



Full Business Case

Date September 2020
Version 0.9
Status: Draft

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1. Introduction

In June 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) published 'Regionalising Adoption' and asked all adoption agencies in England to consider how to work much more closely together on a regional basis. This was enacted as the Education and Adoption Act 2016 which advised authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to join together to form Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA).

The Vision for a Regionalised Adoption System:

'A system where matching is as quick as possible, recruitment is as effective as possible and adoption support quality is high'

The vision for the future of adoption in England encompasses:

- A system where children are matched with the most suitable adopter as quickly as possible
- Recruitment taking place at an efficient scale to provide a pool of 'adoption ready' adopters large enough and well enough matched to the needs of children waiting
- Enough high-quality adoption support services available nationwide

Adopt Coast to Coast is a Regional Adoption Agency between Cumbria County Council, Durham County Council and Together for Children / Sunderland City Council, working with a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) Alliance. The VAA Alliance is made up of the following VAAs; ARC Adoption NE, Barnardo's, Caritas Care Adoption and Adoption Matters.

Established on the 1st April 2017, Together for Children delivers children's services on behalf of Sunderland City Council. Together for Children is owned by Sunderland City Council but controlled by an independent board to ensure operational independence.

2. Executive Summary and Recommendations

2.1 Executive Summary

Cumbria County Council, Durham County Council and Together for Children / Sunderland City Council have been working together since December 2016 to consider how they could develop a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). In December 2017 a bid to establish a RAA was submitted to the Department for Education and this was approved in March 2018.

All three adoption services are judged to be GOOD by OFSTED, and as a partnership they value the strengths that each of the organisations brings to the RAA. Some of the benefits of an RAA include:

- Better outcomes for Children, Adopters and Birth Families
- More Adopters for our Children
- Ability to share resources
- Ability to share expertise and best practice

The RAA will be called Adopt Coast to Coast and it will have its own brand.

The vision for Adopt Coast to Coast is that children will achieve their full potential within a loving and secure family, and everyone affected by adoption will receive a high-quality innovative and sustainable service.

The overall objectives for Adopt Coast to Coast are to:

- Provide child-centred services
- Deliver a high-quality accessible service to adopters and potential adopters
- Provide an accessible independent service for birth families affected by adoption
- Create strong partnership working with Local Authorities, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and universal services
- Offer a service which is high-quality and provides good value for money

It is recommended that Coast to Coast RAA is established as a Partnership Model with a Hub and Spoke delivery.

The Hub will consist of the RAA Head of Service and a Communications and Marketing Officer and will have access to a number of support services such as Performance and Finance.

There will be three spokes:

- Cumbria
- Durham
- Together for Children

The staff in the spokes will continue to be employed by their existing organisations.

The finance model proposed for Adopt Coast to Coast is that the current Adoption Service's budget shall remain in each respective Local Authority. As such and in the best interests of the partnership each Local Authority will agree that there will be no material changes to the current structure without consultation with the other partners where this may impact on the future managerial or financial arrangements.

The hub costs will be the responsibility of the RAA Head of Service, and each Local Authority will contribute 1/3 of these.

The RAA wants to build and develop further its strong relationship with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies. Their involvement will support the RAA in meeting its sufficiency target. The VAA will work collectively as an alliance and will be key to the delivery of some of the functions. They will also be involved in the Governance of the RAA.

A Governance Board will oversee the RAA, set its strategic objectives, performance targets and ensure it delivers good outcomes for Children and Young People. Lead Members will meet every six months with the Governance Board and all Members will have oversight through existing arrangements such as Corporate Parenting Boards.

The aim is for Adopt Coast to Coast to go live on the 1st April 2021.

2.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that Members approve:

1. The Full Business Case for establishing Adopt Coast to Coast Regional Adoption Agency with Cumbria County Council, Durham County Council and Together for Children / Sunderland City Council

3. Context and Background

Cumbria County Council, Durham County Council and Together for Children / Sunderland City Council have been working together since December 2016 to consider how they could develop a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). In December 2017 a bid to establish a RAA was submitted to the Department for Education and this was approved in March 2018.

All three adoption services are judged to be GOOD by OFSTED, and as a partnership they value the strengths that each of the organisations brings to the RAA. Some of the benefits of an RAA include:

- Better outcomes for Children, Adopters and Birth Families
- More Adopters for our Children
- Ability to share resources
- Ability to share expertise and best practice

We are also working in partnership with the Voluntary Adoption Agency Alliance (ARC Adoption NE, Barnardo's, Caritas Care Adoption and Adoption Matters) to support us in the development of the RAA and then as partners in delivering good outcomes for children.

Adopt Coast to Coast RAA has significant challenges to overcome:

- An increasing number of Children Looked After
- A high number of Adoptions
- An increasing complexity of Adoption needs
- Ability to recruit sufficient Adopters

	Total Population (mid 2018 estimates)	Number of Children Looked After As at March 2020	Number of Adoptions 2019 - 2020
Cumbria CC	498,888	721 (+38)	32 (-6)
Durham CC	523,662	914 (+74)	55 (+10)
Together for Children	277,417	582 (-13)	35(-2)

(+/- difference on last year's figures)

Working collectively together as the Regional Adoption Agency with a strong partnership with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies through their Alliance, will help to ensure we meet the needs of our Children and Young People, our Adopters and our Birth Families.

4. Delivery Model

Regional Adoption Agencies have been set up in several different ways depending on the context and challenges facing the partner organisations.

The new preferred legal model for the RAA is based on a collaborative “hub and spoke” model between the three authorities and Together for Children (TfC).

Under this model, the three authorities/TfC would agree to collaborate in relation to the performance of their statutory adoption functions through a legally binding RAA partnership agreement.

The parties would jointly operate a central RAA “hub” for collaboration purposes which would comprise a joint Governance Board (which will be responsible for “key” RAA decisions), a regional joint RAA Head of Service (which would be employed by one of the authorities but would report to the Governance Board) and other relevant central services.

The funding and governance arrangements for the RAA “Hub” will need to be defined in the partnership agreement.

Each authority would then continue to operate at a local “spoke”, under the day-to-day co-ordination of the joint RAA Head of Service and implement the agreed joint plans, policies and strategies as approved by the Governance Board.

There is no single legal authority under this model and given that the adoption functions continue to be discharged by each authority at a local level, there is no formal delegation of statutory powers and no TUPE transfer of staff.

Detailed heads of terms for the partnership/collaboration agreement will be developed as part of the next stage of the process.

The Hub will consist of the RAA Head of Service and a Communications and Marketing Officer and will have access to a number of support services such as Performance and Finance.

There will be three spokes:

- Cumbria
- Durham
- Together for Children

The RAA Head of Service will manage the function through a Matrix Management approach as set out below:

- The hub costs will be the responsibility of the RAA Head of Service, and each Local Authority will contribute 1/3 of these.
- RAA Head of Service will line manage the lead adoption person (hereafter referred to as Adoption Manager, though this title is not used in all organisations) in each spoke for the delivery of the RAA function and some 1:1s and appraisals will be done jointly with the Local Authority line manager.
- If there are any major changes to staffing (i.e. beyond vacancy management) these would come back to Gov Board for approval.
- There will be an element of the budget such as Adoption Support and Interagency Fees which are jointly controlled by the Local Authority and RAA.

Further details of how the matrix management approach will work are set out in Appendix 1.

5. Vision and Objectives

Our vision is that children will achieve their full potential within a loving and secure family and everyone affected by adoption will receive a high-quality innovative and sustainable service.

5.1 Strategic Objectives:

Our overall objectives for Adopt Coast to Coast are to:

- Provide child-centred services.
- Deliver a high-quality accessible service to adopters and potential adopters.
- Provide an accessible independent service for birth families and others affected by adoption.
- Create strong partnership working with Local Authorities, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and universal services.
- Offer a service which is high-quality and provides good value for money.

We will deliver our objectives by:

1. Providing child-centred services through:

- Placing the child at the centre throughout their adoption journey, including into adulthood.
- Securing early permanence to prevent delay and achieve the best possible outcomes.
- Recognising the child's voice in permanence planning and ensuring communication is effective to enable them to understand their life narrative.
- Creating a sense of belonging for the child, in a secure permanent family and in the wider adoption community.
- Ensuring access to support at the level and time that it is needed.
- Ensuring sufficient adopters to promote the best possible match for the child.

2. Giving a high-quality accessible service to adopters and potential adopters through:

- Ensuring applicants receive a sensitive, flexible and welcoming service.
- Responding to enquiries from potential adopters in a timely manner.
- Giving prospective adopters clear, realistic and timely feedback at all stages of their enquiry and application.
- Ensuring that adopters fully contribute to an evidence-based assessment, approval and matching process.

- Providing consistent quality of adoption support that is relevant to individual adopter family's needs.
 - Identifying and progressing potential matches at the earliest possible stage.
 - Providing qualified, skilled and experienced staff to support and guide adopters throughout their journey.
 - Offering consistent, high quality, up to date training throughout, to enable adopters to understand the lifelong impact of adoption.
3. Providing an accessible independent service for birth families and others affected by adoption which will include:
- Support for birth family members whose children have a plan of adoption and enabling them, at any point, to contribute to the child's understanding of their life story.
 - Intermediary services to birth family members and adopted adults.
 - A letterbox service to facilitate ongoing positive contact between birth families and children.
 - Facilitation of direct contact where this meets the child's needs.
4. Creating strong partnership working with Local Authorities, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and universal services by:
- Ensuring Voluntary Adoption Agencies have a full and active role in the delivery of Adopt Coast to Coast services.
 - Sharing learning and striving for evidence-based best practice.
 - Ensuring consistent and long-term sustainability of service delivery and funding to the Voluntary Adoption Agencies for the benefit of children.
5. Offering a service which is high-quality and provides good value for money through:
- Demonstrating consistently excellent practice which results in excellent outcomes for children.
 - Ensuring consistency of quality of service provision across Adopt Coast to Coast.
 - The efficient, effective and innovative use of resources.
 - Effectively commissioning and reviewing appropriate services.
 - Developing and implementing clear minimum standards.
 - Continually learning from stakeholders, best practice and adapting services accordingly.

5.2 Outcomes and Benefits of the RAA

There is commitment from each organisation to work together in a single RAA across the geographical area proposed, to achieve:

- A culture of early permanence planning in order to identify suitable adopters for children at the earliest possible stage during the care planning process to ensure the timeliness of the child moving in with their adoptive family.
- Marketing activity and recruitment of prospective adoptive families to meet the needs of the range of children, including sibling groups.
- Assessment and training of prospective adopters to a consistently high standard.
- Development of services across the range of adoption functions in the RAA through the capturing of stakeholder views and best regional and national practice.
- Matching, linking and adoption support that enables children to live in supportive and safe placements with their adoptive families.
- Pre and Post Adoption support tailored to meet the needs of the children and adoptive families and to deliver this as a consistent package of support across the RAA area.
- Effective and easily accessible Birth Family support.
- Access to consistent and responsive Intermediary Services.

5.3 Services in Scope

Included within the scope of the Regional Adoption Agency are:

- Early Permanence planning
- Marketing activity and recruitment of prospective adopters
- Assessment and training of prospective adopters
- Tracking, Linking and Matching
- Pre and Post Adoption Support
- Birth Family Support

- Intermediary Services

The expectation would be that all adoption functions as currently carried out by Cumbria County Council, Durham County Council and Together for Children / Sunderland City Council or commissioned by them would be in scope of the new RAA. The commissioning of interagency placements as undertaken currently would continue. It is anticipated that adoption support services currently commissioned, will remain so in the initial stages of the RAA to ensure consistency for children and adopters. The expectation would be that at some point the RAA would procure services across the region.

5.4 Services Out of Scope

Special Guardianship Order assessments and subsequent support services have not been included in the scope of the RAA at this point.

Fostering Services are also out of scope.

5.5 The Role of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies

It is envisaged that the Voluntary Adoption Agencies would play a key role in the Regional Adoption Agency.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to meet the demand and the increasingly complex needs of our children and young people. We believe that by working in partnership with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies through their Alliance, we will be in a stronger position to meet the needs of children with a plan of adoption.

We want a different relationship. We envisage that:

- The Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) alliance will work with us each year to look at our needs and help us develop our sufficiency plan.
- From this we will identify our gaps and plan our recruitment campaigns.
- We will have an agreement with the VAA Alliance to provide a specific number and type of prospective adoptive families over the year. The management of the process will be set out in the commissioning arrangements.
- We would include the VAA alliance in our regular tracking and matching meetings so that we can identify suitable matches at the earliest opportunity.
- We would develop our best practice collectively with all partners learning from each other. This would include some joint training and development days.

The benefits of this approach are:

- We would be able to match and place children more quickly.
- We would ensure the children have the most suitable prospective adoptive family to meet their needs.
- We have shared responsibility for the recruitment of prospective adopters with the VAA alliance supporting us by recruiting prospective adopters including for our 'harder to place' children.
- There would be a greater number of prospective adoptive families available across the RAA / VAA alliance.
- We would have a stronger relationship between the RAA and the VAA alliance.
- This approach would build stability in the VAA sector in the region.

In addition to the recruitment of prospective adoptive families (as described above), the VAA can potentially provide a range of additional services to the RAA. Initially it is envisaged that existing contracts are reviewed and then extended where appropriate. During the first twelve months, the RAA will assess its needs and contract services as appropriate.

5.6 Early Permanence

In working together to extend and improve the early permanence planning for children we can ensure that children have the best start in life by being part of a permanent, safe and loving family as early as possible in their lives. Our RAA will be focused on developing and maintaining strong links required with the teams who care plan for children, so we are involved and informed at the earliest possible stage.

Early permanence planning will ensure that we are working together to seek the right prospective adoptive family as early as possible. We will develop recruitment and marketing strategies that target recruitment of families who can best meet the needs of the children for whom we are seeking families. Together we can use our combined expertise to support staff who prepare children to move to their new families and as an RAA identify and deliver bespoke adoption support to meet the individual needs of the child and their prospective adoptive family.

Early Permanence will include:

- Early Placement Planning
- Concurrency

- Fostering for Adoption

We will work across the Local Authority partners to create a culture of Early Permanence planning in order to identify possible suitable prospective adopters for children at the earliest stage during the care planning process. Earlier placement supports the best outcomes for children.

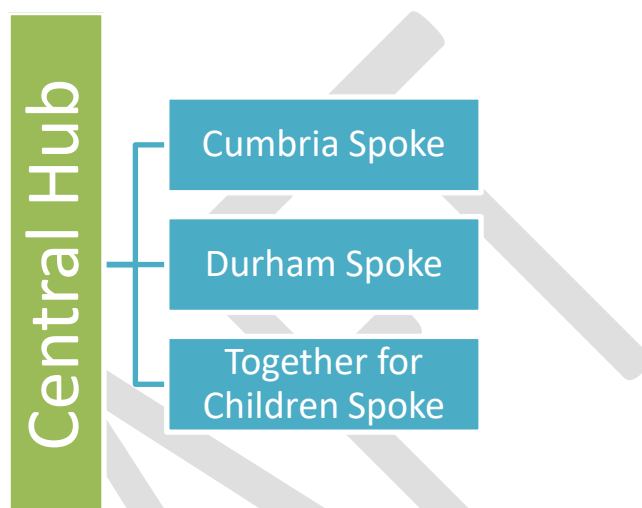
What this means in practice:

- Each Local Authority will have an Early Permanence Strategy which will include all children regardless of route to permanence.
- We need to support the embedding of early permanence thinking within each Local Authority, so this practice is integrated into the culture and practice of the organisation with senior managers and legal teams supporting the principles and the benefits of early permanence.
- We will do this by ensuring that early permanence is a fundamental part of social work practice.
- This will be achieved by:
 - Ensuring effective leadership around early permanence.
 - Constant raising of awareness – through meetings and other engagement opportunities.
 - Effective and ongoing training for all staff – recognising the turn-over in children's care planning teams.

6. Design of the Regional Adoption Agency

6.1 Functions and Responsibilities

In the Partnership Model which is being proposed for Adopt Coast to Coast some of the functions will be undertaken centrally in the Hub and other functions will be delivered locally in the Spokes.



The RAA wants to build and develop further its strong relationship with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies as described in section 5.3. As shown below, this means that the VAA, through its alliance, will be key to the delivery of some of the functions.

Set out in Appendix 2 are high-level maps of how this will work in practice.

Whilst delivery will be devolved to the localities the RAA Head of Service will have overall responsibility for quality management and practice oversight. It is expected that there will be high quality and consistent practice across the RAA.

Function	What	Responsible
Marketing	Brand Website Marketing	RAA Hub
	Events Campaigns Information Sessions	RAA Hub/ Locality

Function	What	Responsible
Adopter Recruitment	Enquiries	RAA Hub Locality
Adopter Assessment	Training Stage 1 (ROI/Statutory Checks) Stage 2 (Assessment) Panel Agency Decision Maker (ADM)	Locality
Early Permanence (EP)/Permanence planning	Early tracking Consideration if EP placement ADM /Child Should be Placed for Adoption	Locality
Tracking, Family Finding and Matching	Early Tracking Centralised Tracking Family Finding Linking and Matching	RAA Core Function undertaken jointly with Hub, Localities and VAA Alliance
Placement Planning	ADM for the Match Placement planning and Introductions Placement Court	Locality
Other Locality Work	Post Box Life Story Work Administration of Panels Management of Adoption Support Fund Birth Records and Intermediary work Independent service for birth families Administration and review of Adoption Allowances Adoption Support	Localities Some aspects of this work are currently provided through commissioned services. Head of Service to take lead in reviewing these and offer proposals for future commissioning activity.
Other RAA Core Functions	Sufficiency Planning Performance Management and Returns Governance Board Finance and Budget monitoring	RAA Core Function undertaken jointly with Hub, Localities and VAA Alliance.

6.2 Staffing and HR Considerations

6.2.1 Staffing Roles

The Hub will consist of two employees:

- RAA Head of Service
- Communications and Marketing Officer

All other adoption staff will continue to be employed by the localities.

6.2.2 HR Considerations

In the Partnership Model proposed for Adopt Coast to Coast, apart from the posts in Hub, all the staff will continue to be employed by their existing employer. This means that there is minimal impact on the staff and no changes to their terms and conditions.

There will still be a need to consult with staff and the Unions on the establishment of the RAA.

The detailed workplan and timescale will form a key part of the implementation and key tasks include:

- Staff and Union consultation
- Recruit Communications and Marketing Officer
- Training and development
- Staff team building

6.3 Accommodation and Property

Adopt Coast to Coast will operate across a very large geographical area and therefore needs to be fully flexible in the way it delivers services.

Each of the Local Authorities will continue to provide accommodation for all the staff they employ, and agile working practices will continue to be a key aspect of successful service delivery. It will be equally important that staff groups can meet to review and develop service provision which will support a cohesive shared vision. This need can be met through a mixed model of engagement including face to face and virtual.

Maintaining a presence in their respective Local Authority accommodation will enable staff to continue to work closely with their respective Children's Social Care teams.

The features of the ways of working are set out below:

- Most staff need to continue to be fully agile using a laptop and phone.
- Business support / administration staff would continue to work as they currently do.
- Access to other partner's accommodation would assist Local Authority staff in working more agilely across the geographical footprint of Adopt Coast to Coast.
- The RAA Head of Service will need the flexibility to work across the geographical footprint of the RAA.
- Team meetings/service development sessions will be a mix of face to face and virtual depending on the activity and the needs of the staff.
- Supervision will be a mix of face to face and virtual taking into account the needs of the supervisee.

6.4 ICT

There are several elements to the ICT solution:

- A Single Point of Contact for the RAA
- Provision of Desktop / Equipment
- A Matching and Tracking System
- Website

A Single Point of Contact for RAA

The RAA will require a single point of contact which is supported by appropriate telephony, website and email arrangements. This also includes a single point of storage for relevant RAA document such as procedures, policies etc, which are accessible across the Adopt Coast to Coast Area.

Desktop / Equipment

The basic desktop and equipment need of each employee are expected to be the responsibility of the employer of the staff member who will provide the ICT needed which will include:

- Laptop or Desktop
- Ability to print to any device in their Local Authority buildings
- Mobile/Smart Phone

- MS-Office
- E-mail
- Video conferencing etc

Adoption Case Management System

Each of the spokes will continue to use their existing Children's Social Care system to record all Adoption activity.

There is a need to develop a system to support the Tracking, Matching and Family Finding.

Inherent in the above is the need to be clarify flows of data between the Hub and the Spokes, as well as clarity in relation to the recording of relevant data items between systems.

Website

The RAA will have its own website with its own brand and will be a customer portal including information about adoption and enquiry forms where appropriate.

6.5 Performance Management

Performance Management Framework

Adopt Coast to Coast must have a clear set of performance indicators which will help it to assess how well it is performing against its objectives. The indicators should give a balanced picture of performance that reflects all aspects of the service. Adopt Coast to Coast will use the Balanced Scorecard approach to make sure it has a rounded picture of performance.

The scorecard covers four key aspects of performance:

- **Customers** – this looks at the impact of the RAA in terms of the community, services users and customers. It involves looking at how well the RAA has met the needs of service users and the perception of the organisation from the viewpoint of the community / service user which will include outcome indicators like customer satisfaction, and other feedback from users such as review, compliments and complaints.
- **Business** – this focuses on how well the processes which are critical to effective service delivery are working and will include all the Adoption Scorecard measures. This encourages managers to identify what the key business

processes are, to look at performance in carrying out those processes and to establish targets for improving performance.

- **Resources** – these indicators focus on how well the RAA's resources are being used and might include finance, equipment or other physical assets.
- **People** – indicators in this aspect focus on actions or initiatives intended to deliver service improvements, these might for example include employees training and development.

There will be two types of performance measures:

1. Primary Measures – Balanced Scorecard as reported to Governance Board (set out below)
2. Secondary Measures – providing additional performance information to support wider business improvements

RESOURCES (R)	BUSINESS/PERFORMANCE (B)
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Interagency budget targets are achieved.2. Budget targets/savings achieved.3. Effective commissioning of services.4. Application to Adoption Support Fund (% of successful applications).5. Monitoring of numbers of externally provided workforce (agency staff).	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adoption scorecard performance measures.2. Improved timeliness for children moving to adoption (measured at each stage in the process).3. Maintain the percentage of children who cease to be looked after by adoption.4. Improving the outcomes for siblings who need to live together, harder to place and older children.5. Ensure placement sufficiency for children who need an early permanence placement via Fostering for Adoption and Concurrency.6. Monitor the number of disruptions pre and post-order using learning to improve practice.7. Increase recruitment of prospective adopters from all sectors of the community.8. Ensure statutory timescales for assessments of adopters are met.9. Contribute to good Ofsted outcomes for Children's Services in the three Local Authorities.10. Develop measures to demonstrate impact and effectiveness of Adoption Support.

	11. Case Audits (number of case audits, judgement on quality of case recording).
EMPLOYEES (E) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employee satisfaction levels (via survey). 2. Number of team development/whole service days – feedback. 3. Sickness and capability levels. 4. % employees who have an annual appraisal (e.g., leading to shadowing to meet service objectives). 5. % of employees who have access to Supervision (monthly). 6. Training – satisfaction – meets service needs and PDP needs. 7. Timeliness of successful recruitment and appointment to first time advert. 8. Staff turnover. 9. Monitoring of numbers of externally provided workforce (agency staff). 	CUSTOMERS (C) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monitor number and nature of complaints. 2. Ability to meet assessed need. 3. Customer satisfaction measures: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Adoptee b. Adopter c. Birth Parent 4. Partner Local Authority Children's Social Care satisfaction. <p>[How: questionnaires, Panel Member feedback, mystery shopper, user groups, feedback from Children's Social Work Teams, IRO's].</p>

OFSTED and Regulatory Framework

Each Local Authority will continue to be inspected by Ofsted under the ILACS framework and will be evaluated on the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters. As partners in Adopt Coast to Coast each Local Authority must demonstrate how the hub and spoke arrangement complies with their statutory responsibilities to meet the needs of their local children. In respect of the hub functions the inspectors will look at each Local Authority's arrangements to assure itself that the hub is meeting the needs of local children. To support the inspection process the RAA will need to provide the necessary information for each Local Authority.

6.6 Information Governance

Information governance protocols will ensure that outcomes are delivered with regards to:

- Data Protection registration
- Privacy Impact Assessment
- Information Sharing Agreements
- Records Management / Storage / retention
- Information and Data ownership
- Freedom of Information
- Complaints / customer feedback / escalation policy / role of Adopt Coast to Coast Governance Board
- Training and Awareness
- Lone Working policy
- IG policies and procedures

And compliance with:

- ISO27001 Information Security Management System standard,
- PSN and PCIDSS requirements,
- ISO9001 Quality Management System standard
- Compliance with HSCN connection requirements
- Adoption Agencies Regulations and National Minimum Standards

6.7 Communications and Marketing

Adopt Coast to Coast will have its own identity and its own brand and website.



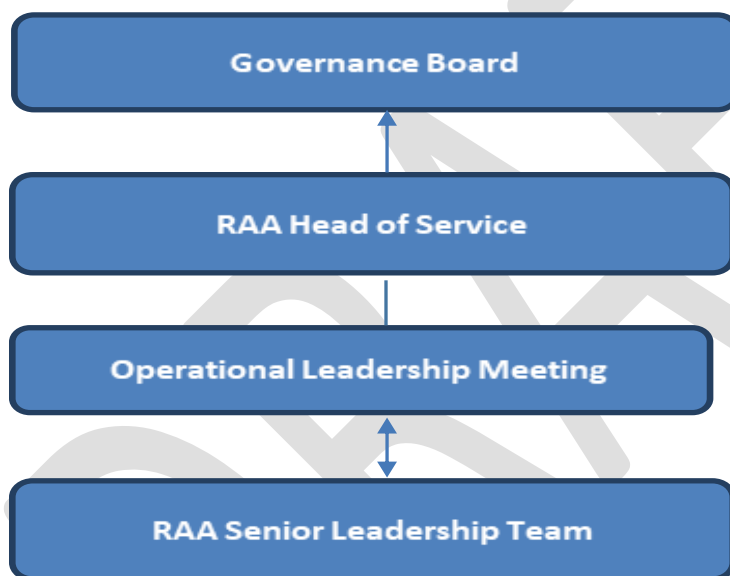
- Website and URL adoptc2c.org.uk

A detailed communications and marketing plan will be developed to support the implementation and operation of the RAA.

6.8 Governance Arrangements

6.8.1 Partnership Model

The Coast to Coast RAA will be established on the basis of a Partnership Model with a Hub and Spoke delivery.



6.8.2 Adopt Coast to Coast Governance Board

The purpose of the Board is to be responsible for the strategic oversight of Adopt Coast to Coast. It is proposed that the Governance Board meet at least every 3 months.

The main functions of the Board are to:

- Ensure children with a plan of adoption and their adoptive families receive a

good service from the RAA in partnership with the Local Authorities.

- Develop strategy and set strategic direction for Adopt Coast to Coast.
- Agree all policy decisions.
- Recruitment, suspension, dismissal of the RAA Head of Service.
- Ensure there is appropriate supervision, professional development and support provided to the RAA Head of Service.
- Propose and recommend the budget and other resources to the three Authorities.
- Recommend in year variations to the budget which are outside agreed limits, to the three Authorities.
- Any proposed procurement which is not expressly approved in the budget will be referred by the Governance Board to the three authorities depending on value.
- Agree the Commissioning Strategy.
- Agree the performance targets.
- Monitor performance and volumetric data.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the service in meeting strategic objectives.
- Agree to changes in service delivery.
- Agree any major staffing changes across the RAA.
- Ensuring that RAA is supported with sufficient resources to carry out its functions.

Governance Board Membership will be:

- Directors of Children's Social Care or their nominated officers
- RAA Head of Service
- Finance representative
- Voluntary Adoption Agency representative
- Staff representative

The Board will be responsible for appointing the chair of Adopt Coast to Coast Governance Board.

6.8.3 Local Authority Members

Local Authority Members have a key role in ensuring that the RAA delivers good outcomes for Children and Young People. Their involvement and oversight will be as follows:

- Lead Members will meet with the Governance Board quarterly to receive an update on progress and outcomes.

- Lead Members will receive regular briefings from their Directors of Children's Services.
- Corporate Parenting Boards will receive updates on the progress and outcomes of the RAA.
- Scrutiny panels will have oversight of the RAA as appropriate.

6.8.4 Head of Service Adopt Coast to Coast

The RAA Head of Service will be responsible to the Governance Board for the strategic development of the service. They will Chair Operational Leadership Meeting and manage the Senior Leadership Team.

The RAA Head of Service will:

- Manage the Adoption Service with the Adoption Manager in each of the three Local Authorities, within a matrix management arrangement with the Local Authority line managers.
- Deliver service improvements and outcomes as agreed by the Governance Board.
- Be responsible for the quality assurance and practice oversight across the RAA and over time ensure consistency of practice and common standards.
- Manage the core expenditure from within the budgets set by the Local Authorities.
- Submit quarterly performance reports and bi-annual adoption reports to the Governance Board.

6.8.5 Operational Leadership Meeting (OLM)

The RAA OLM will be responsible for considering local, regional and national drivers that may impact on the functions and responsibilities of the RAA. This group will maintain an overview of each Local Authorities key requirements and changing landscape in respect of adoption matters to support a timely response from the RAA.

The OLM will be chaired by the RAA Head of Service and will include, as a minimum, the three Local Authority strategic managers with responsibility for adoption, the Communications and Marketing Officer and a representative from the VAA Alliance. Invitations will be extended to leads in each of the three Local Authorities for IT, Performance, Recruitment and Marketing etc as necessary.

It will:

- Meet 6 weekly.

- Consider sufficiency and volumetric data to ensure effective forward planning.
- Highlight to the RAA Head of Service any challenges in embedding Early Permanence, highlighting Teams which require more support and guidance. For the benefit of the partners highlight any aspects of practice in Early Permanence which are working well.
- Act as a 'critical friend' and provide feedback and challenge from other areas of their respective Local Authorities to promote service improvement.

6.8.6 RAA Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

The RAA SLT will be responsible for monitoring and delivering the operational aspects of Adopt Coast to Coast. It will be responsible for ensuring that strong and effective links are developed and maintained between the RAA and the Local Authorities.

The SLT will be chaired by the RAA Head of Service and will include the three Local Authority Adoption Managers and the Communications and Marketing Officer.

It will:

- Meet monthly.
- Consider sufficiency and volumetric data to ensure effective forward planning.
- Be responsible, in partnership with the Local Authorities, for ensuring that Early Permanence is embedded across the partnership.
- Will agree procedures and ways of working including those which impact on the Local Authority, consistent with the RAA agreed policies.
- Will ensure quality of practice is consistently delivered across the RAA.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 Approach

The finance model proposed for Adopt Coast to Coast is that the current Adoption Team's budget shall remain in each respective Local Authority. As such and in the best interests of the partnership each Local Authority will agree that there will be no material changes to the current structure without consultation with the other partners where this may impact on the future managerial or financial arrangements. The hub costs will be the responsibility of the RAA Head of Service, and each Local Authority will contribute 1/3 of these.

The Head of the RAA will oversee one staff member directly, matrix manage the 3 Adoption Managers.

The RAA Head of Service will have oversight of the Interagency Adoption Fees, Adoption Allowances, and Post Adoption Support Commissioned Services for each of the Local Authorities, to enable efficiencies to be achieved with accountability through the Governance Board.

The table below summarises the current budgets associated with Adoption Team activity held within the three Local Authorities.

Expenditure Type	DCC	TFC	CCC	HUB	Annual Cost
Staff	£520,083	£488,683	£934,228	£140,709	£2,083,703
Non Staff Costs	£96,296	£156,512	£137,937	£5,000	£395,745
Interagency Adoption Fees	£1,531,000	£112,548	£100,000	-	£1,743,548
Adoption Allowances	£879,347	£483,266	£600,000	-	£1,962,613
Post Adoption Support Commissioned Services	£45,640	£91,500	£63,000	-	£200,140
Total	£3,072,366	£1,332,509	£1,835,165	£145,709	£6,385,749

7.2 Hub Costs

The initial annual 'Core' budget associated with the RAA Head of Service and the Communications and Marketing Officer and support is estimated at c£146K which will be funded equally by all three participating Authorities as detailed in the Table below.

Estimated Annual Core Budget	
RAA Head of Service	£ 86,514
Coms and Marketing Officer	£ 40,995
Misc.	£ 3,000
Mobile	£ 1,200
Mileage	£ 2,000
ICT	£ 2,000
Business support Cost (HUB)	£ 10,000
Total	£ 145,709

A budget will be established in the Hub authority with the Contributions from the two partner authorities recorded as income. Any over or underspends at the year-end will be distributed between the three partner authorities based on the proportion of the financial contribution.

The budget will be monitored internally as part of the hub authority's usual internal governance cycle with quarterly outturn reports being presented the RAA Governance Board for review.

The RAA Head of Service will produce an annual financial report – summarising adoption activity across the RAA including a breakdown of direct placement costs and statistics relating to the timeliness of the adoption process.

7.3 Interagency Fees

It is proposed that Interagency Budgets remain within each of the participating Local Authorities. The placements recruited by each Local Authority and the associated VAA's be pooled, with the best match for the child being the determining factor as to where the child is placed.

Currently the income received from an outside organisation utilising a placement recruited by another organisation varies depending on the status of the recruiting body i.e. VAA or Local Authority. It has been agreed that all of the Local Authority partners in Adopt Coast to Coast will employ a single pricing structure.

The proposed approach for dealing with Interagency Fees assumes each member of the partnership receives the benefit of a successful placement of a child with a prospective adopter they recruited, whether the child originates from the particular partner or from another partner within the RAA.

The recommended approach for dealing with Interagency Fees is based on the following agreed principles - no Local Authority is worse off as a result of how the RAA manages interagency fees, and our priority is always to place firstly through the RAA Partnership.

Cash Flow

In order to ensure none of the participating members of the RAA are negatively affected by Cash Flow issues - it is recommended that a quarterly reconciliation is undertaken to assess the activity in the year to date with the reporting of the current cost / income implications for each of the RAA partners.

At this point activity to date could be followed by all charges and payments between the partners being undertaken, or potentially just midyear payments to partner VAA's with an annual exercise undertaken by the participating Local Authorities to reflect the financial impact of the whole year.

It is proposed that the support services be provided by the hub and cost be equally shared with all three participating Authorities. Initial indicative support services costs are estimated at £18K as detailed in the table above.

7.4 Set Up Costs

Adopt Coast to Coast will have some one-off set up costs. These are yet to be fully quantified as some of these are dependent on decisions around working practices and any accommodation requirements.

Set-up costs will be funded by the DfE grant held by Durham County Council until this is exhausted and only if this insufficient should any remaining costs be shared between the three Local Authorities.

The most recent review of anticipated setup cost budgets indicates little likelihood of the budget overspending with the revised proposed hub and spoke delivery model requiring significantly less IT development than the previous hosted model.

The project set up budget will continue to be monitored with returns continuing to the DFE on a quarterly basis and outturn forecasts to the RAA Governance Board.

7.5 Commissioning Arrangements

Each organisation currently has in place contracts for commissioned services associated with the delivery of their Adoption Services.

It is proposed that these arrangements be recommissioned by each Local Authority for a further 12 months following the go live of Adopt Coast to Coast.

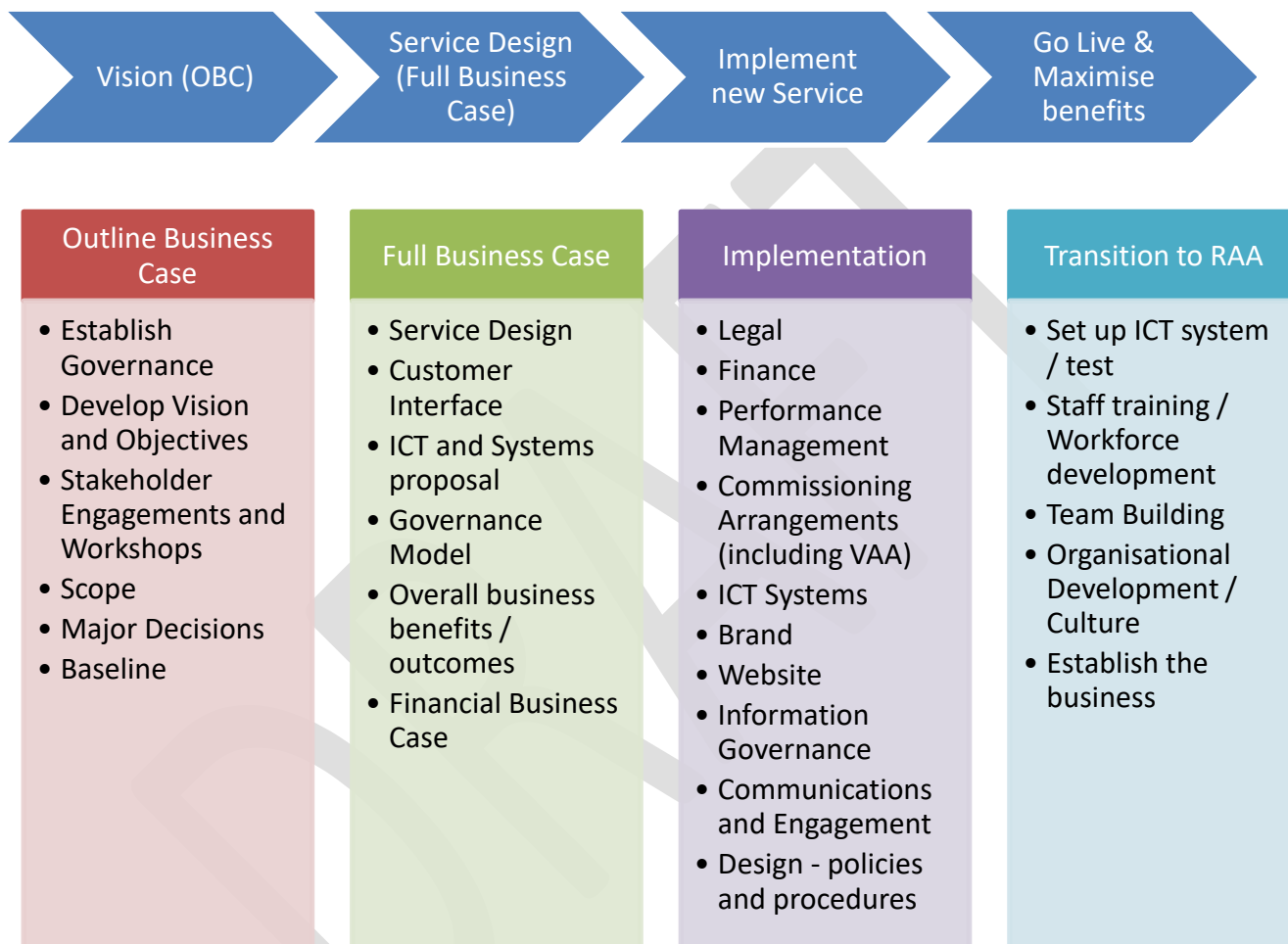
The reason for the proposal is:

- Provides stability to the current providers.
- Provides stability to customers and service delivery.
- Gives Adopt Coast to Coast time to determine which services it needs to commission in the future.

8. Plan and Next Steps / Risk Assessment

8.1 Overall Project Plan

There are four stages to the project:



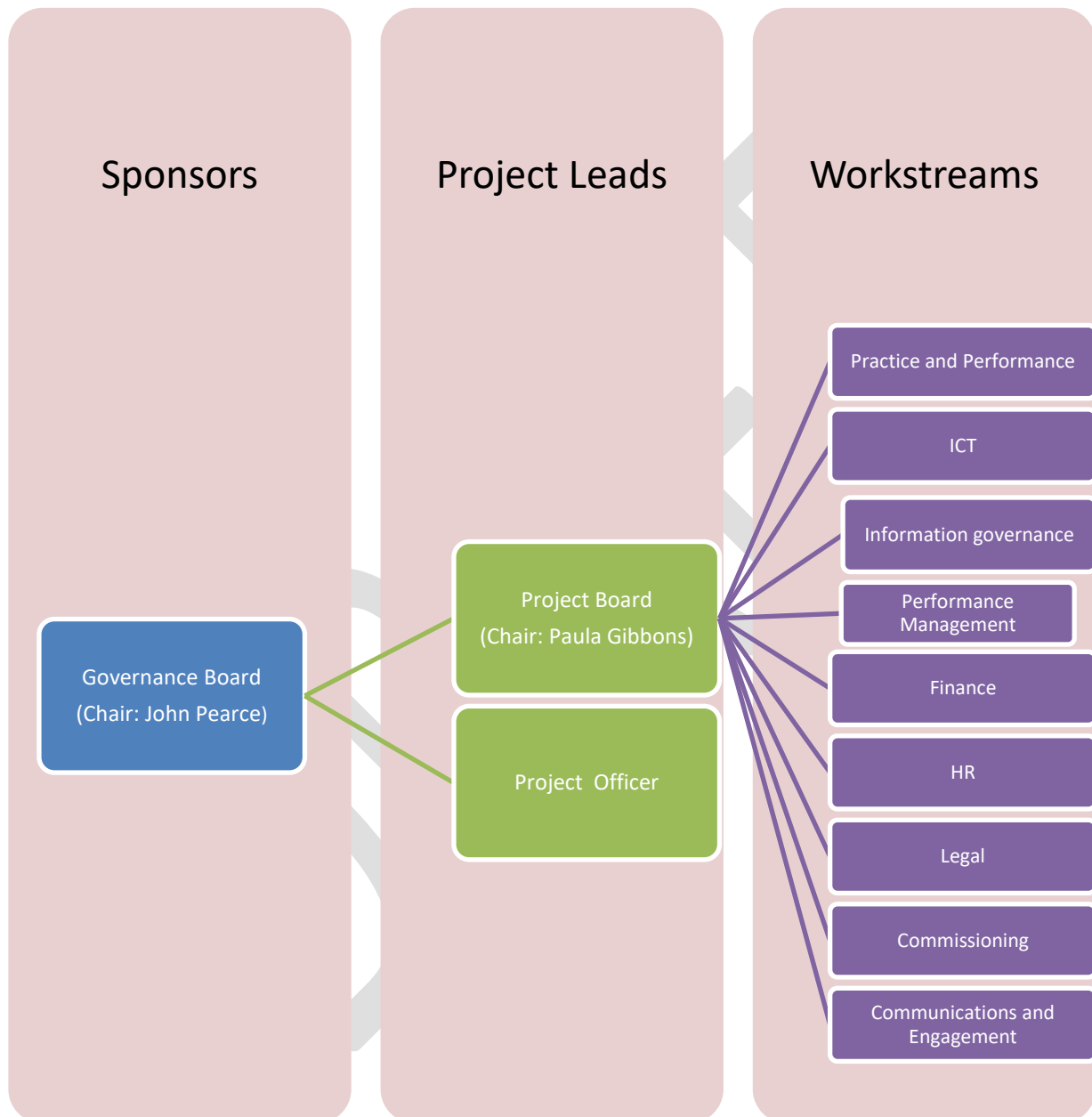
The Key milestones for the project are:

- Full Business Case approved by all three partners – November 2020
- Shadow Go Live – 1st February 2021
- Live – 1st April 2021

The Implementation Project Initiation Document sets out the detailed work which is needed to meet the go live date of 1st April 2021.

8.2 Project Governance Arrangements

The existing project management and governance arrangements will remain in place throughout the project until the go live date.



8.3 High Level Risk Register

The following risks have been identified for the next phase of the project:

Risk	H/M/L	Mitigation
Staff are not engaged and on board with the development of Adopt Coast to Coast.	M	Staff have previously been involved in the development of the RAA. Newly appointed RAA Head of Service will recommence engagement with staff from 1 st September 2020.
Costs of new service are too high and or unsustainable.	H	Detailed financial plans are developed for the Full Business Case.
Sharing risk and gain - there is a risk that one or more partners might not commit due to Adopt Coast to Coast lack of assurance on cost / benefit.	M	Transparency and option dialogue about the potential risk and gains for each organisation.
Fail to achieve buy-in from Adopters and Children.	L	Ensure there is the right level of engagement with Adopters and Children throughout the development of the service.
Children's Care Planning Teams fail to come on board with the RAA objectives.	M	Need strong leadership from all the Children's care planning team leads and need to involve them in the design of the service. Newly appointed RAA Head of Service to lead on Team Building and OD events and service delivery.
ICT system cannot be implemented in time, impacting on service delivery.	M	Work has already started on the specification of the ICT requirements and the hub and spoke model significantly reduces the critical nature of the go live date.
Lack of involvement of Medical Advisors is a risk to good continuity of service once live.	L	The hub and spoke model significantly reduces the impact on the day to day practice of the Medical Advisors in relation to their adoption role. The opportunity to share best practice across the 3 Local Authorities may be of positive benefit to their practice.

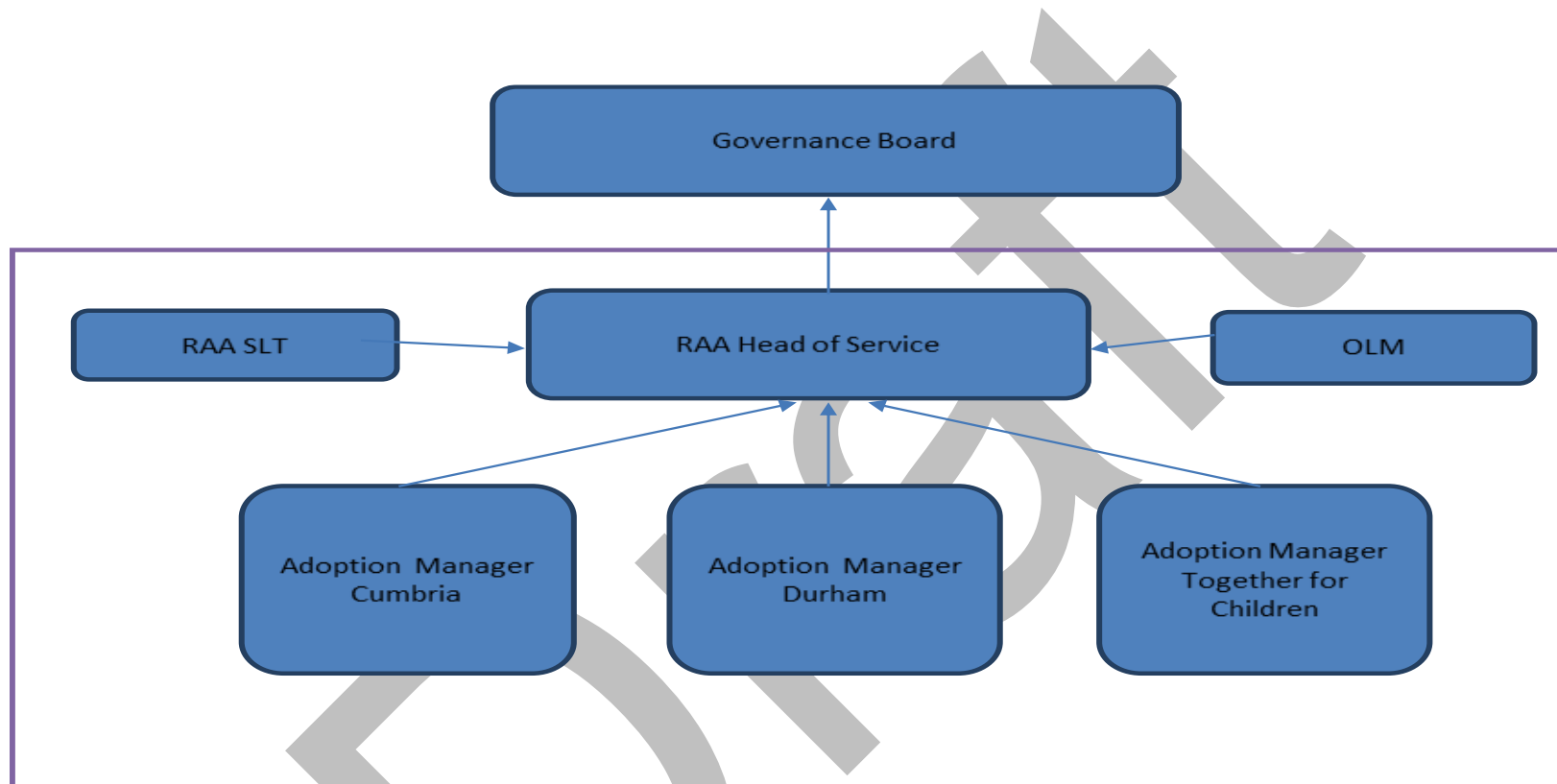
Risk	H/M/L	Mitigation
Communications and Marketing Officer post not filled	L	Job description to be reviewed and recruitment to commence in late September.
Adopter recruitment and sufficiency becomes an issue for the RAA prior to going live.	H	Each Local Authority recognises the need to continue consistent recruitment activity until such time as the brand is launched and RAA recruitment activity commences.
Information Governance issues may prevent effective working and sharing of data before and after going live.	H	IG group is already established and have commenced work on the Information Sharing Agreement.

Appendix 1 – Matrix Management Arrangements

Area	Ideas
Strategic Direction / Oversight / Implementation	<p>RAA Head of Service accountable to Governance Board (GB).</p> <p>RAA Head of Service meets regularly with the Operational Leadership leads.</p> <p>RAA Head of Service develops ideas/solutions with Senior Leadership Team (SLT).</p> <p>RAA Head of Service shares ideas/solutions with Operational Leadership leads.</p> <p>RAA Head of Service presents ideas/solutions to GB.</p> <p>RAA Head of Service delivers agreed strategy on behalf of the GB.</p>
Line Management of RAA Head of Service 1:1 and Professional Development	<p>Provided by the Head of Social Care for the employing organisation.</p>
Line Management of Adoption Managers	<p>Direct line management is provided by employing organisation – includes all employment issues.</p> <p>RAA line management (function) is provided by RAA Head of Service.</p> <p>Adoption Managers are part of RAA SLT.</p> <p>RAA Head of Service involved in recruitment to vacant posts.</p> <p>RAA Head of Service alongside LA line manager to undertake joint appraisals and joint 1:1 meetings.</p>
Line Management of Hub Staff	<p>Provided by RAA Head of Service.</p>

Area	Ideas
Line Management of all other staff teams	<p>Provided by Adoption Managers in the Local Authority.</p> <p>RAA Head of Service is responsible for the overall Organisational Development / Team ethos of the organisation – shared with SLT for delivery.</p>
Workload / Pressures	<p>RAA Head of Service sighted on workload and pressures in the spokes.</p>
Resources	<p>Any changes to resources – budget / staffing – will be the responsibility of the RAA Head of Service but managed through OLM and SLT. For example, vacancies will be discussed, and the approach agreed by OLM and SLT.</p> <p>Significant changes to resources will be agreed by GB.</p>
Quality Assurance and Practice	<p>RAA Head of Service will be responsible for Quality Assurance and practice oversight across the whole RAA. They will ensure consistency of practice and common standards.</p> <p>OLM will be a 6-weekly meeting with strategic managers responsible for Adoption and RAA Head of Service and this gives the opportunity to provide feedback and challenge from other areas of their respective Local Authorities as a ‘critical friend’ to promote service improvement.</p> <p>Adoption Managers are part of RAA SLT with shared responsibility for implementing agreed RAA practice in their teams.</p>
Budget	<p>The finance model proposed for Adopt Coast to Coast is that the current Adoption Service’s budget shall remain in each respective Local Authority. As such and in the best interests of the partnership each Local Authority will agree that there will be no material changes to the current structure without consultation with the other partners where this may impact on the future managerial or financial arrangements.</p>

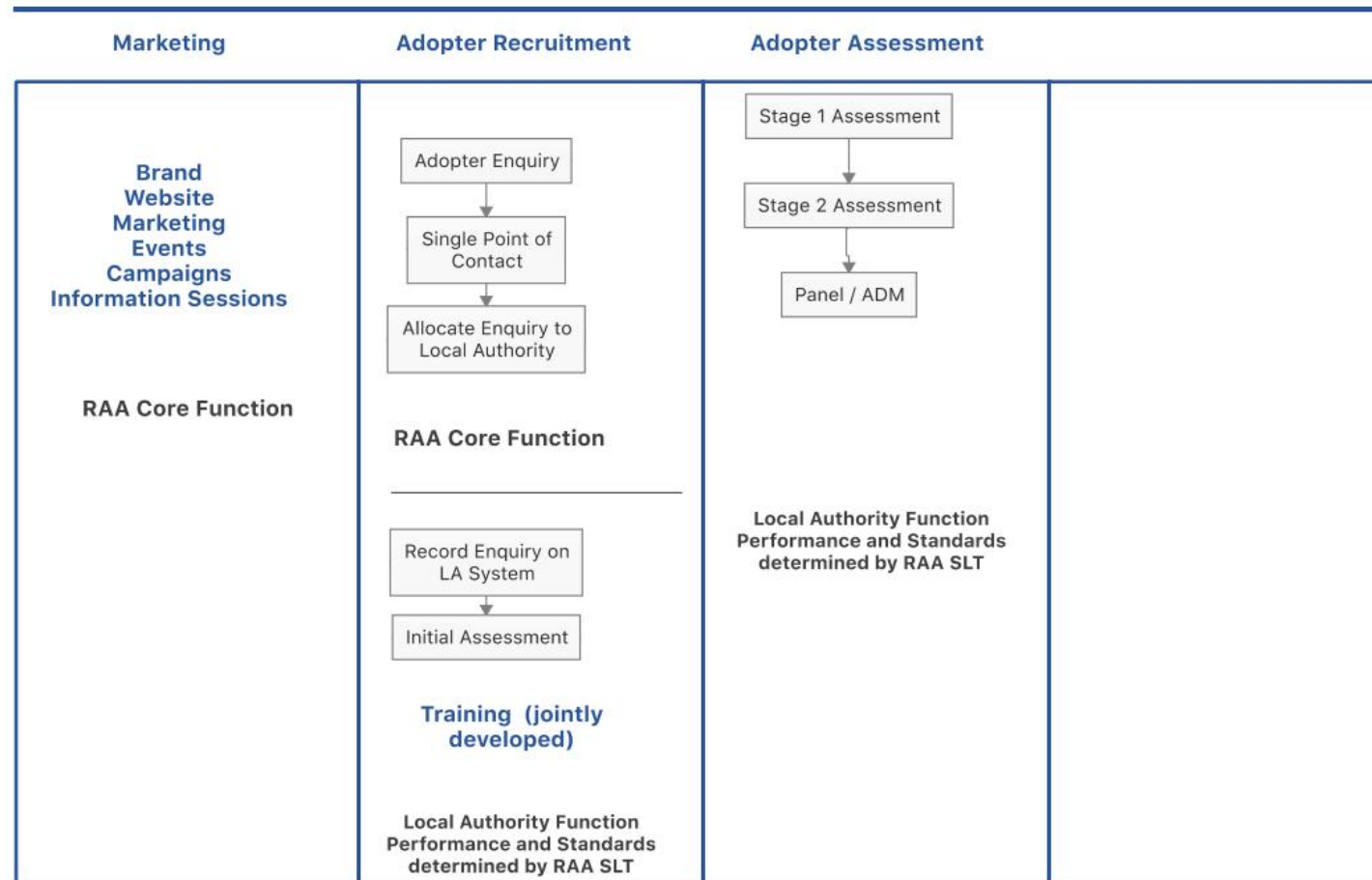
Area	Ideas
	The hub costs will be the responsibility of the RAA Head of Service, and each Local Authority will contribute 1/3 of these.
Performance	<p>RAA Head of Service is responsible for ensuring that performance targets set by the GB are met.</p> <p>Collective responsibility through RAA SLT.</p>
ADM decisions	<p>All ADM decisions will be made by the ADM in the Local Authority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be placed for adoption decisions • Prospective adopter approvals • Approvals of matches • Approval of prospective adopters as foster carers for a named child under FfA arrangements.
Disputes	<p>RAA Head of Service will have full leadership responsibility for the function of the RAA. However, the implementation of the service is the joint responsibility with the RAA SLT.</p> <p>Any unresolved issues will be dealt with by Governance Board.</p>



Appendix 2 – High Level Function Map

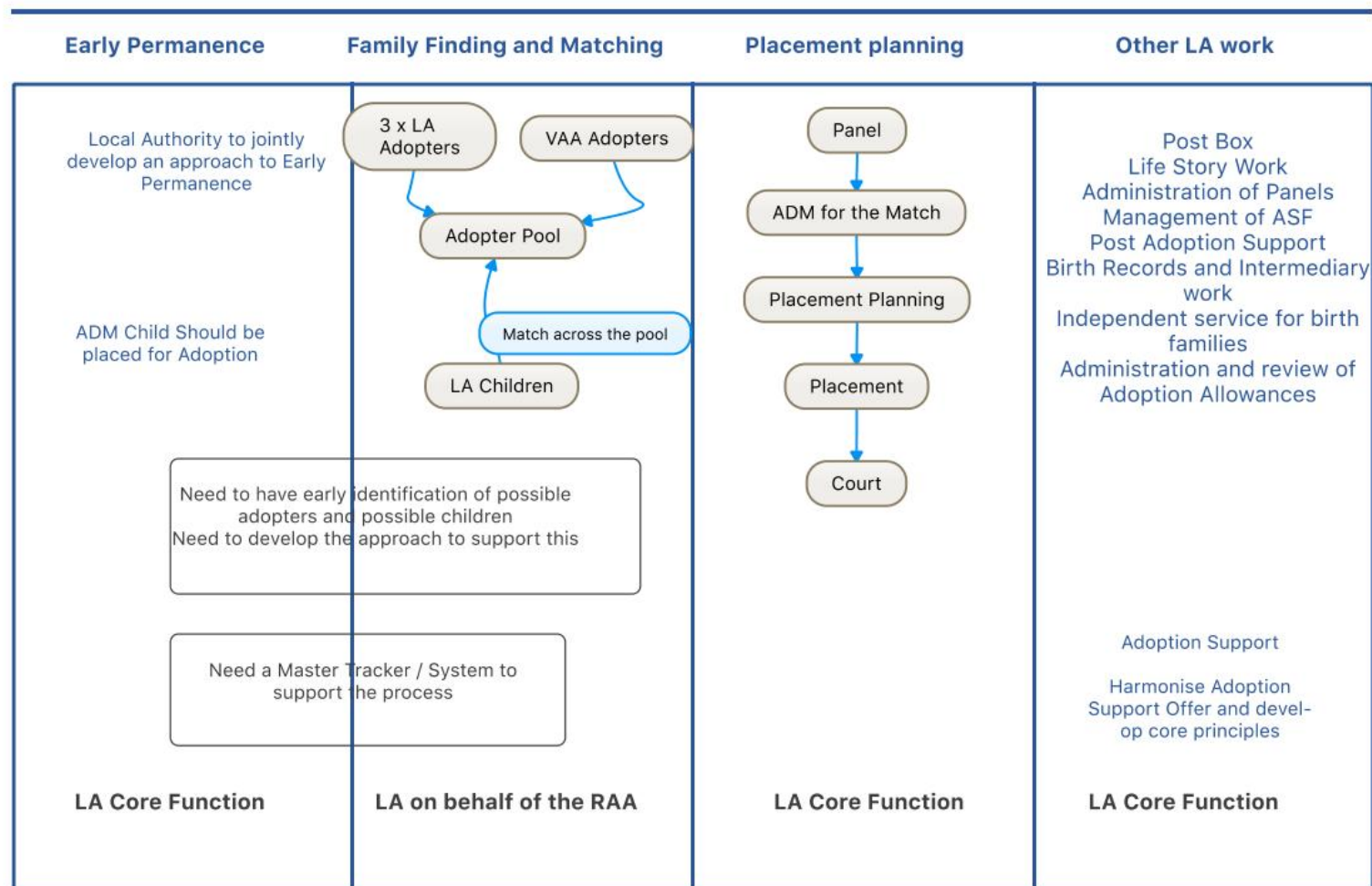
Appendix 2.1 – Adopter Journey

Adopter Journey



Appendix 2.2 – Child Journey

Child Journey



Appendix 2.3 – RAA Management Function

RAA Management

