

## **DRAFT REGIONAL ADOPTION 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 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**

- 4.1 The Integrated Service will operate on a full time basis providing core services flexibly, as required by the needs of services users.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 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.
- 4.8 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**

- 4.9 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 Management Board of the RAA, the Adoption Leadership board and any other statutory body as required.
- 4.10 The performance management framework will include quantitative indicators which will allow performance on the above outcomes to be measured.

- 4.11 The performance management framework will also include qualitative feedback from adopters, service users and key professionals who have contact with the agency.
- 4.12 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**

- 4.13 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**

- 4.14 The Integrated Service will provide quarterly data submissions and associated reports to the Management Board. 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.

DRAFT

**TABLE 1 – DIVISION OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

**1.1 THE CHILD**

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY	NOTES
<b>Case Responsibility</b>	<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"> <li>• Statutory Visits</li> <li>• Management and supervision of contact between child and family members.</li> <li>• Supervision, administration and finance of foster placements and communication with foster carers (including Fostering for Adoption placements).</li> </ul>	<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>	
<b>Early identification of children requiring adoption</b>	<p>The local authority is responsible for identifying, at the earliest possible stage, the children who may require adoption and making them and their needs known to the RAA, providing relevant and timely information. The RAA aims to develop working practices with each LA to ensure close involvement in care planning in order to assist with</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 placement.</p> <p>Representatives of the RAA will be able to</p>	<p>Detail for each LA to be developed in conjunction with care planning leads.</p> <p>The RAA will be asking for permission for the</p>

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY	NOTES
	the earliest identification and to provide external challenge.	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 appropriate, to begin to identify suitable adopters at an early stage.	automatic right to attend these meetings.
<b>Early Placement</b>		Where appropriate, and in agreement with the local authority, the RAA will make available a Concurrent Planning Service and a Fostering For Adoption Service for children who may benefit from the possibility of early placement with potential adopters. (Placements will depend on the availability of appropriate carers)	The fostering element of an FFA service will remain the responsibility of each LA.  The LA will be responsible for supporting foster carers
<b>Twin Tracking of the children requiring adoption</b>	The local authority 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	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	
<b>Pre-placement Reports</b>	The LA will be responsible for the completion and cost of all reports prior to an adoption placement being made including Child Placement Reports.	The RAA will advise on and support the completion of the Child placement report and early profile of the child. The RAA will provide support and challenge to help ensure that	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY	NOTES
		<p>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) &amp; 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 to undertake more specialist assessments e.g. sibling assessments.</p>	
<b>Assessment of needs</b>	The local authority will be responsible for assessing the child's needs in respect of a future placement and in ensuring that any required financial support for a future adoptive placement is available.	<p>The RAA will provide additional information and advice on the placement needs of the child and the likely need for post adoption support services.</p> <p>It will be necessary for the RAA and LAA to work closely and collaboratively to ensure that the needs of the child can be met and that planned support is sustainable.</p>	
<b>Medical Information</b>	The Local Authority will be responsible for obtaining all required medical information in respect of children who		

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY	NOTES
	are being considered for adoption and ensuring all health assessments are completed within agreed timeframes		
<b>SHOBPA decision</b>	<p>The Agency Decision Maker in each LA will be responsible for the ‘Should be placed for adoption’ decision.</p> <p>The LA will undertake a regular review of this decision and associated plans and keep the family finder in the RAA informed of changes.</p>	<p>The RAA will support the SHOBPA decision making process as requested, particularly in the provision of the above information.</p> <p>The RAA will need to give specific consideration to medical information in the identification of a possible match.</p>	The RAA will have a quality assurance role in this process
<b>Family Finding Process</b>		The RAA will lead the tracking/family finding process in consultation with the local authority.	
<b>Communication during the family finding process</b>	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>A Family Finder will be allocated during the early stages of profiling and will keep a watching brief until it is clear that a SHOBPA decision will be made.</p> <p>The RAA will keep the LA regularly updated about progress on family finding.</p>	
<b>‘Hard to Place’/Priority Children</b>	<p>The LA is responsible for identifying at the earliest opportunity where a child is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aged four or over</li> <li>• From a BME heritage</li> <li>• Part of a sibling group of two or more</li> </ul>	<p>The RAA will either provide or commission a service for HTP children which may involve some or all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased publicity – DVD, Photos etc</li> <li>• Press and Digital Media advertising</li> </ul>	Some of these issues need addressing with each LA on a case by case basis.

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY	NOTES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has a disability or medical condition</li> </ul> <p>The LA will gather the relevant information, assess and forward to the RAA as soon as possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Profile the child at specific events</li> <li>Attempt to recruit carers specifically for the child</li> <li>Provide additional training and preparation for potential carers</li> <li>Advise on or assist with additional preparation work with the child.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Note – It will be the aim of the RAA to identify a choice of potential adoptive matches for a child prior to the conclusion of Care Proceedings</b></p>			
<p><b>Preparation of the child</b></p>	<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 often needs to start early in the child's looked after career and will contain information to which the LA has immediate access.</p> <p>The LA will be responsible for producing the Later Life Letter</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 hard to place and who are being prepared using the a more 'bespoke' family finding model (see above)</p>	<p>The RAA could compile life story books if resourced appropriately.</p>
<p><b>Linking and Matching</b></p>	<p>The LA, by agreement, 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</p>	

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY	NOTES
		process.	
<b>CPR, DPR, APR, Matching panel</b>	The LA is responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The CPR</li> <li>• Delegation of Parental Responsibility report</li> </ul>	The RAA will be responsible for completing the Adoption Placement Report, apart from the section on the child.  The RAA will organise the Matching Panel. .	
<b>MATCHING DECISIONS</b>	The Agency Decision Maker in each LA will be responsible for the Matching decision.	The RAA will support the process with information as required, including Panel Minutes	Panel and ADM meetings and processes will need to be closely co-ordinated to meet timescales and ensure all relevant information is available.
<b>ADOPTION ALLOWANCES</b>	Adoption allowances will be agreed and paid for by each LA. LAs will work towards a standardisation of adoption allowances policies regionally.		

## 1.2 ADOPTER RECRUITMENT

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY	NOTES
<b>Recruitment of adopters</b>	<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>	
<b>Enquiries</b>		<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>	
<b>Stage One</b>	<p>The LAs will provide all information required for statutory checks of potential adopters resident in the LA.</p>	<p>The RAA will undertake all Stage one functions</p>	

	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY</b>	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
<b>Stage Two</b>		The RAA will undertake all Stage Two functions	
<b>PAR</b>		The RAA will complete the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR)	
<b>Approvals</b>		The RAA will service the Adoption Panel. The RAA Agency Decision Maker will be responsible for all approvals	
<b>Post approval support and training</b>		The RAA will provide post approval support and training to approved adopters	

DRAFT

### 1.3 POST ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY	NOTES
<b>Adoption support plans</b>	The LA will consider funding requests for post adoption support services which are not included in the core offer.  e.g. Therapeutic support	The RAA will provide or commission all adoption support services.  The RAA will undertake adoption support fund assessments and applications.	
<b>Referrals and safeguarding</b>	The LA will signpost all referrals for support from adoptive families to the RAA.  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.		A referral pathway will be agreed.  This will often involve CAMHS and other health services.
<b>Out-of-hours services</b>	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.	
<b>Indirect / Letterbox contact</b>		The RAA will oversee Letterbox contact between adopted children and birth families.	
<b>Supervised &amp; Sibling Direct</b>	Responsibility for direct contact requirements are to be decided based on analysis of current arrangements and	Responsibility for direct contact requirements are to be decided based on analysis of current	

	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY</b>	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
<b>Contact</b>	RAA resourcing	arrangements and RAA resourcing	
<b>Adoption allowances</b>	Adoption allowances will be paid for by each LA after undertaking the appropriate assessment.		
<b>Adoption Support Fund</b>	Depending on DfE guidance and potential alternative arrangements for administering the ASF, applications may have to be submitted by LAs	The RAA will be responsible for undertaking all assessments and funding applications to the Adoption Support Fund.	
<b>Access to Children's records and files</b>	LA to facilitate	RAA to provide / commission Birth Records Counselling	
<b>Therapeutic support to birth parent</b>		RAA to provide / commission	Legal requirement
<b>Birth parents support to prevent recurring proceedings</b>	TBC	TBC	
<b>Access to Adopter's records</b>	LA for historic cases	RAA for cases which it has managed	
<b>Intermediary Service to relatives of adopted person</b>	LA for historic cases	RAA for cases which it has managed	Relatives seeking information and contact with the adopted person

#### 1.4 SERVICE USER ENGAGEMENT

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY	NOTES
<b>Adopters</b>		The RAA will engage with adopters individually and in groups with the aim of improving the services available	
<b>Adoptees</b>		The RAA will engage with adoptees individually and in groups with the aim of improving the services available	

#### 1.5 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT & INSPECTION

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY	NOTES
<b>Data provision</b>	<p>Each LA will need to provide key data to the RAA on performance, as defined in the commissioning contract.</p> <p>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.</p>		

	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY</b>	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
<b>Data analysis</b>		The RAA will produce a regular report to each LA on performance in a standard format. The schedule and format will be agreed by Board members.	
<b>OFSTED</b>	The future role of OFSTED in adoption is currently under review and future requirements are currently unclear.		

## 1.6 MISCELLANEOUS SERVICES

	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY</b>	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
Service to step parents who wish to adopt		RAA to provide	
Intercountry adoptions		RAA to provide/Commission	

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

**2.1 Front door, Recruitment & Assessment**

<b>Service provision and improvements</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Regular preparation training for prospective adopters to be provided 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.</li> <li>• Post approval training to be provided to all applicants, with modules developed that can be delivered to other agencies with the potential to create an income stream.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• VAA capacity to undertake priority assessments at short notice to be available.</li> <li>• Training could be commissioned from a VAA - either particular modules or complete training programmes to supplement those being provided by RAA staff.</li> </ul>
<b>Performance evaluation and monitoring</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LA tracking systems, Permanence Co-ordination and IROs</li> <li>• Monitoring of source of all enquiries, and ensuring resources are targeted on the most successful approaches.</li> <li>• 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 in to Adoption Panel agendas to enable assessments to be considered promptly when they are completed.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>

## 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.
- Provide continuity for the child, with the RAA worker undertaking the direct work with the child leading to the Placement Order continuing that work and also supporting the child through the matching process and introductions, through to placement and to Adoption Order.
- Continuity for birth relatives with a worker in Adoption West separate to the local authority social worker and already known to them.

#### 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 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 the Permanence Coordinator/Agency Adviser role and advantages in combining the 2 functions in that role.
- Early linking of the RAA worker to prepare the child and 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
- Rapid response team 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
- Development of 'buddy' services for adopters
- Provision of Independent Social Work services subject to agency capacity.

#### Adoption support planning, delivery and review

- Establishment of multi-agency specialist teams (including social workers, psychologists, educationalist and specialist trained adoption support practitioners) providing access to 'in house' specialist services for all adopters across all RAAs.
- 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.

#### 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
- Centre of excellence for the provision of cost effective specialist training
- 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 Post Adoption Central Support works to provide comprehensive contact service
- Development of a comprehensive contact service to LAs.

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 of VAA staff with specialist adoption support skills / training, e.g. through secondment

**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