

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S CABINET MEMBER

REGIONALISATION OF ADOPTION SERVICES

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval from Children's Cabinet Member in relation to the direction of travel outlined in the transitional plan to be submitted to DfE and implications for North Lincolnshire's Adoption Service.
- 1.2 The report is 'urgent' as the Transitional Plan has only recently become available and the deadline is 8 April 2016.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Adoption Reforms continue to gather pace with a clear steer from Government. The DfE released "Adoption - A vision for change" in March 2016. The Forward co-signed by the Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Children and Families state "we are determined radically to redesign the whole adoption system, delivering new service models through Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs), that see local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies working together to deliver excellent adoption services everywhere, with a strong focus on innovation and practice".
- 2.2 By 2020 all local authorities will be a part of a RAA or will have delegated their adoption functions to a RAA. The RAA will be responsible for recruitment, matching, and support functions and may include support to children and families where there is a Special Guardianship Order. VAAs will have a central role to play and a continuing role in the national market place for Adoption Services. Innovation and excellence in practice will be demonstrated by early placement, reduced delay, high quality decision making and support. Adopters will be regularly consulted to drive improvement and there will be a clear accountability framework.
- 2.3 The Education and Adoption Act 2016 contains powers to require local authorities to make arrangements for their adoption functions to be carried out by a RAA.
- 2.4 Within Yorkshire and Humber Region, we have set an ambitious plan regionally to continue with a Central Hub (with the potential of novating the consortium contract to a VAA- this already agreed via the regional ADCS group) and to develop three Regional Adoption Agencies; North & Humber,

South and West. North and Humber includes – North Yorkshire/York/East Riding/North and North east Lincolnshire and Hull. There is an ambitious target to regionalise and establish a RAA by 2017 however it is more important that there is a robust and sustainable implementation therefore this needs to be reflected as part of the ongoing development.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Option 1 – Intention to transfer and establish North Lincolnshire Adoption functions within the context of the proposed RAA outlined in the Transitional Plan for 2016/17. It is a Local Authority led Regional Adoption Agency on behalf of the six local authorities. North Yorkshire and York will take the lead. The transitional plan outlines the work needed to “regionalise” however each RAA may choose to develop differently and propose to leave some flexibility to do this as the detail and implications become more clear.
- 3.2 Regionalisation will have an impact upon the local adoption service, on-costs and central costs. The detail of this will mean a transfer of resource and finance to the RAA.
- 3.3 It is envisaged that further work will be undertaken at a national level to ensure a clear governance framework and where Ofsted sits in relation to the RAA.
- 3.4 North Lincolnshire’s adoption activity is small in comparison to that across the North and Humber region.
- 3.5 The plan will bring financial and operational challenges as part of becoming a Regional Adoption Agency. Commitment to the RAA needs to be proportional, based upon trend and projected activity whilst ambitious in terms of outcomes for children and adopters
- 3.6 Option 2 – To not play a part in the Yorkshire and Humber transitional plan and the development of a North and Humber RAA and give further consideration as to whether we could discharge our function via another route.

4 ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 The ambition for children is right and mandated for in terms of early permanence and stability. North Lincolnshire will become part of the RAA, the financial, staffing and performance implications will be detailed as part of the transitional process and a further report outlining these provided to Cabinet Member.
- 4.2 There is clear guidance to form a RAA or discharge functions via a RAA therefore this is a route North Lincolnshire will have to travel either through the transitional phase or at a later stage, both will require the shift in resources and finance.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 Financial

There will be financial implications, the detail is still to be worked out and will be reported to cabinet member at a later date.

5.2 Staffing

There will be staffing implications, the detail is still to be worked out and will be reported to cabinet member at a later date.

5.3 IT

There will be implications for central services, the detail is still to be worked out and will be reported to cabinet member at a later date.

6 OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

6.1 N/A

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

7.1 The regionalisation of adoption is led nationally and informed by key stakeholders, adopters and children. Children, adopters and VAA's are and will be involved in the transitional plan and development of RAAs.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 That the Cabinet Member approves the direction of travel outlined in the Transitional Plan.

8.2 That the Cabinet Member consider a further report when the resources and finance implications are available for consideration and approval.

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Department
for Education

Adoption

A vision for change

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Foreword by Nicky Morgan MP and Edward Timpson MP

The family is the first and most important building block in a child's life and any government serious about delivering social justice must seek to strengthen families. Our ambition is to ensure proactive support for strong parental and family relationships, particularly for those families facing the most significant disadvantages.

Every child deserves a loving, stable family. For those children who cannot live with their birth parents, it is vital we find them permanent new homes as quickly as possible. Very often, the best placement will be with kinship carers or with foster carers. That is why we remain committed to improving those routes to permanence. But adoption is an important permanence option which has been proven to provide children with unique stability and care within a new family which lasts long beyond childhood. Only 3.2% of children return to care after an adoption order is granted (over a 12 year period), compared to 25% of children on a residence order (over a 6 year period).¹

Five years ago the coalition government set out its plan for improving and tackling delay in the adoption system. At that time, the number of children waiting to be adopted exceeded the number of approved adopters, children waited far too long to be adopted, and too many adopted families were struggling without support.

This situation was nothing short of tragic for the many children where adoption had been identified as being in their best interests, but who had sometimes been left waiting for years. Social justice is about partnerships across government and across sectors. The government therefore came together with local government and the voluntary sector to bring about change. Individual agencies rose to the challenge posed to them to recruit enough adopters and drive out unnecessary delay for children. Innovative new approaches to adopter-led matching were embraced by practitioners and spread rapidly through the system. The adopter approval process was radically redesigned. The government launched the first ever national Adoption Support Fund (ASF) to provide families with the therapeutic support they needed to help their child recover from the abuse and neglect they may have suffered before they entered care and we should be truly proud that 4,700 children have already received support through this fund.

Our actions have meant radical improvements to the adoption system. Over 5,300 children were adopted in 2015, up from 5,000 children adopted in 2014.² The average time it now takes for a child to get through the adoption system has reduced to 18

¹ [Selwyn J& Masson J \(2014\) Adoption, special guardianship and residence orders: a comparison of disruption rates. Family Law](#)

² [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2014 to 2015](#)

months – still too long but a reduction of 4 months from the peak in 2012-13.³ We have almost doubled the proportion of children being adopted within 12 months. This is remarkable progress that should be celebrated.

But there is still more to be done. The process still takes too long and not all adoptive families are receiving the support they need. Since September 2013, local authorities have almost halved the number of children they have put forward for adoption meaning children who would benefit from adoption – whose welfare requires it – are missing out.

Later this year, we will set out further details about how we will achieve our ambitious vision for children’s social care as a whole so that we support all children. But the rapid decrease in the number of adoption decisions calls for action now. Here we outline a new and ambitious plan to reverse this trend.

We are determined radically to redesign the whole adoption system, delivering new service models through Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs), that see local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) genuinely working together to deliver excellent adoption services everywhere, with a strong focus on innovation and practice.

We are determined to see adoption pursued whenever it is in a child’s best interests and a system where all children are matched with adoptive parents without undue delay. We also want to ensure adoptive families receive ongoing support from the moment the child is placed with them and throughout their childhood.

That is what our children deserve and it is our duty, and our will, to ensure they have just that.



NICKY MORGAN

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION

EDWARD TIMPSON

**MINISTER FOR
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

³ [Adoption Leadership Board Business Intelligence](#)

Executive Summary

Overview

Childhood experiences have a lifelong influence. We know that a secure, loving family life is at the heart of those experiences and its absence can have profound negative consequences.

Children rely on birth parents to provide a stable, caring environment in which they can develop and make sense of the world. But birth parents are not always able to provide the positive start to life that their children need and some children experience neglect or abuse which can cause enduring problems. Where birth parents cannot meet a child's basic needs it is one of the state's most important responsibilities to step in and ensure that children can have a childhood which keeps them safe and enables them to flourish.

The right permanence option for a child will always depend on their individual needs and circumstances. If they cannot live with their birth parents, there are a number of placement types – foster care, living with a special guardian, kinship care arrangements and residential care – which can all provide the right placement. We also know that adoption, with a new permanent family, is transformative for many children. Adoption gives children the stability and love they deserve and a chance to recover from the trauma they may have suffered in early life.

What matters most is that children receive stable and high quality care. Children who enter care are vulnerable and have often already experienced abuse, neglect and disruption in their young lives – they need and deserve a social care system that acts in their best interests and provides them with the long term stability and quality of care they need, with minimal delay. Research tells us that permanence, stability, quality of care and avoidance of delay are the factors which most affect children's welfare and their future chances in life. This is what we must keep at the forefront of our minds when tasked with the responsibility of making decisions about the care of vulnerable children.

In *Children's social care reform: a vision for change* (2016) the government outlined its overarching vision for transforming the quality of children's social care services by 2020.⁴ Our ambition for this Parliament is radically to reform the children's social care system, structuring our reforms around three areas: people and leadership; practice and systems; and governance and accountability. Our adoption reforms will be delivered as part of our wider children's social care reforms, because children's social care must be treated as a

⁴ [Children's social care reform: a vision for change, January 2016](#)

whole. Later in the year we will publish a strategy on how we will deliver our ambitions for children's services.

Whilst we have made significant progress on adoption – more children being adopted, children moving in with their adoptive families more quickly, greater numbers of adoptive families getting the adoption support they need – there are still systemic weaknesses.

Children still wait too long for adoption, and too many families still miss out on vital support services that can make a huge difference.

Furthermore, new challenges have emerged over recent years which threaten to undermine the progress made. The decline in adoption numbers means there is an urgent need to accelerate our reform of the adoption system now. Most worryingly, there is reason to be concerned that at the end of a long legal process, some children are not getting the permanence option which would be in their best interests.

This paper sets out the detail of what we plan to do over the next four years to address these challenges and to secure change that will last. Our reforms have driven great improvements, but these have neither gone far enough, nor are they yet fully embedded and secured for the long term.

We are determined radically to redesign the whole adoption system – the structures, systems and workforce – to ensure we have the foundations in place to build lasting change.

We want to see systems that are designed around the needs of children and draw on the best of both the statutory and voluntary sectors.

We then need to focus relentlessly on front line practice. We need all services to deliver high quality, evidence based decisions for children every time.

And we need to ensure the right accountability is in place to drive the delivery of truly great adoption services.

Adoption: our vision for 2020

Our vision for 2020 is of an adoption system where:

Decisions about placements are always made in children's best interests.

Quality of care and stability of placement are rightly prioritised by decision makers whenever they make decisions about a child's future. Adoption is pursued determinedly when it is the right option for a child.

Service delivery has at its heart innovation and practice excellence. Systems are designed around the needs of children, free from bureaucratic barriers that do not add value, and draw on the best of both the statutory and voluntary sectors.

Social workers are highly skilled professionals who make high quality, evidence based decisions and do not tolerate damaging delay for children in their care. Social workers are part of an expert, confident workforce with the knowledge and skills to make and pursue complex and challenging decisions. Once a decision for adoption has been made, the adoption plan is progressed swiftly by social workers driven by a sense of urgency.

Matches are made without unnecessary delay. RAAs provide a large pool of adopters for every child in need of a new family. Where a match is not immediately available within the RAA, the search is extended nationally without delay.

Every adoptive family has access to an ongoing package of appropriate support with a right to a high quality, specialist assessment of need. This support is delivered from day one and continues throughout childhood whenever it is required. Adoptive families have a supportive relationship with their local agency and know they can turn to them for additional support at any time, without judgment.

The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart of national and local policy decision making and delivery of services. The views of adopters and adopted children are demonstrably used in the shaping and co-production of local services and help to inform national policy developments.

Achieving Our Vision

In order to deliver this vision, we will:

Act to address unexpected falls in adoption decisions

We are taking action now to ensure that adoption is always pursued when it is in a child's best interests. To achieve this we will change the law to ensure that quality of care and stability of placement are properly prioritised.

Deliver radical, whole system redesign by regionalising adoption services

For long term, sustainable success, we need a system that operates at the right scale, with a spirit of innovation and excellence at its heart. To achieve this we will:

- ensure all local authorities become part of a RAA by 2020; and
- launch three new funding streams to support local authorities and VAAs in this ambitious work.

Invest in developing the workforce

We will have a new focus on equipping the workforce with the professional skills and knowledge to navigate complex assessment, analysis and decision making and enable adoptive families to access the right support. To achieve this we will:

- launch a new development programme to support social workers to achieve and demonstrate required knowledge and skills and have their specialist knowledge recognised; and
- publish a new Specialist Knowledge and Skills statement setting out exactly what social workers making permanence decisions need to know and be able to do.

Reduce the time children wait to be adopted

As well as speeding up matching by regionalising adoption services, we also need a dynamic national system, free of bureaucratic barriers, which finds homes for those children who cannot be placed immediately within their region. To achieve this we will:

- invest in the continued development of national matching infrastructure and innovative matching methods;
- develop and spread best practice to increase the use of early placement; and

- ensure inter-agency placements are pursued swiftly and operate on a level playing field for agencies and adopters.

Provide more high quality adoption support

We want to ensure every adoptive family has ongoing access to effective, multi-agency support. To achieve this we will:

- extend the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) which has already helped thousands of families to access crucial therapeutic services, with increased funding in every year to 2020, and develop the model to ensure long term sustainability;
- improve the evidence base for, quality of and access to mental health services for vulnerable children; and
- further support and challenge schools to meet the needs of adopted children including: use legislation to expand the role of virtual schools heads and consider how designated teachers can support adopted children, and ensuring teachers understand the impact of the range of developmental issues, including trauma and loss on children's learning.

Further embed strong performance management and accountability arrangements

We need to build on the solid progress already made and make even sharper use of data to drive high performance across the system, and we need to ensure that inspection frameworks encourage high quality practice and innovation. To achieve this we will:

- introduce scorecards for RAA performance, using better and more meaningful data from quarterly local council returns;
- work with the sector and Ofsted to produce a revised inspection framework which supports strong innovation and evidenced based practice, and works in a world where adoption services are regionalised;
- review the way the national Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) works to make sure it continues to deliver strong visible leadership with a spirit of co-operation between voluntary and public sector providers at its heart; and
- enhance the voice of adopters so that services give adopters the power of choice and that the views of adopters shape decisions about the future design of adoption services.

Chapter 1: Progress to date

Where we started

1.1 Where a child cannot be looked after by their family, it is right that society steps in to ensure that an alternative family life is made available, which provides that child with the stability and love that they need, unconditionally and forever. Too often we fail to provide this for the children who come into the state's care, but this priceless opportunity is offered by adoption.

1.2 Children who enter the adoption system have often experienced a significant amount of disruption and uncertainty in their young lives. Statistics show that 71% of these children have experienced neglect or abuse.⁵ Research shows us that delay and instability in care are detrimental to a child's future outcomes. It also increases the likelihood of disruption in the future.⁶ This means that it is absolutely crucial that these children are found stable, loving homes as quickly as possible.

1.3 Despite this, in 2010, we inherited a system where the number of adoptions was at its lowest point for a decade, and the adoption system was characterised by unacceptable delay, for both children and prospective adopters. The fundamental problems in the system at that point were:

- **Adoption was dwindling** – it was not viewed as a genuine option for many children whose best interests may have been served by it. In 2011, just 3,100 children found new homes through adoption – the lowest number since 2001;⁷
- **The adoption process took far too long** – at the outset of the adoption reform programme in 2011, the average wait between a child coming into care and being united with their adoptive parents was twenty-one months and rising, hitting a peak of 22 months in 2012-13. Some groups of children waited even longer, for example, black children and children over five waited over 30 months.⁸ Only 60 babies under one-year old were adopted in 2010-11;⁹

⁵ [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2014 to 2015](#)

⁶ [Beyond the Adoption Order: challenges, interventions and adoption disruption, Julie Selwyn, Dinithi Wijedasa, and Sarah Meakings, April 2014](#)

⁷ [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2014 to 2015](#)

⁸ Analysis of the 'SSDA903 (Children Looked After)' data returns

⁹ [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2014 to 2015](#)

- **The speed of the process was hugely variable across the country** – most local authorities were failing to meet the timescales set out in statutory guidance and the variation between authorities was stark. In 2012 we published *An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay*, which showed that five local authorities placed every single child within 12 months of the decision being made that adoption was the best plan for them.¹⁰ But another four placed fewer than half their children within the same timescale;
- **There were nowhere near enough adopters for the children waiting** – this was the primary driver of delay for children. At the end of March 2012 there were 4,770 children waiting to move in with a new family. By the end of March 2013, this figure had increased to 5,510, but there were insufficient adopters available.¹¹ Furthermore, the process for being approved as an adopter wasn't working well enough. Whilst there was excellent practice in some agencies, many prospective adopters were not satisfied with the service they received; the process was slow and some adopters felt undervalued; and
- **There was too little support available for adopters** – an Adoption UK survey in 2012 found that 64% of adopters were not informed about their entitlement to an assessment of need for support.¹² Of those adopters who had an assessment, 81% had support needs identified, but only 56% said that full support was provided. Over half needed therapeutic services, but only 28% reported receiving these.

What have we done so far?

1.4 In light of these challenges, the government launched a reform programme, the key pillars of which are described below.

National Leadership

1.5 The government appointed Sir Martin Narey as Ministerial Adviser on adoption in July 2011 and also set up an Expert Working Group led by the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS). In the 2012 publication, the government set out an adoption reform programme to improve recruitment and tackle delay in the system.¹³ Under the leadership of Sir

¹⁰ [An Action Plan for Adoption - tackling delay, March 2012](#)

¹¹ [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2014 to 2015](#)

¹² [It takes a village to raise a child, Adoption UK, 2012](#)

¹³ [An Action Plan for Adoption - tackling delay, March 2012](#)

Martin Narey, this reform programme has been paramount in driving forward significant improvements in the performance of the adoption system.

1.6 To ensure a sustained long term focus on adoption, the Adoption Leadership Board was formed in 2014, chaired by Sir Martin Narey, bringing together leading figures from local government and the voluntary adoption sector. This has provided sector leadership and a focus on whole system improvement.

Data driven approach to improving performance

1.7 The collection of quarterly adoption data has contributed to a much deeper understanding of the local and national situation. This data has allowed frank discussions about performance and has provided clear signals of problems in the system, which have been invaluable in taking this reform programme forward. The introduction of the adoption scorecard has also had a big impact on driving a data-led approach to local council performance management, helping authorities to identify and bear down hard on unacceptable delay. The scorecards have enabled us to challenge performance in over one third of local authorities.

Recruiting enough adopters to meet the needs of the children waiting

1.8 In 2013 we introduced First4Adoption, a single national adoption information service, which gives clear and consistent messages to potential and existing adopters. Between April 2013 and October 2015 it had 500,000 unique users. We also introduced a new, quicker two-stage process for approving adopters in 2013.

1.9 We have supported the sector to build its capacity to recruit and approve adopters over the past five years by investing £200 million via the Adoption Reform Grant to local authorities and £16 million for the VAA sector. The voluntary sector has played a crucial role in driving innovation and increased capacity in adopter recruitment. The government's £16 million investment has enabled the establishment of three new VAAs, the development of more innovative ways of working, and increased recruitment of adopters, particularly for children who wait the longest.

Driving innovation in the way children and adopters are matched

1.10 We have enabled more children to be placed in stable homes earlier by requiring local authorities, through the Children and Families Act 2014, to consider a fostering for adoption placement wherever possible. This means children can move in with their new family much more quickly and have fewer placement moves prior to adoption. The Children and Families Act also removed barriers to good placements caused by undue emphasis on finding a perfect 'ethnic' match between children and adopters.

1.11 A key innovation of the adoption reform programme has been the focus placed on involving adopters in matching. Previously, it was social workers who drove decisions around which adopters to choose for a child. Building on innovation started in the voluntary sector, adopters are now empowered and encouraged to take a much more active role, exploring for themselves the children waiting for adoption, and making their own decisions about which children they feel they could care for. The Children and Families Act 2014 enabled approved adopters to access the Adoption Register for the first time, and there has been a significant growth in the use of adopter-led matching through National Exchange Days and Adoption Activity Days where prospective parents and children can meet face to face in a fun and friendly environment. These techniques have been particularly successful in helping children with additional needs find homes. In 2014-15, 300 children were matched with adopters through 25 local authority Adoption Activity Days.¹⁴

Improving support to all adoptive families

1.12 The Adoption Support Fund (ASF), worth over £19 million, came into operation on 1 May 2015. The ASF pays for therapeutic interventions that are so vital in helping children to deal with past trauma and thrive in a nurturing, stable placement. It offers a fast, simple service meaning that adoptive families can access the support they need, as and when they need it. Every local authority has applied to the fund, and so far over 4,700 families have been helped by specialist adoption support services, with more being helped each week.

1.13 We have also significantly improved the universal benefits offered to all adoptive families. Adopted children are now entitled to a free early education place from the age of two; priority admission to the school that can best meet their needs; and additional funding for their education provider through the Early Years Pupil Premium and Pupil Premium Plus at school. Adoption pay and leave entitlements are now more in line with those available to birth parents, and adoption pay has also been enhanced so that it is equal to 90% of a parent's salary for the first six weeks.

The impact of our reforms

1.14 These reforms have had a direct impact of the lives of thousands of children and their families. And they have significantly raised the profile of adoption and inspired renewed public interest, both in outcomes for adopted children and in coming forward to parent these vulnerable children. Measurable progress has been made across our priorities:

¹⁴ <http://corambaaf.org.uk/ourwork/activitydays/adoption-activity-day-march-2013>

- the number of adopters approved rose from 4,090 in 2012-13 to 5,260 in 2014-15;¹⁵
- the average time in 2012-13 of 22 months between coming into care and being placed with their new family, was cut to 18 months by 2014-15;¹⁶
- black and minority ethnic children are now being placed for adoption 5 months earlier than in 2012-13;¹⁷
- in 2012-13, only 19% of children were placed with their new family within one year of entering care. In 2014-15, this had almost doubled, and 35% of children were placed within a year;¹⁸
- in 2011, only 60 children aged under 1 were adopted compared to 230 babies under 1 adopted last year;¹⁹ and
- in its first six months, the ASF has helped over 4,700 families and distributed over £16 million.

¹⁵ [Ofsted Adoption Agency data](#) and [Adoption Leadership Board Business Intelligence](#)

¹⁶ [Adoption Leadership Board Business Intelligence](#)

¹⁷ Analysis of the 'SSDA903 (Children Looked After) data returns'

¹⁸ [Adoption Leadership Board Business Intelligence](#)

¹⁹ [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2014 to 2015](#)

Chapter 2: New and enduring challenges

2.1 Over the last five years, we have begun to lay solid foundations for the improvements required. We have made significant progress towards reforming the adoption system. But there is still much more to be done.

2.2 We face an immediate and serious challenge in ensuring that every child for whom adoption is in their best interests gets this decision. Since September 2013, the number of decisions for adoption has almost halved, meaning children who would benefit from adoption – whose welfare requires it – are missing out. This highlights weaknesses in the way permanence decisions are being made, and raises questions about whether social workers are being supported to develop the skills and knowledge they need to make and defend robust professional judgments.

2.3 Furthermore, over the longer term, there are some structural and systemic weaknesses in the adoption system which mean that the system is still not performing strongly enough. Eighteen months is still far too long for a child to wait for adoption, and not every family is receiving the support they need. Where performance has improved, we cannot yet be sure that this will be sustained.

Adoption decision making

2.4 From September 2013, the number of decisions being made by local authorities to pursue adoption has been declining sharply, as has the number of adoption placement orders granted by the courts. The data show that, since quarter 2 of 2013-14, local authority decisions to pursue adoption are down by a total of 41%, and the number of placement orders granted by the courts is down by a total of 50%.²⁰ The numbers of local authority decisions and placement orders granted are now below where they were at the beginning of 2011-12. Comprehensive engagement and analysis undertaken by the ALB and Department for Education (DfE) has led us to be confident in concluding that many children for whom adoption would be the best option are now missing out, and that some alternative placements are being made despite professionals having significant concerns about the quality and stability of the care on offer, and the future risk for the children involved.

2.5 Social workers are the professionals charged with analysing, making decisions about and pursuing with urgency the right permanence option for children. Whilst there is excellent practice in the sector, it is not universal. As highlighted by the President of the Family Division, Sir James Munby, in his Re B-S judgment (Re B-S (Children) [2013])

²⁰ [Adoption Leadership Board Business Intelligence](#)

EWCA Civ 1146) there remains a lack of confidence from the courts in social workers' presentation of evidenced assessments of the right options for children.²¹ This is not universal: the data show that some local areas have seen very little change in adoption decisions. But where it is going wrong, there is an urgent need to get decision making right and to ensure that assessments cover the likely needs for a child's whole childhood.

The Adoption System

2.6 There are challenges across the adoption system that exist in part because of the scale at which the system operates. The current system is highly fragmented with around 180 agencies recruiting and matching adopters for only 5,000 children per year. We know that the majority of agencies are operating at a small scale which can mean that the capacity and specialist skills in such agencies are sometimes limited.

2.7 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; they are more vulnerable to peaks and troughs in the flow of children, and are less cost effective. The two areas where the current system structure creates the most problems are in relation to how quickly children and adopters are matched, and the provision of adoption support services.

2.8 The system as currently designed builds in delay for children if agencies seek first to match that child with a parent they have recruited 'in house', where there is a very limited pool. Despite significant efforts to speed up processes across the system, it still takes an average of eight months between placement order and match, and some groups of children wait far longer. In 2014-15, harder to place groups of children waited on average 629 days between entering care and placement. This compares to 423 days for all other children.²² The system is therefore still not working well enough for these children. We know that delay causes lasting harm to vulnerable children and yet sequential decision making continues.

2.9 In terms of adoption support, many adopters still tell us they are unable to obtain timely adoption assessments and the support they need. We know that providing timely adoption support can dramatically improve adopted children's long term life chances and so it is vital that they can access what they need, when they need it. One of the major issues is that there are gaps in the adoption support market, both geographically and in

²¹ [Re B-S judgment \(Re B-S \(Children\) \[2013\] EWCA Civ 1146\)](#)

²² [Adoption Leadership Board Business Intelligence](#)

terms of capacity to deliver. Without further systemic change, any growth in the market is likely to be piecemeal.

2.10 Our strategy for addressing these new and emerging challenges has three parts. We will:

- reform the underpinning building blocks of the adoption system, to ensure we have the foundations on which high quality decision making and long term, sustainable success can be built;
- focus on practice, transforming the services on offer to children and families, to deliver excellence everywhere; and
- sharpen our accountability and performance management structures, to ensure delivery now and in the future.

Chapter 3: Creating the foundations for sustainable success

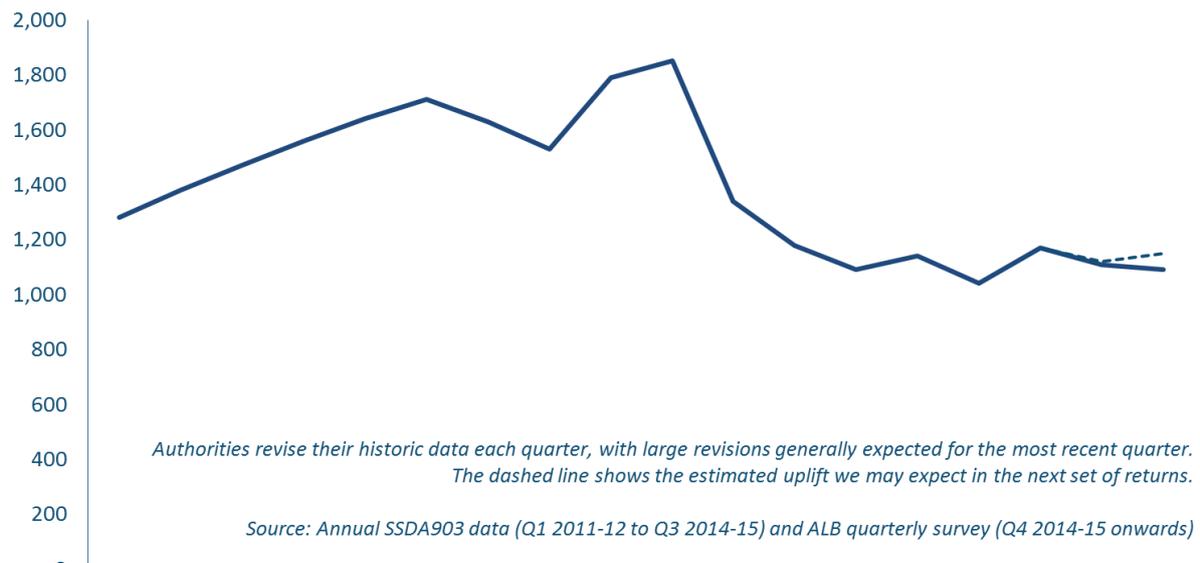
3.1 In *Children's social care reform: a vision for change* (2016) the government outlined its overarching vision for transforming the quality of children's social care services by 2020. Our ambition for this Parliament is to reform radically the children's social care system, structuring our reforms around three areas: people and leadership; practice and systems; and governance and accountability. Our adoption strategy forms a part of these reforms. This chapter sets out the way in which we will reform the fundamental building blocks of the adoption system – the structures, systems and people – to ensure we have solid foundations on which sustainable success can be built. The three building blocks we need to address are:

- **reforming the law**, to ensure the right factors – the factors which we know make a difference to children's outcomes – are prioritised when adoption decisions are made;
- **moving to a regionalised adoption system**, so that adopter recruitment, matching and adoption support are all delivered on an efficient and effective scale at consistent quality; and
- **developing the workforce**, to ensure social workers have the knowledge and skills they need to navigate complex assessment, analysis and decision making, and enable adoptive families to access the right support.

(i) Reforming the law

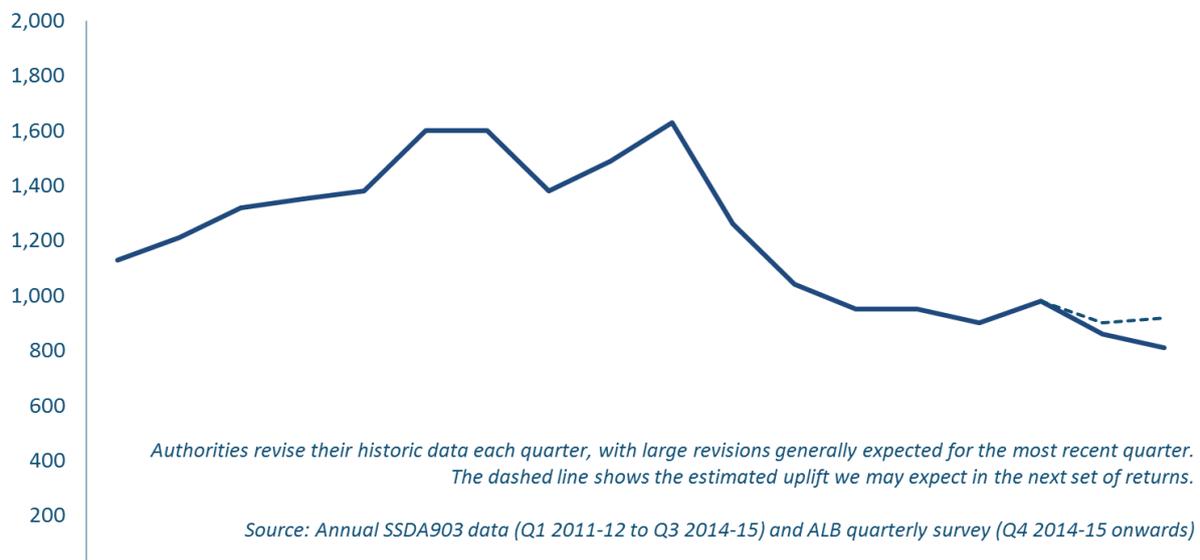
3.2 From September 2013, the number of decisions being made by local authorities to pursue adoption has been declining sharply, as have the number of placement orders granted by the courts.

Number of new Agency Decision Maker decisions in each quarter since 2011-12



Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2												
2011-12				2012-13				2013-14				2014-15				2015-16	
5,690 decisions				6,520 decisions				6,170 decisions				4,310 decisions					

Number of new placement orders granted in each quarter since 2011-12



Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2												
2011-12				2012-13				2013-14				2014-15				2015-16	
5,010 placement orders				5,950 placement orders				5,420 placement orders				3,590 placement orders					

3.3 The DfE and the ALB have looked at what lies behind these dramatic shifts in adoption decision making. Through a series of investigations with local authorities, engagement with sector leaders via the ALB, a series of seminars with local authority lawyers, and a number of short research projects, we have developed a strong picture of the new challenges in making adoption decisions. These appear to be:

- a mistaken view that the legal test for adoption has changed and the bar that must be met for an adoption placement order to be made has risen;
- a misunderstanding resulting in the view that if any extended family placement can provide ‘good enough’ parenting at the current time, this should be pursued over adoption, even if professionals have concerns about the ability of the carer to look after the child, or feel the placement is unlikely to be sustainable over the whole childhood and into adulthood; and
- a drive to eliminate delay in the family courts and conclude care cases within 26 weeks, which is leading some local authorities to believe adoption is difficult to pursue within the timescales.

3.4 These changes are believed to stem from the way two court judgments, *Re B* (June 2013)²³ and *Re B-S* (September 2013),²⁴ have been interpreted across the system. The central message from those judgements is that adoption decisions must be based on strong evidence. This is absolutely true, and the correct legal test. The President of the Family Division, Sir James Munby, has made it very clear that the judgments do not change the law. In a subsequent judgment, *Re R*,²⁵ he stated:

‘I wish to emphasise, with as much force as possible, that Re B-S was not intended to change and has not changed the law. Where adoption is in the child’s best interests, local authorities must not shy away from seeking, nor courts from making, care orders with a plan for adoption, placement orders and adoption orders.’

3.5 However, despite this unequivocal clarification, some local authorities and courts are still making dramatically fewer adoption decisions than was the case before *Re B-S*²⁶.

3.6 This means that some children whose best interests would be served by adoption are now missing out.

²³ [Re B \(a child\) \[2013\] UKSC 33](#)

²⁴ [Re B-S \(a child\) \[2013\] EWCA Civ 1146](#)

²⁵ [Re R \(a child\) \[2014\] EWCA Civ 1625](#)

²⁶ [Re B-S \(a child\) \[2013\] EWCA Civ 1146](#)

Decisions always made in a child's best interests

3.7 Achieving a permanent and loving home is a key principle of work in children's social care. Permanence is important in supporting children who have experienced abuse and neglect to recover and achieve positive life outcomes. Uncertainty and instability are damaging and can prevent children forming the secure attachments needed for good development.

3.8 For children who are not able to return safely to their families there are a number of routes whereby permanence can be achieved. For many children, foster or residential care within the care system provides the right placement; for others it will be living with carers via special guardianship orders, adoption orders, or a child arrangements order. All routes can produce positive outcomes, with the quality and stability of the placement being a key factor.

3.9 However, there is reason to be concerned about whether the right decision is always being made. Local authorities have reported to us that they feel unable to pursue adoption in some cases even where they believe it to be in children's best interests, because of the way Re B-S is being interpreted locally. The dramatic and sudden shifts we have seen in patterns of decision making do not suggest a normal, incremental change, but an extreme reaction.

3.10 Furthermore, in December 2015, the DfE published findings of a review of the way in which Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) are being used currently.²⁷ This highlighted some worrying decision making practices.

3.11 The review found that the majority of SGOs are made to carers who have an existing relationship with the child and who, with appropriate support, intend to and will be able to care for the child up to the age of 18. However, there is a significant minority of cases where the protective factors we expect to see in each case are not in place. In particular, issues have emerged around:

- rushed or poor quality assessments of prospective special guardians;
- potentially risky placements being made, for example, where the SGO is awarded with a Supervision Order because there remains some doubt about the special guardian's ability to care for the child long term; and
- inadequate support for special guardians, both before placements are finalised, and when needs emerge during the placement.

²⁷ [Special Guardianship Review, December 2015](#)

“Without doubt the pressure on courts to complete cases within prescribed timescales is placing pressure on workers to complete assessment more summarily.” (Social worker)

“Knowledge of children’s psychology and attachment is often disregarded at the expense of speedy assessments and disposal in the courts. The standard for ‘good enough’ parenting appears to be lower for special guardianship carers when compared with the standards we expect of prospective adopters.” (Senior social worker)

“Recognition should be given to impact of childhood trauma and abuse on young children, and that for some children the impact of this will not be evident for a number of years.” (Social worker)

3.12 Research shows that there are three factors which influence the success of a placement and children’s outcomes from that placement.²⁸ These are:

- **timeliness** – the speed with which a child finds their way to their stable and long term family;
- **quality of care** – the ability of the carer to adequately meet the needs of the child; and
- **stability** – whether the placement endures over the long term.

3.13 It is our view that the behaviours we have seen across the system since the Re B-S judgment expose a lack of appropriate emphasis and analysis in decision making on the quality of care provided by a placement, and the likely stability of that placement. The government is determined to address this to ensure that these factors, which research has shown are the most crucial to children’s outcomes, are rightly prioritised when decisions about a child’s future placement are made.

What changes will we make to legislation?

Factors to take into account in placement decisions

3.14 In order to ensure that the right factors – the factors outlined above, which research shows have the most significant impact on children’s outcomes – are properly prioritised, we intend to change the legal framework under which permanence decisions

²⁸ [Placement stability and permanence, Research in Practice, 2014](#)

are made. We intend to amend the Children Act 1989 to ensure the following factors are properly prioritised when local authorities and courts are considering the best permanent option for the child at the end of care proceedings:

- whether the quality of care on offer under the different potential placements being considered will be sufficient to meet the child's needs, especially in the light of the previous abuse and neglect the child may have suffered, and their need for high quality care to overcome this; and
- whether the placement will offer this quality of care throughout the child's childhood (until they are 18) – rather than right now or just in the immediate future.

3.15 We intend to bring forward legislation to make these changes as soon as possible.

Recognising the rights of prospective adopters

3.16 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires courts and adoption agencies, when making decisions relating to the adoption of a child, to have regard to the relationship the child has with specific categories of people. This includes consideration of the ability and willingness of any such person to care for the child. The categories of people currently consist of relatives and '*any such person the court considers relevant*'. We will amend legislation to explicitly add prospective adopters in this list, to ensure that the child's relationship with them is also considered in all cases where the child has been placed with them. Where the making of an Adoption Order is being considered, in most cases the child will have been living with the prospective adopters for 6-12 months, so it is important that the adoptive parent's role in the child's life is properly considered and the child's relationship with them.

3.17 Over the coming weeks and months, we will be talking and gathering views on our proposed legislative changes and how they will be implemented in practice, and whether any further legislative changes are required.

Special guardianship assessments

3.18 In addition to the legal changes we also believed it was necessary to make specific changes to the way Special Guardianship assessments are undertaken. We recognise that the majority of Special Guardianship placements are very strong and positive for children. However, the review of Special Guardianship generated compelling evidence that the assessment process for special guardians is not sufficiently robust. We need to ensure that children living under an SGO are safe, and that the placement gives them the best chance of good outcomes in their life.

3.19 That is why the government took immediate action to amend regulations and statutory guidance to require the local authority report to the court on potential special guardians to include:

- the capacity of the guardian to care for the child now and until the child is 18;
- the prospective special guardian's understanding of the child's current needs and likely future needs, particularly in light of any abuse or neglect the child has previously suffered, and their ability to meet those needs;
- the prospective special guardian's understanding of any current or future risk posed by the child's birth parents, particularly around contact and their ability to manage this risk; and
- an assessment of the strength of the previous and current relationship between the child and the prospective guardian.

3.20 The revised regulations were laid in Parliament on 5 February 2016 and came into force on 29 February 2016. Details can be found at: [Revised Special Guardianship regulations](#).

(ii) Moving to a regionalised adoption system

3.21 Overall, the structure of the adoption system as it currently stands does not support the most effective delivery of services, nor does it allow the best possible practice to flourish.

3.22 There is little doubt that the adoption system has improved despite current structures. But we don't think we will see the scale of improvements we need without some reform of the way adoption as a whole is managed in England.

3.23 That is why we are committed to introducing Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs)²⁹, with all local authorities being part of one by the end of this Parliament, operating across boundaries to ensure maximum choice for children, and with Voluntary Adoption Agencies at their heart. RAAs will increase the scale at which the system operates, creating a structure in which strategic recruitment, matching and commissioning of adoption support can all be improved. Establishing RAAs will also help spread excellent practice and innovation. We believe that they will provide us with an excellent platform to trial radical new approaches and to drive improvements across the system.

²⁹ [Regionalising Adoption, June 2015](#)

3.24 By 2020, we want a vibrant adoption system that is made up of a smaller number of more diverse agencies that work effectively across boundaries to match children with the best parents for them, and provide the quality support that we know families need. In this system:

- all local authorities will be part of a RAA or will have delegated their adoption functions to a RAA;
- RAAs will be responsible for the delivery of all recruitment, matching and support functions on behalf of local authorities, unless there is an exceptional reason, and many may also carry out additional functions, such as support provision for SGOs;
- VAAs will have a central role to play – not only as providers of adopters, providers of services and management or practice leaders within RAAs, but also as individual players in a continuing national market;
- innovation and excellence in practice, including early placement, will be widespread, leading to reduced delay for children, higher quality decision making, and higher quality adoption support;
- adopters will be regularly consulted by their RAAs and their input will help drive improvements in adoption services: from recruitment through to adoption support; and
- a clear accountability framework will drive the best outcomes from all agencies.

3.25 We are absolutely committed to working with the sector to ensure that, where possible, all local authorities move to RAAs voluntarily and in a way that works for them and for the overall national response to the needs of our most vulnerable children. If some local authorities fail to do so by 2017, we will consider using the powers in the Education and Adoption Act 2016 to require them to make arrangements for their adoption functions to be carried out by a RAA. We do not expect all local authorities to have fully transitioned to RAAs by this time, but would like to see effective plans and proposals in place. Where this is not happening, we will consider using the powers. We will of course consult all affected agencies before making any decisions.

How we will support the transition to Regional Adoption Agencies

3.26 To support the transition to RAAs, we will provide up to £14m across 2016-18 to local authorities and VAAs to develop and implement regional agencies, via:

- an RAA development fund, available to ongoing and new RAA project partnerships to support the development and implementation of RAA plans; and

- continued support from a centrally-procured delivery partner, available to support, challenge and coach RAA partnerships.

(iii) Developing the workforce

3.27 The government is committed to raising the quality of children’s social work across the board, and clarifying social workers’ responsibilities in supporting vulnerable children. Our wider social work reforms focus on the development of social workers over the course of their professional journey, from frontline practitioner to practice supervisor and then to practice leader, with a focus on the knowledge and skills required at all levels. This is part of a radical shift toward a practice-focused system that builds on the excellent practice already demonstrated by many talented social workers across England. It will result in a stronger workforce that is able to deliver improved outcomes for children and families.

3.28 In relation to adoption, developing the workforce is crucial to achieving sustainable success across the system. High quality social workers – including their ability successfully to undertake complex assessment, analysis and decision making is pivotal to a successful adoption system. Therefore we need to ensure social workers are supported to develop the knowledge and skills required in this specific area, to make the right permanence decision for every child, whether that decision is for adoption or another placement option.

3.29 Our vision for 2020 is of a system in which decisions about what is best for children who cannot be looked after by their parents are made robustly, swiftly and with confidence, by members of a highly skilled professional workforce who present comprehensive evidence and analysis of options, including in court. If a decision for adoption has been made, the adoption plan should be progressed swiftly by social workers driven by a sense of urgency and a refusal to tolerate damaging delay for the children in their care.

3.30 To achieve this, we need to support child and family social workers to develop the knowledge and skills which will enable them to:

- decide on the best permanence option for a child, based on a thorough knowledge of the evidence base for each option and understand the impact of delay on a child’s life chances;
- negotiate the legal process, including preparing thorough assessments and presenting these convincingly in court;
- identify a suitable permanent carer or arrangement, treating potential carers respectfully, providing a high quality service and being mindful of unconscious bias in decision making; and

- support families in transition to new placement arrangements and beyond, both in terms of direct work and the commissioning of services.

3.31 The knowledge and skills statement for all frontline practitioners, practice supervisors and practice leaders published to date, and the assessment and accreditation system currently being designed, focus on developing a common set of knowledge and skills and clear career pathway for social workers. These are essential to social workers working in adoption and making permanence decisions. In addition to this, we are keen to explore the specific practice knowledge and skills required in particular areas of child and family social work, as a way of helping social workers to develop depth of practice in key areas.

3.32 Therefore we will develop a robust programme to support social workers to develop or sharpen skills they need in order to make and support robust permanence decisions. We will develop training that will be recognised as the gold standard in this area across the system. The training will cover the knowledge and skills essential to social workers when making decisions to support children achieve permanence. This will set out what a child and family social worker needs to know and be able to do in order to successfully undertake the complex assessment, analysis and permanence decision making we require of them, and progress permanence plans with urgency and skill.

3.33 We will set up an expert working group to help us develop the content and delivery method for this programme with the aim of starting roll out during 2017.

3.34 The programme is likely to focus on:

- improving the quality of permanence assessments of both children and carers;
- enabling more robust and evidence-based decisions between different permanence options;
- building skills to ensure that court material is well prepared and clearly argued, and developing social workers' skills in presenting and defending cases in court effectively;
- improving the direct work skills necessary to prepare children for permanence and undertake high quality life story work, and training carers in appropriate re-parenting and therapeutic strategies;
- commitment to delivering a professional and high quality service where all parties are treated with respect;
- ensuring pragmatic and timely matching decisions, where the impact of delay is well understood and there is recognition of how unconscious bias can effect decision making; and

- improving the support provided to carers post placement, the diagnosis of support needs and the skills for the commissioning and/ - or delivery of support.

Chapter 4: Excellent practice everywhere

4.1 In the previous chapter, we set out the changes we plan to make to redesign and support the foundations on which the adoption system is built. We will change the legal framework in which adoption decisions are made, establish new Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) to deliver adoption services, and improve the skills and knowledge of the adoption workforce.

4.2 This chapter sets out what we will do, with those building blocks in place, to drive the transformation of front line practice, and bring about a step change in the quality and impact of adoption services across the country.

Delivering practice, innovation, and whole-process redesign through RAAs & VAAs

4.3 We are clear that structural change will not transform practice on its own. We want Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) to ensure they plan for how moving to a new delivery model will enable excellent practice to flourish, as well as increasing scale. Practice innovation must be at the heart of this transition. There is a real opportunity to redesign the way we do things and to spread existing excellent practice across all adoption functions to ensure we are delivering the best services for our most vulnerable children.

4.4 Given their longstanding specialist expertise and history of successful innovation and excellence, we want VAAs to lead the way in ensuring practice excellence is at the heart of the move to RAAs, and we will support them to do so.

4.5 To support innovation further we will also work with RAA projects to identify unhelpful bureaucratic rules and regulations that are standing in the way. Where there is a clear rationale, we will consider giving individual RAAs the flexibility to suspend regulations for a trial period, to test new and better ways of working. RAA projects should approach us with ideas and we can agree the best way forward.

4.6 To support the spreading and development of excellent practice in RAAs and on a national scale, we will introduce two new funding streams totalling up to £16 million over 2016-18. In addition to the financial support for the development of RAAs, outlined in Chapter 3, we will establish:

- a practice and innovation fund that will support RAA projects and individual VAAs and voluntary organisations to develop and deliver new ways of working, or to expand the reach of existing effective practice; and

- a VAA capacity building fund that will support the voluntary sector to strengthen its position as key players in RAAs, but also as individuals in a diverse national market.

4.7 In relation to redesigning practice the sorts of projects we would be interested to include (but not limited to):

- redesigning the adoption process from end to end, focussed around the child's experience and eradicating delay. This could involve removing steps that don't add value, or introducing new and more effective ways of working at various stages;
- embedding proven innovations at scale, for example scaling up a Concurrent Planning Service; and
- trialling a new innovation across an RAA, for example: new approaches to adopter-led matching; new approaches to the way social work and non-social work staff are organised and used within the organisation; new approaches to making matching decisions; or new approaches to post-adoption support.

Developing the national matching infrastructure

4.8 RAAs will provide a more suitable and efficient scale for the operation of adoption services, but there will still be a crucial need for a national infrastructure for recruitment, matching and support.

4.9 This is for two reasons:

- there are, of course, some children for whom even an RAA's larger pool of adopters will not suffice. Social workers will be expected to identify these children quickly and act promptly; and
- we need a diverse market where adopters still have choice, and diversity of provision still drives improvement and innovation.

4.10 We have already worked with the sector to increase substantially the number and range of opportunities that are available to help agencies recruit and match children and adopters who are not within the same agency. These include First4Adoption including its new e-learning functionality, National Adoption Week and the Adoption Register, Adoption Activity Days and National Exchange Days, each of which allows children to be matched with potential adopters on a national basis by initiating matches which would otherwise not be achieved. AdoptionLink has also grown rapidly over the last two years, and has enabled over 550 matches through adopter led links. It is crucial that this national matching infrastructure is maintained. We also want to see the development of

more innovation in matching and, within this, the voluntary sector developing their national offer, either through new ways of working or through targeted projects, particularly for harder to place children and for early placement.

4.11 We will also ensure that inter-agency placements operate swiftly and fairly. An inter-agency fee is paid from a local authority to another adoption agency whenever a local authority places a child with adopters who were assessed and approved by another local authority or a VAA. This is a crucial, non-profit making mechanism that enables swift matching of children across boundaries, and supports the excellent recruitment practice we see in many local authorities and VAAs across the country.

4.12 The scheme currently in place pays centrally the inter-agency fee for harder to place children (sibling groups, disabled children, black and minority ethnic children). This scheme has already had a significant impact – it has been used to support the placement of 572 children with claims worth £13.09m from 116 local authorities in the first two quarters alone. Given the promising early impact of this scheme, we now intend to continue to pay this fee until at least July 2016, when we will have gathered further evidence of impact to be able to make a decision on the future of the fund.

Speeding up stable placements by use of early placement schemes

4.13 We have challenged local authorities to double the number of children placed with their new adoptive families at the earliest possible point – halving the time they are waiting in care for the full process to be completed. This is when children are cared for by foster carers who will go on to adopt them if adoption is decided to be the best option for the child. It means children avoid delay while waiting for decisions about family reunification, and court processes, to be finalised: if the decision is not for adoption, the child has benefited from a high quality temporary placement, and if the decision is to adopt, the child has the benefit of having already lived with their adopter.

4.14 Early placement can be transformative for children. However, to work well for children, adopters, and birth parents, it needs to follow the best, tested practice to support everybody involved.

4.15 To support local authorities in this, we will develop and spread best practice to increase the use of early placement, working with experts in the field. We will also ensure early placement practice is embedded within RAAs, by prioritising this within our practice and innovation fund.

Improving support for adopters in a regionalised system

4.16 The majority of adopted children will have experienced neglect or abuse in their early childhood, which will often cause enduring problems such as attachment disorders or challenging behaviour. Adoption support is therefore an area that deserves particular focus, as good, timely support can make the difference to whether an adoptive family thrives or struggles. A key goal of regionalising adoption is improving the adoption support offer across the country and ensuring high quality services are available everywhere. This section sets out how we see that happening, but also points to some further targeted activity we think is necessary to drive improvement in this area.

4.17 The introduction of RAAs offers an opportunity radically to improve adoption support. RAAs will be better placed to develop an overarching understanding of their adopter populations support needs and to strategically plan and commission support. By 2020 we expect RAAs to have:

- regular contact with adopters who live in their area, to understand their needs and provide regular information on the support they can provide;
- staff with the skills and capacity in their workforce to undertake high quality adoption support assessments, including in partnership with health colleagues where specialist mental health assessments are required;
- strong partnership working with local health commissioners and providers, including delivering local transformation plans to implement proposals set out in the *Future in Mind* report (2015);³⁰
- systems and processes in place to make use of the Adoption Support Fund to provide therapeutic support where this meets a family's need;
- good commissioning processes in place with adoption support providers to enable them to expand to meet local needs;
- processes in place to listen to the views of adopted children and young people. enabling their voice to be heard on their individual support and to influence wider service design; and
- strong partnership working arrangements with local schools through virtual school heads and designated teachers.

³⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-mental-health-services-for-young-people>

Adoption Support Fund

4.18 The £19 million Adoption Support Fund, rolled out nationally in May 2015, has helped many adoptive families obtain the support they need. Over £16 million has been allocated to support more than 4,700 families, funding specialist assessments, various forms of therapeutic support and short breaks. In January 2016 we extended the scope of the fund so families can receive support as soon as adopted children are placed with them. Over the next four years we will:

- increase the ASF in 2016-17 to £21m and £28m in 2017-18, with further increases in every year in this Parliament;
- extend support to adopted young people up to age 21 (from April 2016);
- allow children adopted from other countries via intercountry adoptions to use the ASF (from April 2016); and
- extend support to special guardians who care for children who were previously looked after (from April 2016).

4.19 We will explore with key partners how the ASF can become sustainable in the future, with contributions from central and local government; health service; and private and charitable organisations. We will also explore how we can develop the operation of the ASF to use the funding available as effectively as possible, such as national block purchasing of types of therapies or support, or potentially having regional ASFs linked to RAAs.

Strengthening the evidence base on ‘what works’

4.20 As the provision of support services develops across the country, we need to strengthen the evidence base of ‘what works’ in terms of preventive and therapeutic adoption support. This will build on the independent evidence review of post adoption support interventions carried out by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. This work will be in partnership with the Department of Health and supported by an ASF Research Steering Group, made up of voluntary sector, health and research partners. We will also continue to work with other stakeholders and adopters to identify research gaps and proposals to address those gaps.

Developing specialist mental health provision for adopted children

4.21 The DfE will work closely with the Department of Health (DH) and NHS England on the transformation of mental health services for children and young people as set out in the *Future in Mind* report (2015).³¹ This will include:

- By summer 2016 setting up an expert group to advise DfE and DH ministers on new care pathways for adopted and looked after children. These will set out best practice to be followed in the treatment/support of these children. The experts will be drawn from across the health, social care and education sectors, with input from children, young people, carers and families with experience of the care system; and
- Exploring, with NHS England and other key stakeholders, options for developing models of care to meet the mental health needs of adopted children, along with other vulnerable groups. This will include assessing whether centres of excellence would improve access and support, taking into account the importance of local delivery, and how those centres would link to RAAs.

Improving the capacity of early years and education professionals to meet the needs of adopted children

4.22 Educational attainment is critical to children's long term outcomes, but despite the entitlements we have given adopted children, many still struggle to achieve highly and make expected progress at school.

4.23 Getting a good start is crucial. Adopted children aged 2 years old can get free early education and childcare. For adopted children aged 3-and 4-years old the early years pupil premium (EYPP) gives providers of early years education extra funding to support them. We will identify and spread good practice in early years settings. We will also develop a guide for early years professionals working with adopted children.

4.24 For school-age adopted children we will:

- Use legislation to expand the role of virtual schools heads and consider how designated teachers can continue to support children who have left care under an adoption order;
- encourage and spread best practice around the use of Pupil Premium Plus to maximise the educational outcomes of adopted children;

³¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-mental-health-services-for-young-people>

- support voluntary sector organisations to develop and highlight effective practice including raising awareness and understanding in schools;
- develop guides on education for adopted children for schools and parents;
and
- explore including 'understanding the impact of trauma and loss on children's ability to learn' in initial teacher training.

Chapter 5: Sharpening accountability to ensure delivery

5.1 The previous chapters have described fundamental reform of the building blocks of the adoption system, and a renewed focus on excellent practice and innovation in the delivery of adoption services. Making sure we have the right accountability and performance management systems in place will be crucial to making a reality of these ambitions.

Accountability under the reformed system

5.2 We set out in *Children's social care reform – a vision for change* (2016) how we want to see all children's social care organisations being well governed and held intelligently to account.³²

5.3 In recent years we have seen the emergence of new organisational and geographical models of delivery, such as Children's Social Care Trusts and the new 'combined authority' model. The development of RAAs is another example of this kind of structural innovation, with the potential to create more appropriate conditions for excellent practice and innovation to flourish.

5.4 Our plans to regionalise adoption services of course put this sector at the leading edge of innovative new delivery models for children's social care services. However, the development of new delivery structures means reconsidering the way that adoption services are held to account. Clear and effective accountability needs to be central to a regionalised system to ensure it is delivering the best services for some of our most vulnerable children.

5.5 High quality and relevant data should be at the centre of accountability. Therefore we will develop a clear set of meaningful data to monitor the performance of RAAs including a focus on the timeliness and performance for harder to place children as key indicators, and a greater emphasis on adoption support. We will set out this data in new RAA 'scorecards' to ensure clear accountability.

5.6 Ofsted will also continue to have a key role inspecting adoption services. We are working closely with Ofsted to design a new approach which is appropriate in a regionalised system. We are clear that local authorities, voluntary and regional adoption agencies will all need to be inspected in some way, but recognise that it would be

³² [Children's social care reform: a vision for change, January 2016](#)

disproportionate for the regional adoption agency to be inspected every time one of the local authorities involved is inspected.

5.7 It is important, however, that a link is made so that local authorities are held to account on how they are overseeing and managing the performance of their regional adoption agencies in a way that ensures the best possible outcomes for local children.

5.8 We also want to see a revised inspection framework which supports strong innovation and evidence based practice. We have started to discuss this with Ofsted and would welcome views from local authority and voluntary sector partners on how best to achieve our vision.

The ongoing role of the Adoption Leadership Board

5.9 After nearly 18 months the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) is an established part of the adoption system landscape – an innovative example of sector leadership informed and supported with a robust dataset, a strong and respected chair and commitment from ministers and policy makers. There is a good tradition of radical, open policy-making on adoption – notably the development of a new adopter approval process by system leaders in 2012.

5.10 The government now aims to embed its adoption reform programme through a new policy focus on regionalisation and service consolidation – in a challenging context for local government and the voluntary adoption sector. This means that maximising momentum from the sector for implementation is essential.

5.11 Therefore we will strengthen the role of the ALB to ensure it is having maximum impact across its functions, which are to:

- collect and analyse data to inform, support and challenge policy makers and national leaders;
- engage regional leaders in policy questions and provide visible system leadership;
- support regional leaders in the implementation of the adoption reform agenda; and
- share good practice in implementing the reforms – particularly on regionalisation and service consolidation – and perhaps publish opinions and guidance where helpful.

The role of adopter voice as a driver of reform

5.12 Adopters are best placed to understand the needs of their children and their insight is invaluable in shaping the services they use. The views and experiences of adopted children and young people also need to be understood and taken into account. Supporting local authorities to engage more effectively with adoptive families is a key plank in government policy for improving adoption services.

5.13 We want to see local partnership that recognises and builds on parents' expertise, where professionals and parents really listen to and learn from each other in ways that are valued and adopted children are supported and encouraged to contribute. Adoptive parents must be more than a sounding board, but influence the decision making of professionals. If adoptive parents are working in true partnership with organisations they need to be part of the decision-making processes that shape and build the services they access.

5.14 We want adoption services which respond to:

- individual choices and people's real life complex needs and give adopters the power of choice about what services they receive and how they receive them; and
- the voice of local adopters and children and young people on how improvements in the quality and timeliness of adoption services can be obtained.

5.15 To ensure this, we have established an expert advisory group specifically to inform adoption support policy; and we are supporting the voluntary sector organisation to build on their work in this area. In particular:

- Adoption UK will establish an Adoption Support User Group, made up of Adoption UK adopter champions and adopters from the Adoption Support Expert Advisory Group to inform the development of national adoption policy and programmes. The group will meet quarterly with officials and annually with the Minister for Children and Families;
- Adoption UK will provide support to the partnerships of local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies as they transition to regional adoption agencies, ensuring that adopter voice is embedded within development and implementation plans; and
- Coram will extend the work of 'The Adoptables' to promote the views and experiences of young people who are adopted. After Adoption's TALKadoption project will help adopted young people to get together and

talk about what adoption is like for them and how support can be improved.
These projects will help inform the development of government policy.

Conclusion: Delivering the vision

Our commitments

The next four years offer an exciting opportunity to reshape adoption and, in doing so, make sure we deliver for adopted children and their families. To deliver our vision, we are committed to the following:

Legislative changes

- Legislating to ensure quality and stability of care are prioritised and properly considered.

Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA)

- Providing funding and support via a RAA development fund, with up to £14m available across 2016-18 to support the implementation of RAAs; and
- Continuing support from a centrally-procured delivery partner, to assist, challenge and coach RAA partnerships.

Workforce

- Developing a robust continuous professional development programme to enable social workers to develop the skills they need to make and support robust permanence decisions.
- Setting up an Expert Working Group to help us develop the content and delivery method for a CPD programme for roll out from April 2017.
- Undertaking a formal consultation of the proposed knowledge and skills statement for social workers whose job is achieving permanence in summer 2016.

Research

- Commissioning an independent summary of the relevant research evidence, for use by local authority managers, social workers and judges, which focuses on comparative outcomes of different placement options.

Inter-agency fee

- Continuing to pay the inter-agency fee until July 2016 when we will review the position.

Early placement

- Developing and spreading best practice to increase the use of early placement, working with experts in the field.

Innovation and practice excellence

- Introducing two new funding streams for RAAs, voluntary adoption agencies and voluntary organisations, with up to £16 million across 2016-18.

Adoption support

- Increasing the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) in 2016-17 to £21 million and to £28 million in 2017-18.
- Extending ASF support from April 2016 to adopted young people up to age 21; to children adopted from care in other countries via intercountry adoptions; and to special guardians who care for children who were previously looked after.
- Strengthening the evidence base of ‘what works’ in terms of therapeutic adoption support.

Mental Health

- Setting up an expert group to advise Department for Education and Department of Health ministers on new care pathways for adopted and looked after children.
- Developing models of care to meet the mental health needs of adopted children, and other vulnerable groups.

Education

- Use legislation to expand the role of virtual schools heads and consider how designated teachers can continue to support children who have left care under an adoption order.
- Encouraging and spreading best practice in the use of Pupil Premium Plus.
- Supporting voluntary sector organisations to develop and highlight effective practice in schools.
- Considering including ‘understanding the impact of trauma and loss on children’s ability to learn’ in initial teacher training.

Next steps

We are keen to hear views on these proposals. The Adoption Leadership Board will be asking Regional Adoption Boards to discuss the details set out above during March and April, and feed back views to the Board in advance of their next meeting.

In parallel, we would be keen to hear the views of Local Family Justice Boards and will collate these via the national Family Justice Board.

We will later this year consult on the continuous professional development and the knowledge and skills statement proposals before moving ahead with commissioning and roll out.

Finally, adopters are best placed to understand the needs of their children; and their insight is invaluable in shaping the services they use and telling us whether we are getting it right. We have brought adopters into national policy making through an expert advisory group, and are providing funding to develop adopter voice groups in new RAAs. We would welcome views from adopters and have asked Adoption UK, who sit on the Adoption Leadership Board, to collect and collate feedback.



Department
for Education

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Project Transition from 2015-16 to 2016-17

GUIDANCE NOTES

1. The information you provide in this template will help us assess the progress that you have made and will act as a gateway to further funding in 2016-17, and inform learning needs across the whole regional Adoption Agencies programme. We will make decisions about future funding as quickly as possible and let you know outcomes in May.
2. Please read the explanatory text in the shaded boxes carefully before completing your response. Answer as clearly and fully as you can. Check with your coach if in doubt about how to respond – they know your project and are there to support you. Your DofE lead is also available to help you. **Please could you complete this transition plan as fully as possible and share with your coach for comment by 24 March 2016. Please return a final version to RAA.mailbox@education.gsi.gov.uk by 4 April 2016.**
3. If there are any contextual issues that you would like us to be aware of then please set these out in your covering email.
4. We don't expect you to have worked out all of the detail across all of the sections, but we do expect you to show that you have made good measurable progress since you started work on the project and that you have thought through your plans for the coming year.
5. We are expecting projects to have made different levels of progress by the end of March 2016. We are not expecting all projects to have a finalised model for delivery, nor all of the specifics worked out. In the plan we want to understand how far you have progressed as an individual project in the last few months and what is next for 2016-17. We want to see that good progress has been made, and want to ensure that you are making transformative change, with the right level of ambition and that you're taking the time to do this properly in a sustainable way. Cabinet and Trustee Boards do not have to have signed off the preferred delivery model by the end of March, but, where possible, we would like to see a plan to indicate when this will happen.
6. We want plans that are high quality, concise and clear about what you have done so far and what is next for the project. What we will be particularly looking for is that:
 - a. you have a clear picture of what stage the project has got to from the work you've done over the past six months
 - b. you are building on this work going forward
 - c. there is ambition in the work that you have done and are planning to do
 - d. the work is being appropriately thought through and developed so that the end result is sustainable
 - e. there is clear VAA involvement so far in the work and a commitment to ensuring Voluntary Adoption Agencies will continue to be involved in the project going

forward and the RAA itself – both as integral partners in the RAAs and as providers of services

f. you are ensuring that excellent practice is at the heart of the project

7. To help ensure practice excellence is at the heart of your project, as set out in section 4 of the Transition Plan, we would like you to nominate champions for each practice area. This will help us develop the focus on practice and ensure that we can link specific policy ambition and developments with the projects in a targeted way. Of course, we would expect all members of the project to be considering developing excellent practice, with the project lead and sponsor having a thorough overview.
8. Use Arial 12 Black font and stick to the word limit.

Financial Plan

9. Please use the embedded template on page 10, which is based on the one used during the grant funding agreement discussions. From this plan, we want to understand the funding you need in 2016-17 and then we will have discussions about what's available from the central RAAs programme budget. At this stage, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to cover all your costs.
10. We know that the financial plan sign off process took a while last time, which we appreciate was frustrating, but hopefully you now have a good sense of the level of detail we need to sign plans off. Please ensure you provide this and where you are unsure please get in touch. Where you don't know costs yet, please make that clear and provide an explanation.
11. The purpose of the template is to help us understand your financial planning and assess whether your costs are robust and value for money. Please set out your costs clearly and complete the assumptions column. This is particularly important for those costs which are estimates.
12. Please round figures to the nearest pound.
13. Please ensure that your financial plan only covers the financial year 2016-17 and that it does not include any existing and future running costs of adoption services.
14. A reminder about some of specifics that we set out to you last year:
 - a. Travel and Expenses policy – please note that the Department will reimburse for reasonable travelling and hotel expenses wholly and reasonably incurred in connection with the delivery of this grant. You can only claim for travel and expenses in line with this policy.
 - b. Government efficiency controls restricts spend on advertising, marketing, communications and consultancy (not professional services), or with the maintenance, technical development, updating of existing websites or for the development/creation of new websites unless agreed in advance with the Department. We will be required to seek exemption on spend in these areas for the RAAs grant programme. Please therefore keep these costs to a minimum

and note that you may have to further amend your plans if exemption for your costs is not agreed.

- c. Please do not include contingency costs as we will not provide funding for these costs.
- d. Capital costs – the Department will consider costs for a single item of capital of up to £2000. This includes items such as laptops.
- e. Telephone and mobile costs – if you have budgeted for these costs, you will need to set out how these costs are apportioned and attributable to your funded project. These costs will have to be audited and auditable. The department will cover reasonable costs for handsets or mobile contracts that offer value for money. This would exclude costs for the very latest handsets or tariffs for high usage.
- f. Payment to backfill roles – We will not pay for time which an individual should ordinarily be expected to commit to a project as part of their normal role. As a rule of thumb, where an individual is spending less than 0.2 FTE of their time on the project, and the rest of the time has a role within the Local Authority or VAA which would legitimately involve engaging in the RAAs project, we would not expect to pay for backfill. We will consider exemptions to this rule of thumb where projects provide us with a robust rationale.

Project Plan

- 15. We appreciate that projects will have their own project planning templates but we would be grateful if you would use the embedded template on page 10. This is to provide consistency when assessing all projects.
- 16. We know you won't know everything that will happen in 2016-17 at this stage and that plans may change but please set out as much as you do know at this time. Please provide as much clear and detailed information in the activity section that you can. This will help us understand the stages within your project. Use the blue shaded rows to describe the activity at a high level e.g. stakeholder involvement and provide more detailed information on the steps to deliver that activity in the rows below.
- 17. Some activities may be delivered in sequence but may also happen in parallel so delivery points may overlap.
- 18. Remember that we want you to be ambitious in the speed of delivery but at the same time realistic and careful in ensuring that you take the time to ensure the project leads to sustainable and innovative change. Please think carefully about timescales and ensure that they include time for things like signing off of documentation; stakeholders to respond to consultation; holiday periods; tendering processes etc.

RAA

Transition Plan Template

Section 1: Contact details	
Name of RAAs:	Yorkshire and Humber Regional Adoption Services
Lead contact	Nic Haughton
Organisation and position	Y&H Regionalisation Project Manager
Email address	Nic.haughton@northlincs.gov.uk
Phone number	07881 311718
Who is involved in your RAA?	
Please list the organisations involved in your RAAs project.	
Voluntary Adoption Agencies	Adopters For Adoption
	After Adoption
	Adoption Matters
	Adoption UK
	Barnardo's Yorkshire
	Doncaster Children's Trust
	PAC UK
	SSAFA
	Yorkshire Adoption Agency
Local Authority Agencies	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
	Bradford Metropolitan District Council
	Borough Council of Calderdale
	East Riding of Yorkshire Council
	Kingston upon Hull City Council
	Kirklees Metropolitan Council
	Leeds City Council
	North Lincolnshire Council
	North East Lincolnshire Council
	North Yorkshire County Council
	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
	Sheffield City Council
	Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
	City of York Council

Where have you got to so far?

We are keen to understand the progress you have made i.e. the steps you have taken to get to this point and the lessons that have been learnt along the way.

Section 2: What have you done and where are you now?

Project summary – where are you now?

This section should summarise the current position of the project at the end of March 2016. It should set out what decisions have been made about your RAA. For example, if you have decided on a specific delivery model, what that is. If you have not decided on this, please set out which options are being considered and how you will reach a conclusion on this. This can be high level as there is a more detailed section on this below.

In completing this section, please refer to the plans you submitted in December and set out whether you have done what you intended to do and if not, what has changed and why.

The Yorkshire and Humber project includes three independent Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) and a central 'Hub'. The RAAs will regionalise adoption to a much larger geographic footprint. The Hub will be a central coordinating body to broaden that scope further and create economies of scale across the fifteen local authorities and Voluntary Agencies in the Y&H region.

The energy from all partners to make this unique opportunity lead to improved services has enabled a great deal to be achieved to this point. An effective governance structure and momentum has been established involving all LAs, VAs, Adopters, Adopted Teens and others. The model provides both flexibility and scalability and is a good platform to build on the best practice from local authorities and the VA Sector and better realise the potential of service users as delivery partners.

Partnership

1. Adopters and Young People are active members of the Regional Project Board and initiatives to deliver the integration of adopters as partners in the operational delivery of services are being developed.
2. A range of partnership models between Local Authorities, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies are being explored to ensure best use of the unique qualities of each sector/contributor. Additional ways of supporting future partnership are being planned through the introduction of a Social Impact Bond pilot as additional funding source is in train.
3. Wider stakeholder engagement has been good at all levels and perspectives and there is an increasing understanding about how this model can provide a shared way of improving services.

Management

1. Project leaders and managers have driven the development phase forward through the Regional Project Board, coordinating the different groups and areas:
 - a. Three Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) project boards, (North and Humber, South, West) have or have nearly completed appraisals of delivery models which best support the characteristics of each area but within the context of the regional vision.

- b. The Voluntary Agencies (VA) have established Y&H VA Alliance board (6 Voluntary Adoption Agencies and 2 Adoption Support Agencies) and has developed a coordinated Alliance “offer” and joint working protocols.
- c. The Regional Youth Council, (Adopted Teens) is defining what a good service means from a teen perspective
- d. The Regional Adopter Forum is developing quality standards for each stage of the adoption journey. This is being done in parallel to a Regional service delivery task group looking at the characteristics which each type of service should reflect.
- e. Regional scoping and data building is in place for HR, Finance, IT, Governance and Comms which the boards will take forward individually. The Adopter Forum is developing quality standards which will contribute to policy and practice development over the coming year

Leadership

1. The Regional Directors of Children’s Services (DCS) group has made a clear commitment to funding the Regional Hub and to the integration of VA sector (individually and as an Alliance). DCS sponsors have been identified for each RAA and A VA Chief Executive Sponsor has been identified for the region to mirror the role of the DCS sponsors.
2. Improving outcomes for children has driven the choice of delivery model for each new RAA, laying the foundations for Statements of Purpose going forward.
3. An independent evaluation of the long standing Y&H consortium has been undertaken to ensure lessons from this inform forward plans for the new Regional Hub.

Further work

1. To define the respective functions and relationships between the Hub and RAAs.
2. To identify ways to integrate Local Authority’s and Voluntary Agencies as equal partners so as to provide the highest quality and diversity of services and best value for money.
3. Complete the modelling and agreement for RAA finance, staffing and IT systems.

Progress so far – what have you done?

Please describe:

- What you have done since your project began to get you to where you are now. This should be based on your project plan submitted in January as part of your grant funding agreement and should set out specific activity that has taken place. For example, you should include that you’ve taken legal advice and include a brief summary about what on.
- What, if anything, have you implemented already as part of your RAAs e.g. any practice changes?
- What, if anything, would you do differently and what are the current development and implementation challenges for your RAAs?

The solid foundations described above have drawn on the energy and collaboration of an enormous number of people with different perspectives, roles and skills. This is an inclusive, whole-region project.

Keeping the Y&H Regional Vision

1. The independently chaired Regional Project Board has met monthly and is very well attended, and includes representatives from each RAAs project board, the Regional Adoption Leadership Board lead, Voluntary Adoption Alliance, Adopters Forum, Adopted Teens Council, CAFCASS, with others attending for specific topics.
2. Six thematic task groups (HR, IT, Governance, Comms, Finance and Service Delivery) have met regularly to undertake scoping and modelling work, begin implementing (Comms) and defining standards (Service Delivery) in conjunction with the Adopter Forum. All groups have geographical and “perspective” representation and report monthly to the Regional Project Board.
3. Regional meetings have been held with Lead Members, Independent Adoption Panel Chairs, Medical Advisers, CAMHS commissioners, Unions. All other stakeholders are represented on the Regional Project Board.
4. An effective regional online “Huddle” (similar to the DofE Info Hub) has been established to support comms and information sharing.
5. University partnerships (East Anglia and Loughborough) and a research plan has been agreed going forward – see S4
6. The role of the Hub is developing, with an agreement already in place for it to undertake some functions and 3 year Local Authority funding commitment in place. Negotiations are in train for the business management for the Hub to be transferred from the current Local Authority (North Lincs Council) to one of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies. (Barnardo’s)

Meeting Local Need

1. Each RAA board has met monthly and includes representation from relevant Local Authorities, Voluntary Agencies Alliance, adopters and adoptees, pulling in specialist advisers as required. Each has conducted stakeholder engagement activities, differently according to individual plans and area characteristics.
2. Options appraisals have been based on the following design principles
 - a. Single management structure
 - b. Reporting mechanisms back to all accountable member organisations
 - c. Provide or commission recruitment and assessment, family finding and adoption support
 - d. One host organisation (new or existing)
 - e. Improve timely adoption placements, ensure accurate matching, provide quality support
 - f. Optimal standardisation of approach to service delivery within
 - g. Regional/Sub regional planning and coordination <> localised delivery
 - h. Unified support functions (administration, HR, Finance, payroll, IT etc.)
 - i. commissioning which will improve outcomes for children and provides value for money

The Voluntary Sector

1. Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies have met monthly and formed the Y&H Voluntary Agencies (VA) Alliance. It has appointed an ASA Chief Exec as VA Alliance sponsor and developed a coordinated Alliance ‘service offer’ and protocols to hold the tension between competition <> collaboration.
2. The Alliance is represented on the RAA boards as well as the Regional Project Board and has worked up a proposal for a Voluntary Agencies development role for the transition phase – See S4.

Adopters Forum

1. Including adopters from across the region, the forum has met monthly and is

developing a set of adoption service policy statements/quality standards which will complement the Service Quality task group above to act as a template for RAAs and Hub service development.

2. The Forum is represented on the Regional Project Board and has worked up a proposal for an Adopter development role for the transition phase – see S4.

AT_ID (Adopted Teens ID)

1. The youth council of the above has met bi-monthly to develop a range of ways of informing providers about what kind of services they want to see going forward.
2. AT_ID is represented on the Regional Project Board and they have worked up a development role to extend and deepen the voice on Adopted Teens in service development

Implementation so far

1. Implementation of some aspects of new combined services before actual start dates include adopter training, performance data sharing, adopter preparation groups and some support initiatives.
2. Practitioner level workshops to identify and best practice and protocol examples.
3. An Approved Provider List is now in place to extend the range of support providers.

Key roles and involvement of stakeholders

Please describe:

- Governance arrangements – what arrangements are in place to drive the project forwards?
- Who is the project sponsor, who else is in a key role?
- Please provide an organogram of governance arrangements and key roles, from project sponsor to operational leads.
- What role have Voluntary Adoption Agencies played in the development so far?
- How have you brought in the adopter voice?
- How have you brought in the voice of the child?

The role the VA sector, Adopters and Adopted Teens have played in developing this project has been central. This has brought an energy which helps ensure that its focus is on outcomes for children and has strongly influenced the way in which its governance has been designed.

Governance and Leadership

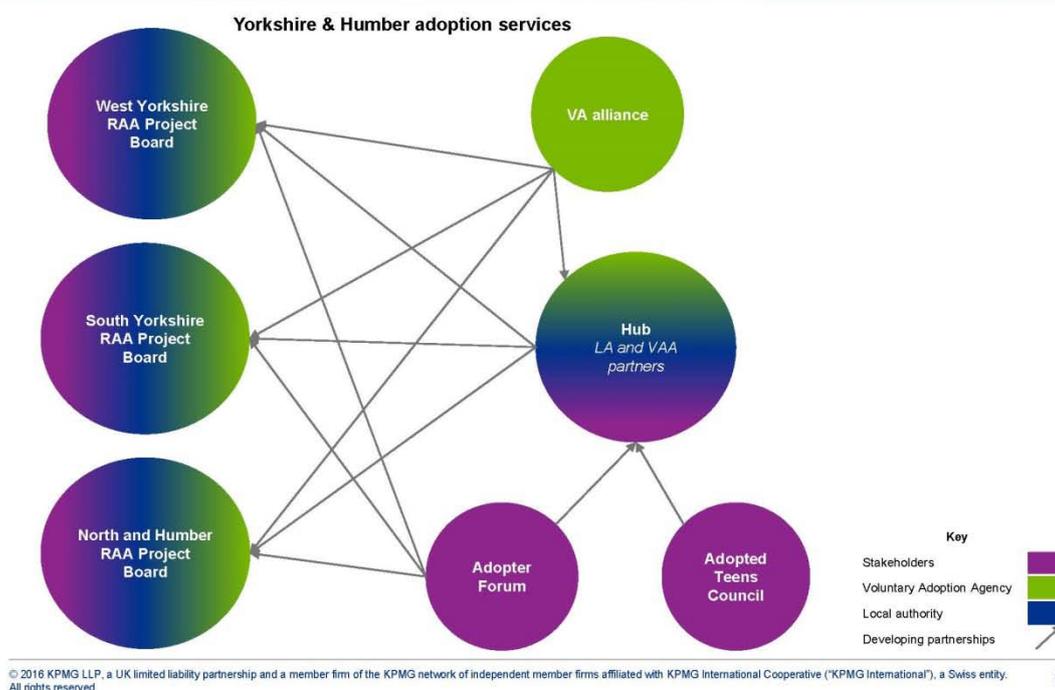
1. All project boards are currently chaired by Assistant Directors of Children's Services (AD) or independently by a "senior figurehead", and have memberships described above. They have terms of reference which define their purpose, accountability, intended outcomes with individual project plans.
2. Each RAA board has project manager and lead roles which will merge over the next 6 months. The transition plan includes the appointment of Heads of Service for each RAA from October who will take over the project lead role from October to ensure a smooth transition into the implementation phase.

3. Each RAA has a DCS sponsor who liaises with respective DCS colleagues for their area, ensuring projects are progressing as planned. They will take over chairing RAA project boards from June. To help reinforce the significance and the influence of the Independent Sector, the Voluntary Agencies Alliance have also identified a Sponsor
4. The Regional Project Board will continue to be chaired independently of Local Authorities and Voluntary Agencies over the transition period. It will oversee the direction of the project as a whole, coordinating and influencing the development of the RAAs and defining sustainable relationships between the RAAs and the Hub. The role of the current Consortium Executive Board and the Regional Adoption Leadership Board (RALB) will be integrated with the Regional Project Board

Organogram

This describes the structure which will be in place until the new RAAs are set up.

Transition phase organogram



Learning

Please describe:

- What has gone well so far? This should consider your individual project and the programme as a whole.
- What has gone less well so far? This should consider your individual project and the programme as a whole.
- How have you taken this learning on board and what will you do differently going forward?
- What aspects of this learning do you think it would be useful to share with other

What has gone Well:

1. A relationship of **trust and confidence** between agencies was already established through the long standing consortia arrangements in the region and this has been evident in the high level of support, innovative thinking and challenge within the Regional Project Board.
2. Wide spread and **infectious energy and commitment** has been evident in all the Project Boards, Alliance, Adopter Forum and Adopted Teens council, in teams and stakeholder groups more widely, to use this opportunity to make real improvements to outcomes for children.
3. Bringing in some **independent project leads / managers** and external consultancy for modelling, has added ideas and rigour. The inputs from the coach, masterclasses and learning events have supplemented this.
4. The **flexibility for the region to design a service to fit its own characteristics** and needs has been very welcome and has encouraged a bottom up self - assessment and an approach which builds on strengths. It has also allowed space for adopters and adoptees to be much more apparent at all levels.

What has Gone less well:

1. Direction and advice from the DofE on several fronts have come late in the process: eg: earlier definition of DCS role sponsors would have helped clarity and senior leadership sooner; master classes which would have been more relevant and forward planning easier if advertised earlier.
2. There has been a growing sense of partnership between Local Authorities and VAs and a real determination to find sustainable models which work for both sectors. Clear national direction from DofE, based on authoritative legal advice would have been, and would still be, very helpful.

Learning

1. Engagement of stakeholders is time consuming but vital.
2. Senior leadership is key to having a sense of direction and needs to be in place from the start of the planning phase
3. Finding project time from already overstretched jobs is less effective than engaging designated posts or services for the project.

Detailed design of the RAAs – what you know so far

The following section requests much more detail about your RAAs. It explores what you know about what your RAAs will look like when it's up and running, rather than details about your project and getting to implementation. There is **no expectation** that this section will be completed in full. You may not know all of the answers at this stage, but where you do have any detail about your thinking so far then please do record it. This section does not include word limits as we expect some projects to be able to provide more detail than others.

Where you don't yet know the answers to these questions, please outline the steps you will take to get there in your project plan (see section 4).

Delivery Model

Please describe what you know at this point about the following:

- The options analysis approach you have taken. This should include what steps have been taken so far to come to any decisions about a preferred delivery model and if no decisions have been made yet, what options are being considered and how you will reach a conclusion on this.
- The scope of the RAAs and an explicit statement about what services will be delivered by the RAAs; will remain in the Local Authorities; and will be commissioned from other organisations. This should include who delivers and how they deliver recruitment, family finding and matching and support functions.
- The child's and adopter's journey through the Local Authorities, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and RAAs. This should be provided in the format that you have used to capture this information.
- How you will ensure your RAAs focuses on excellent practice and improved outcomes for children.
- How will Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies be involved in your RAAs

The overarching principles of this project the from the start has been to develop:

A LISTENING service with children's and adopter's voices at its centre.
A LEARNING service driven by broad, innovative thinking and skill development
A RESPONSIVE service planned regionally and delivered locally.

1. The region will capitalise on its size and collaborative culture to achieve this through its central coordinating Hub which will be shaped by the needs of the 3 RAAs. Local Authorities and the Voluntary Alliance will be Strategic and Delivery partners, using the VA sector as an Alliance and as individual agencies, to maximise value, ambition and national reach
2. The Regional Adopter Forum and Adopted Teens Council will be central to delivery as well as planning
3. Sustainability will be achieved through an inclusive approach - public, voluntary, private and community - which makes greater use of the 'adopter community' potential, widens access to additional funding sources, eg social impact bonds and developing economies of scale through joined up and shared approaches at all levels.

Hub

1. The Hub will lead or be involved in adopter recruitment, matching, support, adopter and staff training, performance data analysis, adopter forum and teens council. Future functions will be determined over the transition phase.
2. The Hub will be the primary vehicle to ensure a sustainable Voluntary Sector through establishing a Local Authority/RAA/Voluntary Agency Joint Venture

Company or Long Term Funding Agreement. Either will include contractual relationships for services with the three RAAs – and possibly others.

The region plans, with Health colleagues, to develop a Centre of Excellence, which will run alongside the Hub with the intention of developing

3. Specialist assessment and interventions with NHS and independent providers
4. Research and learning with university partners,
5. Regional signposting and support coordination
6. Social impact bond and other private investment initiatives
7. Merging of provision (eg recruitment and support) which can meet the dual aims of improving quality and best value.

RAA Delivery Models

1. West will be Local Authority (Leeds) hosted
2. South are considering Hosting by and existing VAA (Doncaster CT), a new VAA or a combined Local Authority hosted agency.
3. North and Humber will be Local Authority (Joint York and North Yorkshire) hosted, with possibility of a merge with an existing VAA.

Scope:

1. Permanence planning, family finding and matching will be managed in combination between Local Authority, RAA and Hub to maximise timeliness, choice and expertise. Local Authority ADMs who will retain formal decision making for individual children's plans and matches.
2. RAAs will recruit and assess adopters, with marketing and front door information and advice from the Hub.
3. The Hub will enhance the current regional register of children and families and link to the national register and other national matching platforms to support a clear "**Best Match**" policy.
4. RAAs will provide or commission adoption support services through the Hub or wider as required. This is an area of significant potential for increasing access, quality, consistency and economies of scale.
5. Other areas of service currently undertaken by the LA teams are being considered for RAAs. Eg: non-agency adoption work; special guardianship support post order; access to adoption records.

Voluntary Agencies involvement;

See Governance and Accountability below

Child and Adopters journeys:

The Adopter Forum and a regional Service Delivery task group, with support from the Youth Council, are producing quality standards for each stage of the adoption journey. These will be used over the next 3 months as a template for services to define pathways for adopters and children. This will include early identification and permanence planning, "**Best Match**" family finding practice and adopter led matching, through to introductions, early support and ongoing support at all levels from universal to crisis and specialist.

Practice excellence:

1. Developing and maintaining innovative and really effective practice is one of the most exciting aspects of this project and has been central in its design.
2. The Hub provides a platform for a **centre of learning and innovation**, allied to the development of a Centre of Excellence, jointly with Health colleagues by:
 - a. Developing specialist staff training in existing staff groups and **reviewing the**

- skill sets** needed by staff at different points in the adoption journey.
- b. Becoming a mechanism to coordinate student placements, particularly to increase understanding in front line services about the **long term impact of trauma on children**, (knowledge which is particularly well developed in adoption services).
 - c. The project recognises some of the **key shifts in social work accreditation** within the Professional Capability Framework and is keen to develop 2 way learning partnerships
 - d. Building on **existing practice initiatives** in in Local Authorities and Voluntary Agencies, such as Early Permanence, PAUSE, Family Group Conferencing, “specific child” family finding, school attachment awareness, Child on Parent Violence support, Restorative practice, etc.
 - e. The Y&H region would be interested in setting up a pilot “**Innovations Unit**” as envisaged in “Adoption, A vision for Change”, probably based in the Hub.
3. The project will seek permission to develop **alternative decision making** arrangements without referring matters to Adoption Panels and to develop alternative Quality Assurance systems which increase speed and reduce cost.
 4. The plan contains a research proposal for the transition stage and beyond, in partnership with the University of East Anglia and Loughborough University. This has 3 dimensions
 - a. Analysing and improving the use of data sets to improve planning and outcomes.
 - b. A longitudinal study of families’ pre and post regionalisation. We hope, with continued funding, that this might be the basis of the first large study of adoptive families through all stages or adoptive family life from placement to adulthood and beyond.
 - c. Action research supporting this organisational transition.
 5. Each RAA is identifying Practice Champions who will coordinate across the region to maximise sharing.
 6. The Hub will coordinate and develop the use of individual and trend performance data to support rigorous tracking and service planning.

Governance and accountability

Please set out what you know, if anything, about how governance and accountability will work within the RAAs and between RAAs and Local Authorities/Voluntary Adoption Agencies for when the RAAs delivers services. This should include any thinking that has been done so far. If possible, it should set out:

- A description of the governance arrangements proposed for the RAAs. This should not include governance arrangements for the project.
- An outline of how partners will hold the RAAs to account.

The model of 3 RAAs and a Hub, in a region this size, offers enormous scope for economies of scale, practice sharing and innovation at all points and levels, whilst supporting a “local feel” and provider/user relationships which meet individual child and family needs.

Hub

1. The existing Yorkshire and Humber Adoption Consortium will transfer to the Hub which will have a Partnership Board that comprises RAAs, Voluntary Agencies Alliance, Adopters and Adopted Teens.
2. It will be run by a Voluntary Adoption Agency as a long term funded Business

Contract or as free standing Jointly Venture Company. In either case it will be accountable to a board made up of the three RAAs and Voluntary Agencies Alliance.

3. The Hub will provide support and coordination for RAAs and others and will commission services from the VA Alliance or its members, singly or jointly, and from Local Authorities and other providers as required.

RAAs

1. All RAAs will be governed by boards which are characterised by Local Authority and Voluntary Agency members with equal influence over strategic direction and will appoint a Head of service.
2. All boards will be accountable to their member agencies to deliver performance. Outcomes which will be defined by contracts between the individual Local Authorities, Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Adoption Support Agencies and the RAAs.

RAAs Funding (up and running costs, not implementation funding)

Please set out what you know, if anything, about the running costs and financial model of the RAAs. This should include any thinking that has been done so far. This section is about costs for when the RAAs is up and running. It should not include implementation costs for 2016-17 as these will be included in your financial plan.

For example, what do you know about:

- The projected financial costs of the new RAAs
- Finances that will underpin the new RAAs, who will provide these and the level of agreement obtained about this
- the long-term funding model to sustain the RAAs in the medium to long term, including funding for any pension liabilities
- When/if the investment being made will be paid back through efficiency savings
- Understanding of working capital required for the new RAAs, redundancy and pension liabilities, and tax implications.

Value for Money and Equal Partnership

1. A key factor in deciding governance models has been ensuring cost savings from this are used to improve services and avoid an increase in organisational costs. Additional Pension and VAT costs are potentially significant in some models considered which introduces a tension with the wish to establish **equal** partnerships between public and voluntary sector bodies.
2. Governance arrangements which allow both factors to co-exist are being explored and there is a determination that with a **child-centred approach and openness to new thinking**, this can be found.

Spending

Current Y&H spend on Adoption service in total is in the region of £28m and

initial modelling exercises indicate that there is scope for efficiencies in the mid to long term.

Funding

Formulas are being developed on 3 fronts:

1. Funding the RAAs based on unit costs, (with help from the work of Loughborough University's cost calculator work) and the different levels of individual Local Authority current spend. Further work over the next 6 months is required to unpick the detail and reach agreement
2. Common financial support levels and policies within each RAAs, and where possible, across the region.
3. Funding the Hub: funding has been agreed for an initial 3 yrs. This will evolve as future decisions about its functions are made.

Additional work on capital costs, including IT, premises and equipment, will begin once decisions about delivery models are confirmed.

Other Factors

1. On all fronts, the transition from current spend will need to be done in stages to ensure other key Local Authority services are not disadvantaged and a timeline will be developed as this work progresses.
2. Funding for additional capacity in the project team and externally is included in the financial plan attached to this plan

HR and staffing implications

Please set out what you know, if anything, about the HR and staffing implications for the RAAs. Again, this should include thinking so far. If possible, it should set out:

- A description of how the new organisation will be staffed and managed and the capability anticipated for each team.
- A proposed organogram for the staffing structure.
- The equality implications of the transfer to the RAAs to ensure compliance with the Equality Act.
- Consideration of any resource or staffing implications, particularly TUPE and pension implications.
- Approach to engage/consult with staff/unions.

Staff

1. Staff currently employed by the consortium will transfer to the Hub before the end of June 2016 to help with service continuity – regional register, performance information, adopter training and existing regional contracts.
2. Work to understand existing staff numbers, current roles and job descriptions is well underway, closely linked to the financial modelling above. The West are examining levels of training and skill sets required by staff groups to provide different kinds of service at different points in the child's or adopter's journeys.
3. It is envisaged that the great majority of staff with specific adoption focus, likely to

be over 250, will transfer to the new RAAs. Office movement for staff will take place only where there is a definable benefit to outcomes, to help maintain the vital links between adoption and other teams involved in planning for children,

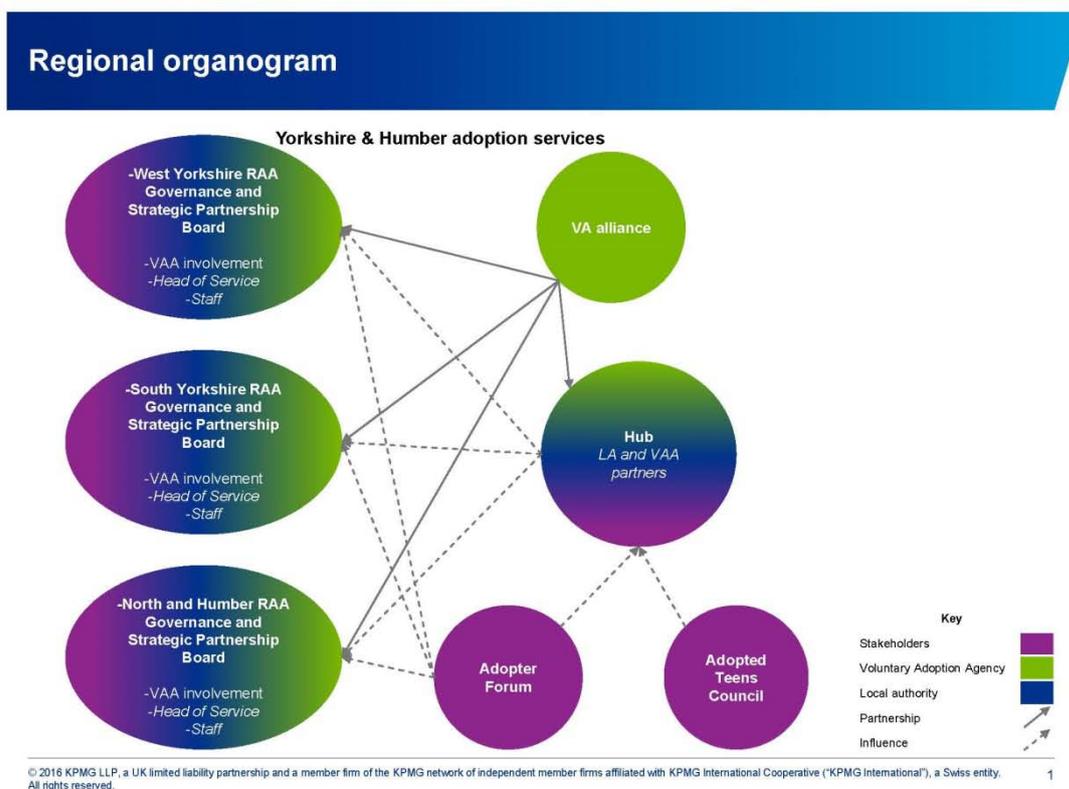
Communication and Consultation

1. Meetings have taken place with staff groups and regional union leaders to ensure their concerns are well considered in plans prior to formal consultation over the next 12 months.
2. The communications task group will continue to develop its strategy to ensure key groups are either involved directly, eg Adoption teams, Adopters and Adoptees and CAFCASS, or through meetings and briefings, eg other social care staff, Leads Members, CAMHS / NHS England, Adoption Panels Chairs, Medical Advisers and the judiciary.

Equality

An Impact assessment is being undertaken and will be incorporated into the risk management plan over the transition and in building the new services. The key factors will be to maintain a good service during this transition, supported by the introduction of DCS sponsors.

The following high level organogram illustrates the likely framework. The different geographical and demographic factors across this very large region will mean that different staff structures, roles and numbers may be suited to each new RAA.



IT design

Please set out what you know, if anything, about the IT implications for the RAAs.

Again, this should include thinking so far. If possible, it should set out:

- Who will provide the RAA's IT systems.
- What these systems will be and how they are different to and will integrate with existing systems across the different organisations that are part of the RAAs.

Whole Region

In order for this hub and spoke framework to achieve its potential, it will need to have IT systems which allow relevant data sharing between front line Safeguarding services in each Local Authority (Children in Need and Safeguarding), right through to adoption support. This will:

1. Track the progress from first contact of individual children (birth family) and adopters (enquiry) to adoption order. This will ensure consistent and tight management of timescales
2. Gather numerical and group profile data across the region and by RAAs to help target recruitment, staff resource management (ensuring staff are available where and with what skills required as demand changes) and future support needs.
3. Track the progress post order of children and families who need support. This will help support service planning and staff development.
4. Gather numerical data and group profile across the region and by RAAs to ensure development of relevant and timely support at all levels (social groups and family days to intensive, specialist therapy)
5. To develop the Regional Score Card which builds on the National Score Card indicators
6. Gather and track similar data in relation to children moving to other forms or permanence – Special Guardianship Orders, Long term fostering, Child Arrangement Orders and return to family.

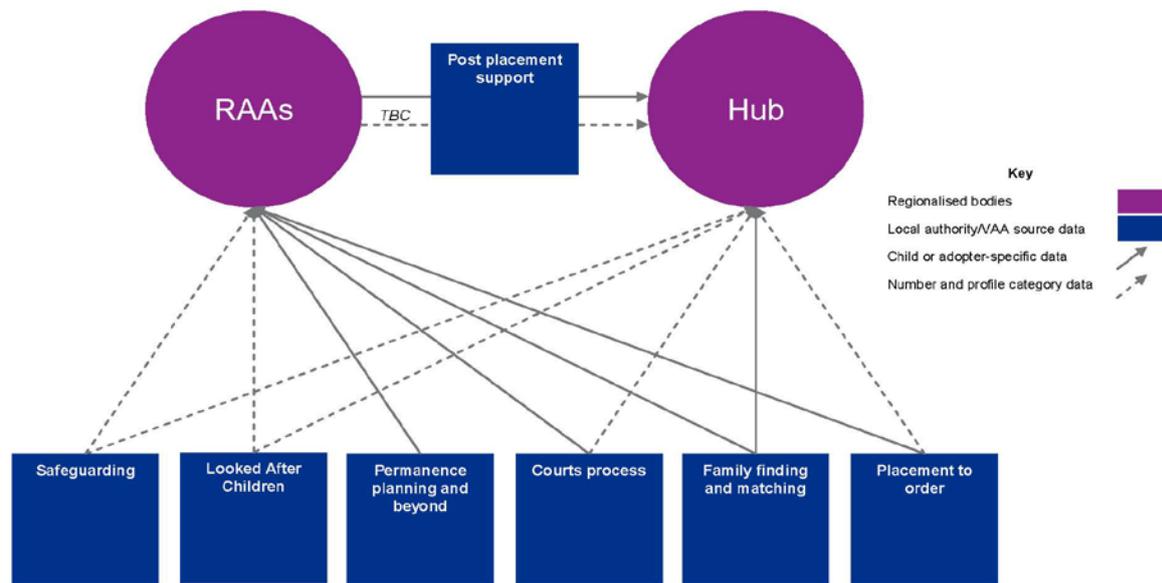
There is no intention to merge existing ICS systems wholesale - there are currently 7 different systems across the region and the disruption and cost to all Local Authorities would be enormous and disproportionate. The intention is develop data sharing systems and protocols which can migrate agreed data from several different systems to a single RAA tracking and performance management system, possibly using a portal system. Whether this can be common to all three RAAs and the Hub is to be determined.

RAAs

Each RAAs board will build on the work of the RPB IT Task group to

1. Understand the implications of individual delivery models of each RAAs when these are confirmed
2. Define what data should be shared between
 - a. Local Authorities and RAAs
 - b. RAAs and the Hub
 - c. Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies as an Alliance
 - d. Alliance / individual Voluntary Agencies and the RAAs
 - e. Alliance / individual Voluntary Agencies and the Hub.
 - f. RAAs to RAAs

Data transfer approach



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System Development

Funding for additional specialist support is included in the financial plan to help work out the best way forward. An additional capital sum has been identified in the finance plan which may or may not be required depending on the outcome of this initial work in July August 2016 – see project plan

What is next for 2016-17?

This section asks you to provide detail on the focus for your project in the next phase of work. This will of course vary depending on what stage your project is at. Some projects will focus on deciding on a preferred delivery model, whereas others who have made that decision will focus on detailed design of the operating model and transition. This section needs to be clear what you will do to take your project to the next stage. You should focus on how the work of the project will enable you to answer the questions in section 3 in more detail than you can at this stage.

- Please provide us with a copy of your project plan for the next phase (2016-17), using the embedded template. See below section on plans to develop your RAAs where additional information about your plan is required.



RAA Project Plan
template.xlsx

Please provide us with a copy of your financial plan for the next stage of the work in the embedded template. Please indicate for each budget line where you are confident about costs or where you are making estimates, please also describe any assumptions. See below section on funding where additional information about finances is required



RAA Transition Fin
Plan 2016-17 040416.0

Section 4: What is next?

Plans to develop your RAAs

- Please summarise the overarching aims of your project in 2016-17 and the main activities you will carry out to reach these aims. For example, is your focus on starting your transition to your RAAs, getting sign off for your preferred delivery model or agreeing between partners your chosen delivery model?
- We will read this alongside your project plan so please ensure the two tell a coherent narrative about your aims and how you will achieve these. All projects should outline what steps will be taken to ensure your RAAs has excellent practice at its heart.

Aims

The Expression of Interest set out an ambitious vision whose aims were

1. To place more children in a more timely way.
2. To recruit more of the right families for the children waiting, preparing them consistently and well.
3. To improve the range, accessibility and quality of adoption support

By

1. Establishing formal partnerships with Voluntary Adoption Agencies in design and delivery
2. Involving adopters and adoptees as partners in design and delivery.
3. Increasing quality, consistency, cross sector partnerships, value and innovation,

The plan is for the region to be ready to deliver on these aims by April 2017.

Next steps

The following are the overarching steps which are broken down into more detail in the project plan

1. Detailed design of RAAs and Hub models which reflect equal partnership principles between Local Authorities and VAs outlined in Section 3.
2. Obtaining sign off and ownership for these at all levels within agencies and with stakeholder groups.
3. Naming RAAs and developing a Statement of Purpose for RAAs and Hub
4. Defining contractual relationships between RAAs and their respective Local Authority's to ensure viable and sustainable business models.
5. Defining the contractual relationships between Hub, Local, individual Voluntary Agencies, the Voluntary Agencies Alliance and RAAs.
6. Complete staffing structures and funding formulas outlined in Section 3
7. To build on the Regional Score Card indicators to include effective methods of measuring
 - the impact of support interventions – qualitative and quantitative.
 - the level of user satisfaction with support services across the region
8. To develop methods to evaluation the impact of this change on the cost of

services and on staff levels, retention and morale

Project roles and engaging stakeholders

Please set out:

- Are there any changes to your partnership in the next phase? For example, are any other Local Authorities or Voluntary Adoption Agencies going to join the project?
- Please include a summary of the key roles and who will be doing them. Please identify your champions for recruitment, matching and early placement and adoption support.
- Will any additional staff join the project team?
- What specialist advice do you think you will need during the next phase and how will you access this advice?
- What plans do you have in place to manage change, communicate with and engage stakeholders? Who are your key stakeholders?
- How will you continue to engage with the adopter voice?
- How will you continue to engage with adoptees?

Taking the Vision Forward

1. The vision of a whole-region network of providers and users, organised through 3 RAAs and a Regional Hub and with Children and Adopter voices driving it, is universally supported. The established regional communications strategy will develop as plans progress, but will include Y&H-wide briefings for adaptation as required by RAAs, Local Authorities and VAs and for other stakeholder groups.
2. A comprehensive roadshow is planned from the autumn for all stakeholder groups, supported by the increased project team capacity below, to ensure maximum readiness at all levels in April 2017. Each RAAs Board is developing a change management plan according to its individual circumstances. Practice champions, who will be appointed over the next 2 months, are seen as vital to embedding the principles of the wider vision and aspirations, into everyday social work practice and user experience.

User Voices

1. An Adopter Forum development role is planned to ensure that adopter views are sought and considered from a very wide base reflecting geography, stage of journey, family make up and type of need. This will help to build on current adopter presence on boards and service planning groups in all parts of the region.
2. The Adopted Teens Council will continue to be represented on the boards. Additional capacity to the current Youth Council coordinator is planned to ensure that teen and adopted adult groups in each part of the region are engaged

VA Integration

A VA Alliance development post is planned support individual Alliance members in being adequately represented in all forums. This will supplement the senior strategic Alliance representation on Boards to ensure a 2 way dialogue continues within each RAAs

Technical Support

1. **HR** to analyse the data already gathered and help RAAs to determine staffing needs and structures, roles and job descriptions, negotiations with staff and unions, staff transition processes, etc.
2. **Finance** to build on and analyse the data already gathered to support formulas for funding the RAAs and the Hub - capital and running costs, and coordination to maximise use of ASF support
3. **IT** to develop/commission systems which support the linking of different IT systems, supporting data analysis and performance management - developing a consensus around the data required and purchase or development of software.
4. **Communications** to coordinate the comms for all stakeholder groups and engagement events, ensuring consistency of message regionally, tailored to the individual characteristics of each RAA.
5. External Consultancy to supplement the above areas used flexibly to ensure continued rigour and challenge as the project progresses and advice on due diligence requirements.

Project management and specific areas to consider

Please set out:

- How will you project manage the next phase of work?
- What are the top 3 priorities for the next phase of work?
- What are the top 3 risks for the next phase of work? How will you manage these?
- What are the dependencies for the project? What is needed to help make your project a success?

The engagement of a wide cross section of partners, stakeholders and project leadership has been successful during the development phase and with adaptations described above, this provides a good framework going forward

Project Management

1. The current project team includes Leads and Managers who share the strategic and operational elements of the project drawing on specialist / technical expertise where possible. Additional staff and/or service level agreements will be added a regional level to provide specialist expertise and capacity. The Heads of Service will take over the Strategic Lead role from October
2. The combination of the team above, the RAA project boards, the Regional board and the DCS and VA sponsors will oversee, lead and manage the transition. The more specialist detailed work on technical aspects of the plan

being done as required at each stage.

3. The changes to RAA boards and DCS sponsorship described in S3, with the appointment of heads of service in the autumn as project leads are designed to achieve a smooth transition, into new operational and service policies and procedures.
4. The Regional Project Board will
 - a) Coordinate the work of the RAA and Alliance Boards, Adopter Forum and Youth Council and the range of task groups.
 - b) Define the relationship between the Hub and RAAs,
 - c) Integrate of developments of a regional Centre of Excellence and the Social Impact Bond initiative into the overarching framework..
 - d) Merge the current functions of the Y&H Consortium Executive, the Regional ALB and the Regional Project Board under one board.

Priorities

1. All stakeholders and participants are well informed, engaged and enthused at all levels throughout the next 12 months
2. The infrastructure, financial, IT, HR, governance and admin arrangements are clear and robust. We plan the major share of this work will be done by autumn 2016
3. We have the right people with the right skills to complete the transition and to manage the new services going forward

Risks

1. Business continuity and maintaining performance during transition
2. Change management: Personal, organisational and political engagement
3. Finding and agreeing technical solutions, eg IT, HR, finance

Dependencies

1. DofE support:
 - a. In removing obstacles/exemption from specific regulations or requirements: eg adoption panels.
 - b. Funding for what is a resource intensive but comprehensive transition plan
2. Getting the right people or services, with the right skills at the right time.

Funding required to develop and implement the RAAs

- Based on your financial plan, please provide us with an overview of what the funding will achieve this financial year.
- If you need more time to develop your RAAs, please describe if it would be helpful to have further funding agreed in phases when costs are more certain, for example further development funding followed by a submission to DofE that releases implementation funding.
- At this point, do you envisage needing set-up funding beyond 2016-17? If so please provide an indicative figure,

Funding 2016-17

The financial plan includes costs for

1. **People / Services** to implement the transition plan - project managers, Leads/Heads of Service and specialist advisers will complete the modelling, detailed planning and transition management over the next 12 months – see Project Plan for timescales for each element
 - a. Business plans, Statements of Purpose and Ofsted registration.
 - b. Organisational structures, staff and manager numbers and roles, delivery points, office bases and communication systems
 - c. Finance, set up and maintenance costs, operating and service funding formulas, finance systems.
 - d. Policies:
 - All areas of service delivery including Region wide and RAAs
 - Organisational policies – HR, IT, Finance etc.
 - e. HR plans: Staff briefing, support and transition
 - f. Governance and accountability arrangements for each RAAs and the Hub with signed contracts, funding agreements, partnerships, MOUs as required.
 - g. Communications: to maintain the comms strategy ensuring each stakeholder group is briefed, consulted, engaged as appropriate.
 - h. IT systems and data sharing protocols staff trained and ongoing technical support is in place.
2. **Equipment and expenses** for additional project team and expenses for events.
3. **Possible Capital** for IT system subject to final decisions about delivery models and agreements about host IT systems for each RAAs, new software development may be required. This will be clear by end June 2016. A holding cost of £300,000 has been included for this.

Funding 2017-18

It is anticipated that there will be some development cost during 2017-18.

1. Longitudinal research study - see S3. There may be other or supplementary funding sources for this
2. Project development of the hub: The detailed function and constitution of the hub will be determined by the development of RAAs and will become clearer during the transition phase.
3. Combining this with the development Centre of Excellence, jointly with health colleagues, and the Social Impact Bond plans, will require short term additional development time in addition to the management of the core hub.

Continuing support to deliver your RAAs

In addition to the financial support outlined above and in your financial plan, what support do you need to drive your project forward? You should outline:

- What you need from your coach
- What it would be helpful to have central advice on and at what point
- What it would make sense to provide centrally, for example any IT systems
- What should be covered in the learning programme

Coach

This is a complex plan to create 4 different organisations, by pulling together partnerships involving 15 Local Authorities, 7 VAs and Adopters. Each new

organisation is dealing with some challenges which are common to all and others which are unique for geographical, political, legal, financial and service quality reasons. Coach support needs to reflect this to focus primarily on individual RAAs but working closely with the regional project team to ensure regional cohesion.

Central Advice

The leeway given to projects to design bespoke plans is very welcome and ultimately will produce “fit for purpose” organisations faster and with greater buy-in. To a large extent central advice has and needs to be reactive to questions and dilemmas which emerge within projects as they progress. Therefore it would be most helpful to be able to access authoritative advice about national parameters and red lines quickly.

Central Support

It is unlikely that a national IT/data system will be developed but a unified dataset requirement including 903 returns, ALB quarterly survey and National Adoption Register would be very valuable, saving time and confusion.

Learning program

A whole or at least half year plan with dates and topics would help to make sure that projects can make best use of time and learning opportunities. These should be more evenly spread geographically and include

1. Regular project progress sharing events
2. Master classes on
 - a. Procurement and commissioning
 - b. Staff needs modelling
 - c. Business management
 - d. Legal parameters of partnership models
 - e. What adopters and adoptees tell us
 - f. Advanced level change management
 - g. Navigating the Data Sharing minefield