

ADOPTION WEST REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY SERVICE SPECIFICATION

1. Background:

- 1.1 This schedule sets out the vision, objectives and details of roles and responsibilities to be fulfilled under this agreement by the Regional Adoption Agency and Local Authorities.

2. An Integrated Adoption Service – the Vision

- 2.1 The local authorities in the partnership wish to build on the success of their existing services to improve performance in meeting the needs of those children who require permanence through adoption. This will be achieved by bringing together the best practice from each authority into an Integrated Service. Entering into a Regional Adoption Agency will allow the local authorities to provide a more cohesive, efficient and effective use of resources and development of practice.
- 2.2 All partners are agreed that collaboration should be underpinned by two guiding principles;
- a. That looked after children and prospective adopters are advantaged by doing so and
 - b. That a regional adoption service is demonstrably more efficient and flexible in delivering the service.
- 2.3 All partners share the ambition to improve performance particularly;
- a. In reducing the time that children have to wait for adoptive placements
 - b. In improving the experience for prospective adopters from initial inquiry, through the assessment process, panel approval and placement matching and the delivery of post adoption support services.
- 2.4 All partners agree that the joint aim is to improve the adoption system for children and adopters, and that this will involve systemic and cultural changes within local authorities, as well as the development of the RAA. The RAA in isolation will only be able to effect limited change making effective partnership working between RAA and LA staff critical.

3. Key Objectives

- 3.1 The key objectives shared jointly by the RAA and partnering local authorities are
- a. To provide children with the right adopters at the right time, approving those equipped to meet the needs of children waiting.
 - b. To minimise changes of plan away from adoption
 - c. To reduce delay and improve timescales for matching and placement for all children – working with care planning processes in each LA to improve early identification / twin track planning and to achieve best practise and consistency across the region.
 - d. To improve earlier permanency planning using:
 - i. Concurrent Planning

- ii. Fostering for Adoption
 - e. To take innovative approaches to placing 'hard to place' children. e.g.
 - i. Linking children with adopters from enquiry stage onwards where appropriate
 - ii. Thoroughly preparing child and family for placement
 - f. To reduce the likelihood of placement breakdown through timely and improved matching, preparation and adoption support.
 - i. Providing a range of pre and post adoption support and intermediary services in conjunction with statutory and voluntary sector providers
 - ii. Establishing effective working links with key partnership agencies (e.g. schools and health providers)
 - g. To form strong and productive partnerships with:
 - i. Adopters
 - ii. Adoptees
 - iii. Voluntary sector providers
 - iv. Health and education
 - h. To ensuring that customer feedback and the views of service users are obtained and considered in the development and future operation of the service
- 3.2 All activity in the RAA will ensure compliance with requirements set by legislation, regulation, national minimum standards and local procedures. The RAA will operate under an agreed performance management framework, will be subject to inspection and auditing bodies, and will work closely with the National Adoption Leadership Board.
- 3.3 In the longer term it is anticipated that the new agency will, dependent upon agreed resourcing, extend its offer to support wider permanence options for children including Special Guardianship Orders.
- 3.4 The DfE have made it clear that they wish to see Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies as integral partners in the regional agencies. Action for Children, After Adoption, CCS Adoption, The Centre for Adoption Support and Education, and Adoption UK are invited to join the partnership. The relationship with voluntary agencies will be set out in a memorandum of understanding and separate commissioning arrangements to sit outside this agreement.

4. Outline specification of services and responsibilities

- 4.1 The provision of adoption services is acknowledged to be the function of a complex system involving a number of agencies. Each part of the system has to play its own role and to work

collaboratively with the others in order to deliver positive outcomes for children. The following table sets out the respective responsibilities of each agency under this agreement.

- 4.2 The Adoption and Children Act (2002) places a statutory requirement on each participating Authority and, therefore, the Integrated Service, to:
- a. Recruit, assess and support potential prospective adopters
 - b. Work in partnership with the child's social worker in seeking a permanent placement for the child through adoption
 - c. Assess, support and plan for children who are relinquished by their birth parents
 - d. Assess, support and plan for children who have a parallel plan for adoption
 - e. Assess and support parent/partner and family relatives who wish to adopt a child
 - f. Assess and support those adults who are seeking to adopt from another country (inter-country adoptions)
 - g. Provide counselling advice and information to adopted adults post 18.
 - h. Provide Independent support to birth parents involved in proceedings.
 - i. Manage and support Adoption Panels which make recommendations to approve prospective adopters and on the matching of individual children to adopters
 - j. Provide professional advice on best practice and regulations to agency decision makers
 - k. Provide a quality assurance role across the Integrated Service

5. Service collaboration and rationale

- 5.1 Adoption West, formed as a local authority controlled company limited by guarantee will be commissioned to deliver the new Integrated Service and will bring together the adoption services of the following local authorities:
- a. Bath and North East Somerset Council
 - b. Bristol Council
 - c. Gloucestershire County Council
 - d. North Somerset Council
 - e. South Gloucestershire Council
 - f. Wiltshire Council
- 5.2 The following legislation forms the legal framework within which the new service will operate:
- a. Local Government Act 1972
 - b. Children Act 1989

- c. Adoption (inter-country Aspects) Act 1999
- d. Adoption & Children Act 2002
- e. Children and Adoption Act 2006
- f. Education and Adoption Act 2016

5.3 The legislation above is supported by the following guidance within which the new service will operate:

- a. Statutory instruments 2005 no. 389, children and young persons, England social care, England; The adoption agencies regulations 2005 as amended by Statutory Instruments 2013 No. 985, Children And Young Persons, England, The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- b. Statutory Guidance on Adoption for local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies and adoption support agencies July 2013
- c. Adoption: national minimum standards July 2014
- d. Early permanence placements and approval of prospective adopters as foster carers; Statutory guidance for local authorities and adoption agencies July 2014

6. Eligibility criteria

6.1 The Integrated Service will be responsible for providing a service to:

- a. Children who require adoption
- b. Adults who wish to adopt
- c. All adoptive families living in the region eligible for adoption support
- d. Adopted adults
- e. Facilitate contact between adoptive and birth family members
- f. Birth parents and former guardians eligible for adoption support
- g. Independent support to birth parents who risk losing their child to adoption

6.2 Aspects of these services may be externally commissioned.

7. Service delivery

7.1 The Integrated Service will operate on a full-time basis providing core services flexibly, as required by the needs of services users.

- 7.2 The Integrated Service will at all times, maintain a volume of service that is sufficient to fulfil all of its statutory duties as an adoption agency, as well as any specific requirements, targets and outcomes of this specification.
- 7.3 The Integrated Service will at all times maintain an appropriately qualified and skilled workforce that is sufficient to fulfil all of its statutory duties as an adoption agency, as well as any specific requirements, targets and outcomes of this specification.
- 7.4 The Integrated Service will have in place a detailed contingency plan to deal with workforce absence caused by planned leave, sickness and vacancies that is cost effective and causes minimum disruption to service delivery.
- 7.5 The Integrated Service will at all times comply with safe employment practice including statutory background checks, confirmation of identity, confirmation of entitlement to work in the UK, disclosure and barring checks, employment and personal references.
- 7.6 The Integrated Service will at all times put the needs of users at the heart of service delivery and maintain a system that ensures their involvement in service design and delivery, as well as decision making.
- 7.7 The Integrated Service will at all times maintain a system for the management of complaints and representations that complies with minimum standards for timeliness, transparency and information sharing.
- 7.8 The Integrated Service will at all times maintain a system for data protection and handling that complies with the Data Protection Act, as amended from time to time.

8. Performance measures

- 8.1 Building on the key objectives of the Regional Adoption Agency, set out in section 3, the Integrated Service will develop a performance management framework and comply with the key performance indicators set and report upon performance in relation to these indicators to the Board of Directors, the Adoption Leadership Board and any other statutory body as required.
- 8.2 The performance management framework will include quantitative indicators which will allow performance on the above outcomes to be measured.
- 8.3 The performance management framework will also include qualitative feedback from adopters, service users and key professionals who have contact with the agency.
- 8.4 Additionally, regional good practice standards will be developed to clarify service expectations, measure outcomes and ensure that services provide good value for money.

9. Outcomes

- 9.1 Outcomes in adoption have traditionally focussed on placement disruption and breakdown. The data collected is usually quantitative rather than qualitative. To ensure a culture of continuous improvement the new agency will move the focus of evaluation from outputs to outcomes by implementing a review system so that learning from disruptions and breakdowns is captured. This learning will then be used to develop a greater understanding of the factors which present a risk to placement outcomes.

10. Contract monitoring

- 10.1 The Integrated Service will provide quarterly data submissions and associated reports to the Board of Directors. Additionally, in accordance with the terms of reference of the Management Board, the Integrated Service will be responsible for conducting an annual review of the quality of the service it provides. Mechanisms to monitor the quality and outcomes of the service will include:

- a. Effective line management, supervision, support and training of staff employed by the service
- b. A set of regional policies, procedures and practice standards
- c. A range of methods to obtain feedback on the functioning of the regional service from service users, local authorities and other stakeholders
- d. Systems to audit the performance of the service against performance indicators and compliance with legislation and standards;
- e. A system to monitor and manage complaints against the service

11. Ofsted inspection

- 11.1 The RAA will comply with whatever inspection regime is in place from the start of the operational period.

12. Detailed division of roles and responsibilities in the new agency.

- 12.1 Recognising the successful delivery of the new service will be dependent on a high level of joint working between LAs and the RAA, table 1 below breaks down the respective roles and responsibilities identifying where the agencies will have to collaborate in the best interests of children

13. Summary of proposed service provision, improvements and performance evaluation

- 13.1 An outline of proposed service provision, improvements and performance evaluation is summarised in table 2 below.

TABLE 1 – DIVISION OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1.1 THE CHILD

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RAA	NOTES
1. Case Responsibility	<p>The local authority will retain case management responsibility for the child until the making of the Adoption Order.</p> <p>The local authority will be responsible for all statutory functions including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory Visits • Management and supervision of contact between child and family members. • Supervision, administration and finance of foster placements and communication with foster carers (including Fostering for Adoption placements). 	<p>The RAA will provide specialist advice and support to assist LA staff to fully understand the adoption process, influencing and promoting best practice.</p>	
2. Early identification of children requiring adoption	<p>The local authority is responsible for identifying, as soon as there is a possibility that a child will need permanence outside their birth family, the children who may require adoption and making them and their needs known to the RAA, providing relevant and timely information. The RAA will assist LAs in adjusting working practices to ensure close involvement in care planning to assist with the earliest identification.</p> <p>LA to be receptive to external challenge.</p>	<p>The RAA will allocate a Family Finder to each child identified as possibly requiring adoption. Staff from the RAA will be involved in identifying children for early permanence placement.</p> <p>Representatives of the RAA will be able to attend meetings in each local authority (such as legal planning meetings, looked after review meetings, care planning meetings etc) to better understand the needs of the children who may require adoption and, where</p>	<p>Detail for each LA to be developed in conjunction with care planning leads.</p> <p>The RAA will be invited to relevant meetings to enable better practice in planning for children to permanence.</p>

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RAA	NOTES
		<p>appropriate, to begin to identify suitable adopters at an early stage.</p> <p>RAA to provide challenge to improve LA practice and performance</p>	
3. Early Permanence Service (Concurrent Planning/ Fostering to Adoption)	<p>The LA will identify all children for whom an EP placement is a possibility and refer these children to the RAA.</p> <p>Children and family social workers will make use of the training, advice and guidance offered by the RAA regarding Early Permanence.</p> <p>The LA will make the decision regarding the most suitable placement for the child, with support and guidance from the RAA.</p> <p>The LA will continue to update the RAA on the progress of the child care plan until the Adoption Order.</p> <p>The LA will make the statutory visits to the child placed with EP carers.</p>	<p>Where appropriate, and in agreement with the local authority, the RAA will make available an Early Permanence Service (Concurrent Planning/ Fostering to Adoption) for children who may benefit from the possibility of early permanence with potential adopters. Placements will depend on the availability of appropriate carers.</p>	<p>For temporarily approved foster carers under reg 25a, the LA will delegate the fostering supervisory social worker role to Adoption West. Adoption West will provide the LA with records of this function in accordance with the specific fostering regulations.</p>
4. Twin Tracking of the children requiring adoption	<p>Where appropriate to the child and family circumstances the Care Plan will include a plan for permanence for the child, while setting objectives for work with the child, birth family and carers in relation to the child's assessed needs.</p> <p>The LA will progress adoption plans in conjunction with the RAA at the same time as pursuing other options for</p>	<p>The RAA will provide advice and guidance and work with the LA to support the Care Plan for the child.</p>	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RAA	NOTES
	children.		
5. Tracking Child Care Plans and Progress to Adoption	<p>The LA will track the progress of children in care proceedings or looked after under section 20 (Children Act 1989) so as to maintain an up-to-date knowledge of their potential need for an adoption placement.</p> <p>The LA will be responsible for reporting to the Adoption Leadership Board child level data for the children in their care in the adoption process. They will also continue to provide data on Special Guardianship Orders.</p>	<p>The RAA will also actively track all children who may require a plan for adoption or for whom initial information indicates that adoption may be required.</p> <p>The RAA will be responsible for reporting adopter level data only. They will be treated as distinct entities, with separate URNs to the LAs.</p>	
6. Pre-placement Reports	<p>The LA will be responsible for the completion and cost of all reports prior to an adoption placement being made including Child Permanence Reports.</p>	<p>The RAA will advise on and support the completion of the Child Permanence Report and early profile of the child. The RAA will provide support and challenge to help ensure that CPRs are of a consistent high quality across partnership LAs.</p> <p>The RAA will be responsible for the early and any subsequent profile of the child (even before the CPR is compiled) & in identifying early matching considerations. This will include taking into account information and advice from post adoption support services on the potential needs of the child[ren] once placed, and potential sources of future support. The RAA will also provide support guidance to enable the LA to undertake more specialist assessments e.g. sibling assessments.</p>	
7. Assessment of	<p>The local authority will be responsible for assessing the</p>	<p>The RAA will provide additional information</p>	

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needs	child's needs in respect of a future placement and in ensuring that any required financial support for a future adoptive placement is available.	and advice on the placement needs of the child and the likely need for post adoption support services. It will be necessary for the RAA and LA to work closely and collaboratively to ensure that the needs of the child can be met and that planned support is sustainable.	
8. Medical Information	The Local Authority will be responsible for obtaining all required medical information in respect of children who are being considered for adoption and ensuring all health assessments are completed within agreed timeframes		
9. Should Be Placed For Adoption (SHOBPA) Decision	The Agency Decision Maker in each LA will be responsible for the 'Should be placed for adoption' decision. The LA will undertake a regular review of this decision and associated plans and keep the family finder in the RAA informed of changes.	The RAA will support the SHOBPA decision making process as requested. The RAA Panel Advisor will provide adoption advice and information to the LA ADM to assist them in the SHOBPA decision The RAA will need to give specific consideration to medical information in the identification of a possible match.	The RAA will have a quality assurance role in this process.
10. Family Finding Process	The LA will work with the RAA to prepare a profile of the child as early as possible to ensure early identification of suitable placement matches. Wherever possible children will be placed with Early Permanence Carers – the LA will identify these children and work with the RAA to identify carers.	The RAA will track all children identified for a permanence placement in consultation with the LA. The RAA will advise, guide and challenge the LA to make the best available placement choice for each child with options for Early Permanence placements considered in all cases.	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RAA	NOTES
	The LA will be responsible for seeking permission from the court to profile the child prior to granting of the placement order, where appropriate	Aim to identify a choice of potential adoptive matches for a child prior to the conclusion of Care Proceedings.	
11. Communication during the family finding process	It will be the responsibility of the LA to keep the CPR updated and to inform the family finder of any changes in the child's development or circumstances (e.g. change of placement).	<p>Via regular tracking meetings with the LA's the Family Finding team will identify children for whom early profiling is appropriate in consultation with the LA.</p> <p>The RAA will keep the LA regularly updated about progress on family finding.</p>	
12. Children who wait longer / Priority Children	<p>The LA is responsible for identifying at the earliest opportunity where a child is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged four or over • From a BME heritage • Part of a sibling group of two or more • Has a disability or medical condition • Has been waiting longer than usual for a potential placement • The LA will gather the relevant information, assess and forward to the RAA as soon as possible. 	<p>The RAA will either provide or commission a service for priority children which may involve some or all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased publicity – DVD, Photos etc • Press and Digital Media advertising • Profile the child at specific events • Attempt to recruit carers specifically for the child • Provide additional training and preparation for potential carers • Advise on or assist with additional preparation work with the child. 	Some of these issues need addressing with each LA on a case by case basis.
13. Preparation of the child	<p>The LA will be responsible for preparing the child for an adoptive placement.</p> <p>The LA will be responsible for the preparation of the child's Life story Book. This should start early in the child's looked after timeline and should be continuously added to by foster carers and others working with the</p>	<p>The RAA will support the LA in the preparation of the child, particular in respect of the future placement.</p> <p>The RAA will develop or commission specific expertise in the preparation of children who are harder to place and who are being</p>	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RAA	NOTES
	<p>child to ensure that all information is recorded and available to the child in future.</p> <p>The LA will be responsible for producing the Later Life Letter</p>	<p>prepared using a more 'bespoke' family finding model. The RAA will provide advice and guidance on Life Story Books and Later Life Letters to LA social workers.</p>	
14. Linking and Matching	<p>The LA will meet the costs of introductions between children and carers.</p> <p>The LA will make the final decision regarding a suitable match and to place a child.</p>	<p>The RAA will take lead responsibility for all aspects of the linking and matching process, but will always involve the LA in the decision-making process.</p> <p>The RAA will chair shortlisting, linking and formal matching meetings as part of the process.</p>	
15. CPR, DPR, APR, Matching panel	<p>The LA is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CPR • Delegation of Parental Responsibility report • The Adoption Support Plan <p>The Contact Plan</p>	<p>The RAA will be responsible for completing the Adoption Placement Report, apart from the section on the child.</p> <p>The RAA will organise the Matching Panel.</p>	
16. Matching decisions	<p>The Agency Decision Maker in each LA will continue to be responsible for the matching decision for children in their individual area</p>		<p>Panel and ADM decision processes will need to be closely co-ordinated to meet timescales and ensure all relevant information is available.</p>
17. Inter-Agency Fees	<p>Local Authorities will continue to manage income and expenditure for placements external to/from Adoption West Members.</p>	<p>Adoption West will advise on matching and monitor placements between agencies with a view assisting LAs regarding inter agency fee income and expenditure.</p>	<p>Maintaining current arrangements will enable Adoption West to study and adapt to changes in the inter agency market and agree future funding</p>

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RAA	NOTES
			based on further analysis
18. Adoption Allowances	Adoption allowances will be agreed and paid for by each LA. LAs will work towards a standardisation of adoption allowances policies regionally.		

1.1 ADOPTER RECRUITMENT

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RAA	NOTES
1. Recruitment of adopters	<p>The LA will signpost any enquiries from potential adopters to the RAA.</p> <p>The LA will ensure that information relevant to potential adopters is included in its own marketing materials and on its website, clearly signposting potential adopters to the website of the RAA.</p>	<p>The RAA will be responsible for recruiting adopters appropriate to the needs of children waiting in each LA.</p> <p>Marketing information will reflect the fact that the RAA is delivering the service on behalf of partnering LAs.</p>	
2. Enquiries		<p>The RAA will provide a centralised enquiry process for the region to meet all statutory requirements.</p> <p>The RAA will provide written information to potential adopters and will hold a programme of information events.</p> <p>The RAA may signpost adopters to other agencies where they are not appropriate to the needs of the children which the RAA has waiting.</p>	
3. Stage One	The LAs will provide all information required for statutory checks of potential adopters resident in the LA.	The RAA will undertake all Stage one functions in the application to adopt process	
4. Stage Two		The RAA will undertake all Stage Two in the	

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		application to adopt process functions	
5. PAR		The RAA will complete the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR)	
6. Approvals		<p>The RAA will recruit a Central list of panel members and service the Adoption Panel.</p> <p>The RAA Agency Decision Maker will be responsible for all approvals</p>	
7. Post approval support and training		The RAA will provide post approval support and training to approved adopters	

1.1 POST ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICE

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RAA	NOTES
1. Universal provision	<p>Adopted children and families are entitled to a whole range of universal services within their LA, Including early help, diversion from care services, out of hours support.</p> <p>Keep RAA informed of changes to process and procedures.</p>	Liaise regularly with LA about services available and how to access them.	Both to agree mechanism for establishing thresholds, managing disputes & disagreements – specifically in relation to adoption support.
2. Adoption support plans	<p>Create Adoption Support Plan, review and update for the period up to adoption order in consultation with RAA social workers.</p> <p>The LA will consider funding requests for post adoption support services which are not included in the core offer. Ensure consistency and agreed process for considering requests for adoption support allowances, match funding for ASF and</p>	The RAA is responsible for the continued review of adoption support services and for informing LAs of the strategic developments required and impact of increased demand on service provision. The RAA will learn from and apply good practice regionally and nationally to deliver	The scope of services is limited by the investment received from local authorities to fund adoption support services. Increased year on year demand for adoption support needs to be

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	shared funding thresholds (e.g. Therapeutic support).	<p>best value.</p> <p>The RAA will undertake adoption support fund assessments and applications.</p> <p>Where required, review and update post adoption order.</p> <p>Support and advice</p>	regularly reviewed by the RAA and LAs.
3. Referrals and safeguarding	<p>The LA will signpost all referrals for support from adoptive families to the RAA.</p> <p>Where a safeguarding referral is made to the LA the LA will conduct any appropriate section 47 enquiry and will allocate an LA Social Worker where thresholds are met, whilst simultaneously notifying the RAA of any referral involving an adopted child.</p>	The RAA will notify the Local Authority in which a child is resident of any safeguarding concerns in accordance with the South West Safeguarding Procedures.	<p>A referral pathway will be agreed.</p> <p>This will often involve CAMHS and other health services.</p>
4. Child in need	Process for responding to RAA identification of potential CIN	Inform LA if potential for child to reach threshold for CIN	
5. Early Help	Liaise and inform RAA of early help provision and any changes to provision	Inform LA of specific needs of adopted CYP / families and the nature of provision required	
6. Out-of-hours services	All adopters will have access to the LA's Emergency Duty Team out of core hours.	The RAA will negotiate out of hours support for specific families where necessary subject to agreed LA funding.	
7. Indirect / Letterbox contact	The LA will be responsible for developing the adoption contact plan and will work with the RAA to prepare the plan	The RAA will oversee Letterbox contact between adopted children and birth families.	
8. Supervised & Sibling Direct	Responsibility for direct contact requirements are to be decided based on analysis of current	Responsibility for direct contact requirements are to be decided based on analysis of current	Proposals relating to the management of direct

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Contact	arrangements and RAA resourcing	arrangements and RAA resourcing	contact will be presented to the Board of Directors within the first 3 months of operations
9. Adoption allowances	Adoption allowances will be paid for by each LA after undertaking the appropriate assessment.	Provide assessment of need to support the request.	Action plan to be developed for determining interim and longer term arrangement
10. Adoption Support Fund		The RAA will be responsible for undertaking all assessments and funding applications to the Adoption Support Fund.	
11. Access to Children's records and files	LA to facilitate Manage and administer adoption files. Managing and maintaining adoption archive in line with regulations for all files they are responsible for.	RAA to provide / commission Birth Records Counselling	
12. Therapeutic support to birth parent	Identify and make referrals Agree a consistent approach among LAs	RAA to provide / commission	Legal requirement
13. Birth parents support to prevent recurring proceedings	LA responsible	None	Under child's journey
14. Access to Adopter's records	LA for historic cases (cases closed as at date of transfer) To provide for historic cases on request from RAA Managing and maintaining adoption archive in line with regulations for all files they are responsible for (up to the point of transfer).	RAA for cases which it has managed and those still open at the point of transfer that have been passed to the RAA. Managing and maintaining adoption archive in	

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		line with regulations for all files they are responsible for (post-transfer).	
15. Intermediary Service to adopted adults and their relatives	Support RAA by providing the required information.	RAA for cases which it has managed	Relatives seeking information and contact with the adopted person

1.1 SERVICE USER ENGAGEMENT

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RAA	NOTES
1. Adopters	Support with marketing and promotion through existing local channels and advice as appropriate.	The RAA will engage with adopters individually and in groups with the aim of improving the services available.	
2. Adoptees	Support with marketing and promotion through existing local channels and advice as appropriate.	The RAA will engage with adoptees individually and in groups with the aim of improving the services available.	

1.1 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT & INSPECTION

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RAA	NOTES
1. Data provision	Each LA will need to provide key data to the RAA on performance, as defined in the service delivery contract. Each LA to provide the RAA with data to enable the RAA to plan future recruitment and service provision and to set targets that will meet the needs of children with a plan for permanence.		
2. Data analysis		The RAA will produce a regular regional performance report to LAs in a standard	

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		format including data for each LA. The schedule and format will be agreed by Board members.	
3. OFSTED	<p>OFSTED will continue to inspect adoption services of Local Authorities that are part of an RAA under the current regulatory framework. LAs will involve the RAA in planning, preparation and inspection activity as required.</p> <p>LAs to support the RAA in preparation for and during an inspection under the Social Care Common Inspection Framework (SCCIF) for VAAs.</p>	<p>OFSTED will inspect the RAA under the Social Care Common Inspection Framework (SCCIF) for VAAs.</p> <p>The RAA will support the LA to prepare and respond to inspection requirements.</p>	

1.2 MISCELLANEOUS SERVICES

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RAA	NOTES
1. Service to step parents who wish to adopt	Where step parent assessments currently sit outside of the Adoption Service and staff transferring LAs retain responsibility for work underway and waiting lists.	RAA to provide step parent adoption services from commencement date	
2. Intercountry adoptions		RAA to provide/Commission	

TABLE 2 - SUMMARY OF PROPOSED SERVICE PROVISION, IMPROVEMENTS AND EVALUATION

2.1 Front door, Recruitment & Assessment
Service provision and improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The RAA recruitment strategy will be prepared and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that recruitment of adopters is targeted on the children for whom the L/As are making adoption plans. Extensive use of social media and on-line marketing, alongside more traditional advertising and promotional activity to ensure that there is wide coverage of the need for adoptive parents for a wide range of children. Assessments of prospective adopters to be undertaken in a timely way to ensure that there is a sufficient pool of approved adopters to

facilitate speedy matching, and that priority is given to those wishing to adopt children with additional needs or sibling groups.

- Regular preparation training for prospective adopters to be provided or commissioned from a VAA to ensure that no delays occur in commencing/completing assessments. Use of in-house expertise to enhance training – DDP, Theraplay and Birth Relative support practitioners.
- Targeted recruitment activity focusing on Priority Children has been the core business of VAAs for many years and there is an opportunity to harness VAA expertise to achieve early placements for children.
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- Training could be commissioned from a VAA - either particular modules or complete training programmes to supplement those being provided by RAA staff, including formal adopter preparation programme provision.

Performance evaluation and monitoring

- LA tracking systems, Permanence Co-ordination and IROs
- Monitoring of source of all enquiries, and ensuring resources are targeted on the most successful approaches.
- RAA case management system to track timescales on all assessments, with management oversight by Team Manager. Target Panel dates to be identified at the outset of all assessments, with flexibility to 'fast-track' assessments for children currently waiting. Additional capacity to be built into Adoption Panel agendas to enable assessments to be considered promptly when they are completed.
- Monitoring by Team Manager with additional training arranged as required. Training programmes to be regular evaluated by trainers, using service user feedback to ensure the content is relevant and appropriate.

2.2 Child's journey and permanence planning

Service provision and improvements

- Better and more methodical early identification of children with likely adoption plans and early involvement of workers from Adoption West
- help to shape and target recruitment activity within Adoption West for individual children, and more generally by identifying trends in ages, family composition, level and type of need.
- allow for early identification of children for whom an Early Permanent (fostering to adopt) placement might be an option, to enable them to move to their permanent family at the earliest possible opportunity.
- ensure that the right level of direct work is undertaken with each child, dependent on their age and level of understanding, to help them to understand why they are in care, what needs to happen for decisions to be made about their future care, including a simplified explanation of the court process. The child's wishes and feelings about their current and future care can be ascertained as part of this process. Work on families can also be undertaken, to help the child to understand about different kinds of families- birth families, foster families and adoptive families. Also work to understand that families come in different shapes and sizes with a mum and a dad, two mums or two dads, or one mum or one dad. This can link back to the composition of the birth family, foster family or potential adoptive family. The direct work with the child is currently undertaken by the local authority child care social worker, who faces the competing and conflicting demands of tight court timetables and gathering evidence as to whether or not the birth family can safely care for the child, and undertaking the more planned and paced direct work essential to help prepare the child for a potential move to adoption. As a result, the direct work with the child is not always undertaken well, or in

some cases at all, until the Placement Order is granted. This will be many months after a child first enters care, and when a child's anxieties and insecurities will be high. The better the child understands what is happening, the better prepared that he or she is for a move to their permanent family, and the greater chance of a successful transition and placement.

- enable work to be undertaken with foster carers and supervising social workers to ensure they are involved in and understand the family finding and matching process and time table, and the way transitions are managed. This will help them to support and manage the child's anxieties at this time.
- free up the local authority social worker to fully focus on the court work leading to the granting of a Placement Order.
- ensure that birth relatives have access to an independent worker from Adoption West from the point that adoption is the plan for their child, to provide them with support and to ensure that the fullest possible information about the birth family is gathered. This will help inform the Child Permanence Report, will help with family finding for the child and with the child's life story book. It will also potentially help to set the scene for future letterbox arrangements if the birth relatives are linked with Adoption West workers at this stage.

Supporting local authority childcare social workers

- Ensure more timely matching with support of focused family finding activity undertaken by specialist workers supporting LA social workers balancing the competing demands of child protection and court work as well as adoption work.
- Reduce delay in short listing potential families, arranging visits, completing paperwork for Adoption Panel for matching, and planning introductions. This is currently undertaken jointly with a local authority social worker, who is limited in availability by child protection work, court dates and deadlines.

Voluntary Adoption Agency involvement

- VAAs will continue to play an important part in providing families for children for whom Adoption West are responsible. VAA involvement on the Management Board will ensure that they have knowledge of and input to discussions about trends in the characteristics of children being referred to Adoption West to inform their recruitment strategy. They may be commissioned to recruit either a certain number of or type of placements each year for Adoption West.
- The level of support and type of adoption support services needed for any particular match is an important part of the matching and placement process. VAAs may also be in a position to offer specific practical or therapeutic support services for individual children and families post placement.

Performance evaluation and monitoring

- Tracking systems will be set up by Adoption West to monitor the journey of each child identified by the Permanence Coordinator as likely to have an adoption plan for permanence. These will monitor the progress of the child through the court and matching process through to placement and Adoption Order, and will be updated and monitored regularly in Adoption West team meetings and through supervision.
- These systems will enable Adoption West to provide the child's originating agency with data on an individual child's progress. Data will also be collected on disruptions prior to Adoption Order and children for whom an adoption placement is not achieved. Comparisons with performance

prior to Adoption West going live is already available to measure performance against.

- Data across all aspects of adoption work is also collected and collated quarterly by the Adoption Leadership Board, with headline national trends identified alongside the availability of local data. It is anticipated that this will continue once Regional Adoption Agencies are set up. This will enable comparisons with national performance and trends.
- Reporting mechanisms back from Adoption West into each local authority for oversight and scrutiny by elected members at least every 6 months will also be set up, incorporating all of the data available.

2.3 Matching and Placement

Service provision and improvements

- Early identification of children through tracking by the family finding service and Agency Adviser role to start the family finding at the earliest possible point, also creating opportunities to identify children for whom an Early Permanent (concurrency & fostering for adoption) placement might be appropriate.
- Wider choice of prospective adopters from the RAA through more targeted recruitment
- Improved timescales for short listing and visiting potential families, improved standard of CPRs, and other reports for prospective adopters, Adoption Panel and ADM, as the RAA worker will have the expertise and be dedicated to the adoption process.
- Improved support plans due to the early involvement of the RAA
- VAA involvement on the Management Board
- Potential commissioning of assessments for harder to place children from VAAs or spot purchase

Performance evaluation and monitoring

- RAA tracking systems
- Internal management scrutiny and oversight within the RAA
- IRO involvement in statutory reviews, QA and monitoring for each child
- Reporting mechanisms back into the LA about individual children, and overview and scrutiny by elected members
- Quarterly data submitted to the ALB

2.4 Adoption Support

Service provision and improvements

Assessment for adoption support

- Specialist transitions work
- Comprehensive support to placements
- Comprehensive information about adoption support services made available through varied formats, including detailed information online
- Better promotion of adoption support services
- Duty service focused on timely response to advice and information requests

Building on established working relationships with other agencies (e.g. LAs, CAMHS, Out of Hours) in particular in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation, missing children and safeguarding

- Maintaining contact for adoptive families (If desired) following the making the adoption order
- Strengthening of adopter led support groups and peer to peer support, including feasibility of 'buddy' services for adopters
- Provision of Independent Social Work services subject to agency capacity.

Adoption support planning, delivery and review

- Accessing specialist services (including social workers, psychologists, educationalist and specialist trained adoption support practitioners)
- Provide a fair and consistent support provision across the region
- Locally delivered specialist services, creating efficiencies in service delivery
- Provision of a menu of services to other agencies including therapy services, training (e.g. to schools) to enable the service to grow and develop
- Timely response to requests for support and monitoring levels of need and outcomes of provision of service

Specialist areas of Adoption Support

- Economies of scale are expected to enable the provision of regular and additional training and support groups for all relevant parties involved in adoption
- Working with voluntary agency partners to develop a centre of excellence for the provision of specialist services and training where feasible and cost effective
- Development of core training menu to adopters
- Providing a more accessible service across the region building on current good practice delivered by the VAA to two of the LAs
- Dedicated function to provide indirect contact service

For all stages

- Building on good practice
- Offer training opportunities to students undertaking professional training
- Investment in staff to provide career satisfaction and stability of team membership
- ICT systems that enable the appropriate sharing of information to prevent duplication and delay and to ensure the most appropriate services are offered.

VAA involvement

- VAA involvement in the provision of specific adoption support services
- Integration and sharing of skills between RAA and VAA staff and promotion of opportunities for joint working

Performance evaluation and monitoring

- Reviews of Adoption Support Plans
- Operational performance measures including monitoring of waiting times for services where applicable and disruption rates
- Commissioning contract KPIs
- Regulatory inspections
- Service user feedback
- Increased demand for services
- Supervision and evaluation of 'associate' providers and commissioned services
- Developing outcome measurement, monitoring (specifically regarding provision of therapy)