Update**



Report authorised by : Bev Hendricks, Assistant Director, Children's Services

Lead Officer: Bev Hendricks, Assistant Director,
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Ward(s) affected: NA

1. Describe the issue under consideration

This briefing has been prepared by Adopt London Regional Adoption Agency.

2. Recommendations

Members to note the briefing.

3. Background information

3.1 In March 2016, the government announced changes to the delivery of adoption services proposing that all local authorities' adoption services be delivered on a regionalised basis by 2020. The agreed model for London was to create four Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) to cover London, with programme coordination to deliver those functions most effectively carried out once.

3.2 It was agreed that a new regional adoption agency for the North London Region to be known as 'Adopt London North' would consist of the London Boroughs of Haringey, Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney and Islington. The Boroughs working in partnership combine their adoption services for a regional adoption agency for North London hosted and led by the London Borough of Islington

4. Contribution to strategic outcomes

4.1 Borough Plan 2019-2022

4.2 People Priority

5. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Education and Adoption Act 2016

Report to Cabinet on 3 March 2019: Adopt London North: a North London regionalised adoption service

Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs)

Adopt London Briefing

15th October 2019

This briefing provides an update on the Adopt London RAA development programme.

Introduction/ Background

1. In March 2016, the government announced changes to the delivery of adoption services proposing that all local authorities' adoption services be delivered on a regionalised basis by 2020. This followed a range of national policy changes since 2012, including the 2015 Regionalising Adoption paper by the Department for Education (DfE) that sought improvements in adoption performance.
2. The government has reinforced their policy ambition through provisions in the Education and Adoption Act 2016. The Act also gives the Secretary of State a new power to direct one or more named local authorities to make arrangements for any, or all, of their adoption functions to be carried out on their behalf, by one of the local authorities named, or by another agency.

Delivery Model

3. The agreed model for London was:
 - to create four Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) to cover London, with programme coordination to deliver those functions most effectively carried out once.
 - Adopt London has 23 participating Boroughs within the four RAAs.
 - All four RAAs operate on a shared service hosted model.

- The four host Boroughs remain as Islington, Southwark, Havering and Ealing.

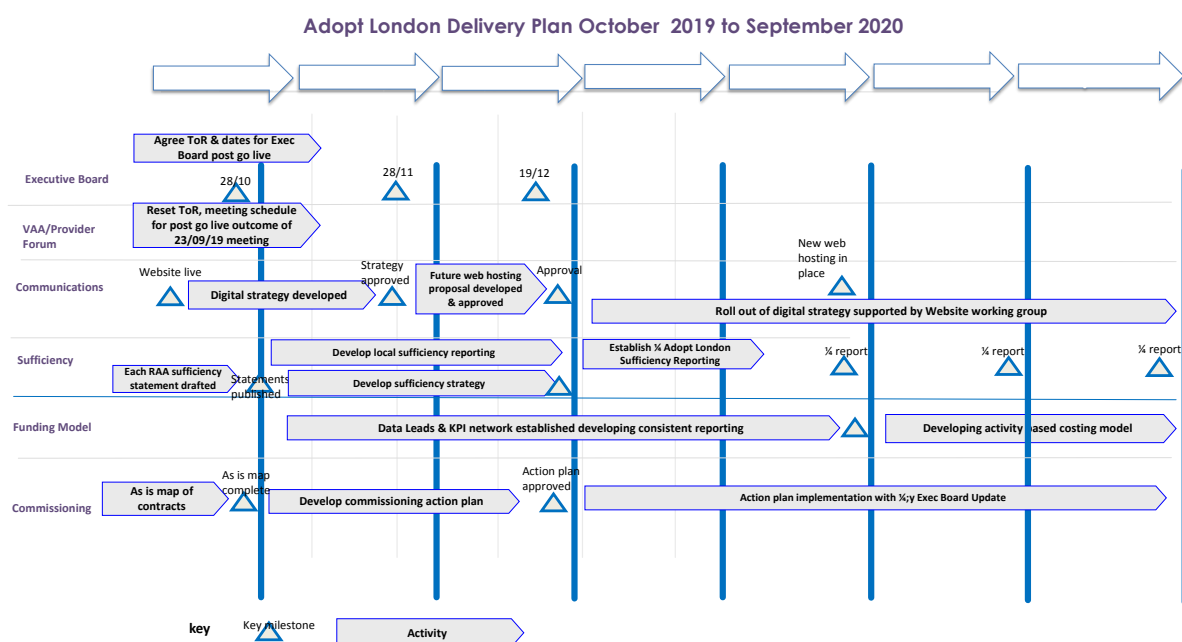
Implementation

4. All four RAAs went 'live' between July and October 2019.
5. Each project and the overall programme management has now closed as all four RAAs are now implemented.
6. There are four Heads of Services appointed to manage the service on behalf of the participating Boroughs.
7. The table below provides a breakdown of the member Boroughs within each of the RAAs that make up Adopt London.

	North (6)	East (4)	South (9)	West (4)
Host Boroughs	Islington	Havering	Southwark	Ealing
DCS/Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Carmel Littleton ▪ Lauren Eden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robert South 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Quirke – Thornton • Alasdair Smith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judith Finlay • Carolyn Fair
Membership	Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington	Barking, Havering, Newham, Tower Hamlets	SW – Kingston, Richmond on Thames, Merton, Sutton, Wandsworth SE – Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark	Brent, Ealing, Hounslow, Hammersmith & Fulham
Head of Service	Lydia Samuel	Sue May	Susanna Daus	Debbie Gabriel

8. A pan London implementation plan is in place to progress collaborative plans across Adopt London working with VAAs and voluntary sector partners. This also includes working with Ambitious for Adoption (the 5th RAA led by CORAM which includes a number of London Boroughs). This work will be led by the RAA Heads of Service going forward. The primary focus is:

- ⇒ Improving sufficiency of adopters in London
- ⇒ Improved and consistent post adoption support offer
- ⇒ A longer term smarter collaborative commissioning approach



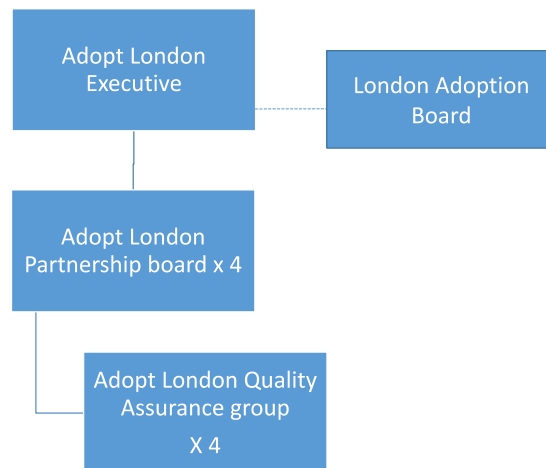
Adopter Recruitment

9. Adopt London has developed a set of brand guidelines and has one website for recruitment , training and support of adopters and those affected by Adoption. This will be supported by a digital strategy across the 4 RAAs.
10. DfE have invested £750k in a National Adoption recruitment campaign, that is being launched for an initial 4 week period around Adoption week (14- 20th October) starting with a digital campaign via Society Guardian - #YouCanAdopt. A bigger scale campaign is planned for January 2020 following a marketing agency being commissioned. Mark Owers chairs the steering group with representation from VAAs and RAAs. The Adopt London Heads of Service will be engaged via the leadership programme, they are not represented on the steering group.

Governance

11. Each RAA has a Partnership Board chaired by the host Director with representation from all participating Boroughs. A quality assurance group will feed into the Partnership Board. Annual reports will be provided to each Boroughs Corporate Parenting forums.

Adopt London Governance



12. The Directors of Children's Services (DCS) from each of the four host Boroughs have formed the Executive Board. This is chaired by the Lead DCS for Adoption.
13. The Executive Board provided governance and support to the projects during the development of the RAAS to ensure core principles were adhered too and to oversee pan London developments. The Executive Board will remain in place to monitor and support the implementation of pan London activities.
14. There is on-going engagement and collaboration with the VAAs and the wider voluntary sector on a pan London basis.

Lessons learnt

15. Appendix A provides a summary of the lessons learnt from undertaking this programme which at times has been a drawn-out, complex process , with multiple obstacles to overcome due to the wide range of stakeholders and partners involved.

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Appendix A - Programme Lessons learnt

Stakeholder engagement	<p>Communication and stakeholder engagement at all levels is crucial early on and throughout the process.</p> <p>Staff events, briefings, newsletters , FAQs and individual sessions with teams supports the change management process. HR officers involvement was very beneficial.</p> <p>VAA/Provider forum with Director involvement was positive in building trusting relationships and progressing London wide opportunities.</p> <p>HR cross regional HR meetings supported by London Councils assisted with consistency of approach and knowledge sharing.</p> <p>Trade Unions engagement both locally and on a pan London basis was needed to ensure transparency, reduce resistance and delay.</p>
Governance	<p>Political engagement – Pan London member briefing flushed out issues early on. Cabinet decision making processes vary considerably – aligning timelines can be challenging. Early planning is needed.</p> <p>Ongoing and early in principle sign off at each stage is necessary.</p> <p>Governance structures involves all parties and at a range of levels (Directors, Operational Head of Service, Legal, Finance , HR, IT and information governance, Performance, Commissioning and Communications teams etc).</p> <p>Executive Board represented by all hosts and independently chaired was critical in ensuring timely decisions and managing risks.</p> <p>Sponsor/SRO access outside of board meetings ensured drift was minimised.</p>
Programme and Project management	<p>Leadership at programme management level and skilled, experienced project managers are required to drive the programme/projects</p>
Base line – understanding the current position	<p>Data and financial information was inconsistent – a pragmatic approach to developing a ‘good enough’ shared ‘as is’ position early on requires a range of partner leads to be involved and developing a culture of peer challenge has proved helpful.</p>
Finance	<p>Negotiating and agreeing financial contributions in challenging financial times requires robust analysis and challenge to ensure all partners interests are represented and contributions represent actuals, recent trends and future demand projections.</p> <p>Bringing together Heads of Finance at the earliest opportunity is required</p>
Service re-design	<p>Re designing the model and undertaking a full restructure to ensure a “Fit for Purpose” organisation , opposed to a ‘lift and shift’ approach provided a higher level of certainty for staff and minimised vacancies and the need to re structure post go live.</p>
New model development	<p>Testing new ways of working require financial investment – these are often related to IT, system and process changes and legal advice on proposals.</p>
Partnership Agreement	<p>Working off a version developed by other RAAs and waiting for the Pan London version to be reviewed caused initial delays. Multiple comments received on various drafts took a significant amount of time to review and amend, given the number of stakeholders involved. Earlier identification and engagement of LA leads may have simplified the process. Allow sufficient time for reviews in the project plan.</p>
IT & FM	<p>Implementation costs and options need to be considered at the onset.</p>
Practice	<p>Early appointment of the Head of Service was beneficial in providing leadership, building relationships and developing practice.</p> <p>Practice lead on the project team gave capacity to focus on practice developments, communications and stakeholder engagement. (Staff, adopters, professional partners etc)</p>