

Coast to Coast Regional Adoption Agency

Outline Business Case

Date	14 November 2018
Version	1.0
Status:	Subject to Approval

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Executive Summary and Recommendations	4
2.1 Executive Summary.....	4
2.2 Recommendations.....	5
3. Context and Background	6
3.1 Background Information	6
3.2 Approach to Developing the Outline Business Case	7
4. Vision and Objectives	9
4.1 Strategic Objectives:.....	9
4.2 Outcomes and Benefits of the RAA	11
5. Scope of Coast to Coast RAA.....	12
5.1 Services in Scope	12
5.2 Services Out of Scope	12
5.3 The Role of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies	12
5.4 Early Permanence	13
6. Ideal Experience Child / Adopter / Birth Families	15
6.1 The Child Perspective	15
6.2 The Adopter Perspective	15
6.3 Birth Families	16
6.4 Consultation.....	16
6.5 Case Study Examples	18
7. How the Service will be Delivered.....	19
7.1 High Level Processes and Pathways	19
7.2 Functions and Responsibilities	21
7.3 Staffing Roles	24
8. Delivery Options	26
8.1 Potential Legal Forms.....	26
8.2 Conclusion.....	29
9. Plan and Next Steps / Risk Assessment.....	30
9.1 Overall Project Plan.....	30
9.2 Project Governance Arrangements	31
9.3 High Level Risk Register	31
Appendix 1 – Case Study Examples.....	33
A1.1 Early Permanence	33
A1.2 Working Together	35
A1.3 How the RAA would have made a difference.....	36

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

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; After Adoption, ARC Adoption NE, Barnardo's, Caritas Care Adoption and DFW Adoption.

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.

The Outline Business Case (OBC) sets out the vision and objectives for a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) – Coast to Coast. It sets out the high-level design principles for the RAA and seeks approval to move onto the next phase of the project, the detailed business case.

Coast to Coast is our working title for the development of the new RAA. The final name will be agreed as part of the Outline Business Case decision-making process.

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 Outline Business Case document was developed following a series of workshops which have included members of staff, independent panel members, professionals across all partner organisations including the Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

The vision for the RAA 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 are to:

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

Included within the scope of the Regional Adoption Agency are:

- Early Permanence planning
- Marketing and Recruitment of adopters
- Assessment and training of adopters

- Matching and linking
- Pre and Post Adoption Support
- Birth Family Support
- Intermediary Services

The RAA is proposing a different model of working which sees a much stronger partnership with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies. By working together we will be in a much stronger position to meet the challenges faced in Adoption Services.

We also want to extend and improve the early permanence planning for children. Early permanence planning will ensure that we are working together to seek the right adoptive family as early as possible.

Following an initial review of the potential models for the RAA, it has been identified that in principle the following could potentially be appropriate models for the RAA:

- (I) RAA hosted by single lead authority;
- (II) RAA established as a jointly owned local authority company; or
- (III) RAA hosted by Together for Children.

The Directors of Children's Services have examined these options and are recommending either option one or option three as the preferred legal form.

2.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that Members approve:

1. The Outline Business Case for establishing Coast to Coast Regional Adoption Agency with Cumbria County Council, Durham County Council and Together for Children / Sunderland City Council
2. The RAA hosted by a single lead Council or the RAA hosted by Together for Children
3. The principles of working with the Voluntary Adoption Agency Alliance are approved
4. The principles of Early Permanence for children are approved subject to further development

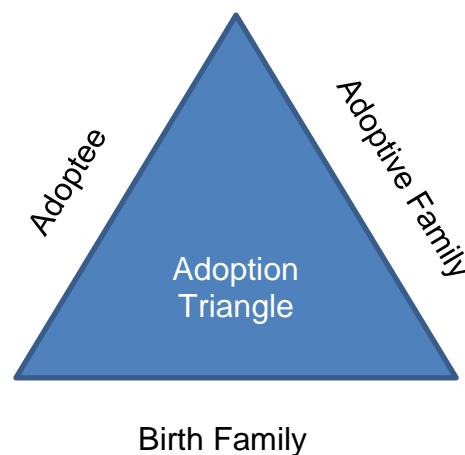
3. Context and Background

3.1 Background Information

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 (After Adoption, ARC Adoption NE, Barnardo's, Caritas Care Adoption and DFW Adoption) to support us in the development of the RAA and then as partners in delivering good outcomes.

The 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	Number of Children Looked After As at March 2018	Number of Adoptions 2017 - 2018
Cumbria CC	498,000	665	51
Durham CC	522,000	809	53
Together for Children	277,962	579	47

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.

3.2 Approach to Developing the Outline Business Case

It was important when developing and designing the new Regional Adoption Agency that this was informed by professionals and the voice of the customer. To ensure this was the case, a large part of the project so far has included workshops and consultation.

During July and August 2018 a series of service design workshops took place with professionals from all partner organisations and independent panel members:

Event	Date	Number of Attendees
Child Journey	2 July	24
Adopter Journey	4 July	15
Local Authorities interactions	9 July	16
Roles and Functions	12 July	16
Vision and Objectives	8 August	14
Measures and Outcomes	13 August	14
Voluntary Adoption Agencies	10 August	All 5 agencies represented

In addition to the service design workshops a series of consultation exercises were also undertaken.

The Adoption staff teams for Cumbria, Durham and Together for Children were all consulted during workshops held in June 2018.

The Voice of the Customer consultation was undertaken by After Adoption. They undertook both quantitative and qualitative consultation:

- Questionnaires were sent to Adopters, prospective Adopters, Birth Families, Adopted Adults
- Two engagement events were held in September 2018 which included children and young people who had been adopted

All the information gathered at these events has informed the Outline Business Case.

4. 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.

4.1 Strategic Objectives:

Our overall objectives for Coast to Coast Regional Adoption Agency 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

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 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 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 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 service provision across Coast to Coast
 - The efficient and effective use of resources
 - Effectively commissioning appropriate services
 - Developing and implementing clear minimum standards
 - Continually learning from best practice and adapting our services accordingly

4.2 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 living in their adoptive family
- Marketing and Recruitment of adoptive families to meet the needs of a range of children, including sibling groups
- Assessment and training of adopters to a consistently high standard
- Development of services across the range of adoption functions by capturing the best practice from across the region and delivering this throughout the RAA
- 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 Intermediary Services

5. Scope of Coast to Coast RAA

5.1 Services in Scope

Included within the scope of the Regional Adoption Agency are:

- Early Permanence planning
- Marketing and Recruitment of adopters
- Assessment and training of adopters
- Matching and linking
- 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 inter-agency 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.

5.2 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 Service is also out of scope.

Legacy adoption services, including adoption allowance payments agreed prior to the setting up of the RAA, will remain as part of existing services and only new allowances will be part of the RAA.

5.3 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 these needs.

We want a different relationship. We envisage that:

- The Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) 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 VAAs to provide a specific number and type of Adopter Families over the year for which they would be paid up-front
- We would include the VAAs in our regular planning 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 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 adopter family to meet their needs
- We have shared responsibility for recruitment of Adopters, with the VAA supporting us by recruiting Adopters including for our harder to place children
- There would be a greater number of Adopter Families across the RAA / VAA
- We would have a stronger relationship between the RAA and the VAA
- This approach would build stability in the VAA sector

In addition to the recruitment of Adopter 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.

5.4 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 giving particular consideration to the 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 adoptive family as early as possible. We can develop recruitment and marketing strategies that target recruitment of families that can best meet the needs of the children for whom we are seeking families. Together we can use our combined expertise to prepare children to move to their new families and provide bespoke adoption support to meet child and adopter family needs.

Early Permanence will include:

- Early Placement Planning
- Concurrency
- Foster to Adopt

We will work with the Local Authorities to create a culture of Early Permanence planning in order to identify possible suitable adopters for children at the earliest stage during the care planning process. Early placement results in 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 create a shift in thinking within each local authority where early permanence is standard culture and practice and senior managers and legal teams support 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 training of all staff – recognising the high level of turn-over in children's social worker teams

6. Ideal Experience Child / Adopter / Birth Families

6.1 The Child Perspective

If things are the best they can possibly be in our RAA, these are the things we will see:

- Our children feel like they matter and that their views, wishes and feelings are heard
- They feel they belong to a family and the wider adoption community
- They feel important and valued
- They can trust someone to put them first
- They can recognise themselves in reports
- They know their story and why they have been adopted
- They are supported to understand their plan and they know what it means
- They are placed without delay
- They know about the people in their birth families and foster families and understand why they do or don't still see them
- They live in a safe, stable and loving family and know this is forever

6.2 The Adopter Perspective

If things are the best they can possibly be in our RAA, these are the things we will see:

- Adopter and prospective adopters feel valued and wanted
- Prospective adopters who come with a range of experience and circumstances feel welcomed and respected
- Adopters can see our commitment to getting the best outcomes for our children
- They are able to speak to somebody when they need to
- They know exactly what is going on in relation to their adopter journey – what is going to happen and when
- They understand what is being talked about / written down – the service should be jargon free
- That appropriate adoption support is available to them when they need it and that it is local and accessible
- They are confident that their emotional journey and its impact is understood
- There is consistency of message and support when things aren't going quite right

- They have confidence in the RAA

6.3 Birth Families

If things are the best they can possibly be in our RAA, these are the things we will see:

- Pre-adoption support will be provided to help them understand the adoption process
- They will be able to discuss their concerns, worries and anxieties with an experienced social worker
- They will receive bespoke support which is provided at time that works best for them
- They will feel supported and not judged
- They will feel confident about contributing to Mailbox and other agreed contact arrangements.

6.4 Consultation

After Adoption were commissioned to carry out a series of consultation events with service user groups impacted by adoption on behalf of the 'Coast to Coast' Regional Adoption Agency. The purpose of the consultation events was to gain the views of those who have first-hand experience of the adoption process. The consultation events aimed to understand service users' previous experiences of the adoption process and to understand their hopes, fears and recommendations for the future of adoption support as we move towards a regionalised adoption agency in the Cumbria, Durham and Sunderland regions.

Consultation was undertaken with the following key stakeholders:

- Adoptive Parents
- Birth Parents and Relatives
- Adopted Adults
- Adopter Children and Young People

In order to gather feedback from as many people as possible within the consultation the approach was two-fold. Face to face consultation events were held in Durham and Cumbria and an online consultation survey was circulated via Local Authority and Voluntary Adoption Agencies involved in the Coast to Coast Regional Adoption Agency.

Adoptive Parents

The key messages from the adoptive parents who took part in the consultation events were that they wanted to build professional, sustained relationships with staff who were reliable, passionate and knowledgeable about adoption. They also wanted to be able to access training throughout the adoption journey, in various forms (face to face and online) and be able to access support without fear of judgement and criticism.

The adoptive parents reported clear hopes and concerns regarding what a Regional Adoption Agency will mean for those receiving services. The adoptive parents would like the agency to ensure that local knowledge will not be lost, communication will be consistent and staffing issues will be addressed quickly and without direct impact on the individual family's adoption journey.

Birth Parents and Relatives

All of the parents involved in the consultation had received support from After Adoption in relation to the adoption of their child(ren).

Birth parents feel that support throughout the process is very important. They welcome support and counselling and it is important to them that they do not feel judged.

Those consulted said that they had appreciated the emotional support and counselling support offered with one participant highlighting that the support offered had enabled them to maintain post adoption contact arrangements with their child, and another parent had added that After Adoption (alongside the local authority) had kept them informed of the adoption process however had also enabled them to understand other post adoption support available to them.

Adopted Adults

Accessing adoption information needs to be easy to obtain. Just under half the people who were consulted had not had a good experience and the recommendation from the consultation is that this area of the service is further developed in the Regional Adoption Agency.

When asked to rate the experience when dealing with their local authority/ agency with regard to the information, advice and support received, the majority of participants had stated that this had been fair, good or excellent. It is evident that positive working relationships had contributed to this.

The importance of openness in adoption generally, and benefit of allowing children to have the greatest understanding of their heritage and background as possible. This highlights the need ensure that openness in adoption is supported by the Regional Adoption Agency moving forwards.

Adopted Children and Young People

Further work will be undertaken with Children and Young People using existing groups as attendance at the scheduled consultation events had low attendance and therefore it was not possible to undertake the engagement as originally planned.

6.5 Case Study Examples

Set out at appendix A are three case studies.

Case study one is an example of how a trial of Early Permanence is having a positive impact on outcomes for children.

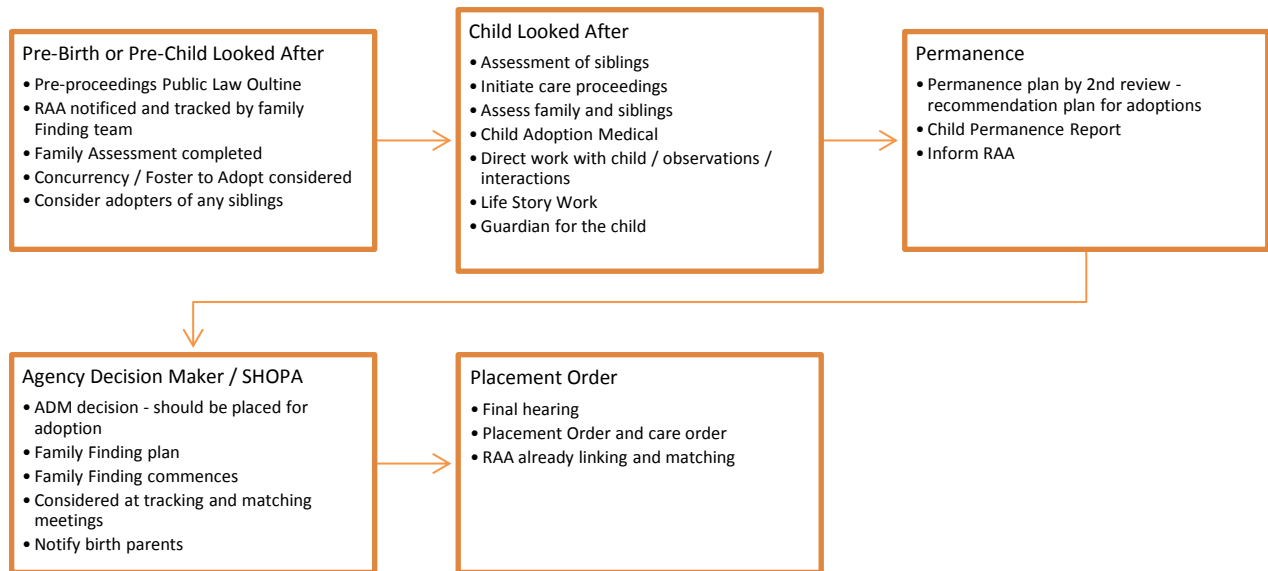
Case study two is an example of how working together in a Regional Adoption Agency means that there is a much bigger pool of Adopters and therefore ensuring the best possible match for the Child and the Adopter Family. The three partner organisations are already running events jointly and sharing best practice.

Case study three is an example of the different outcome which might have been achieved if our new ways of working with the Regional Adoption Agency had been in place at the time of the adoption.

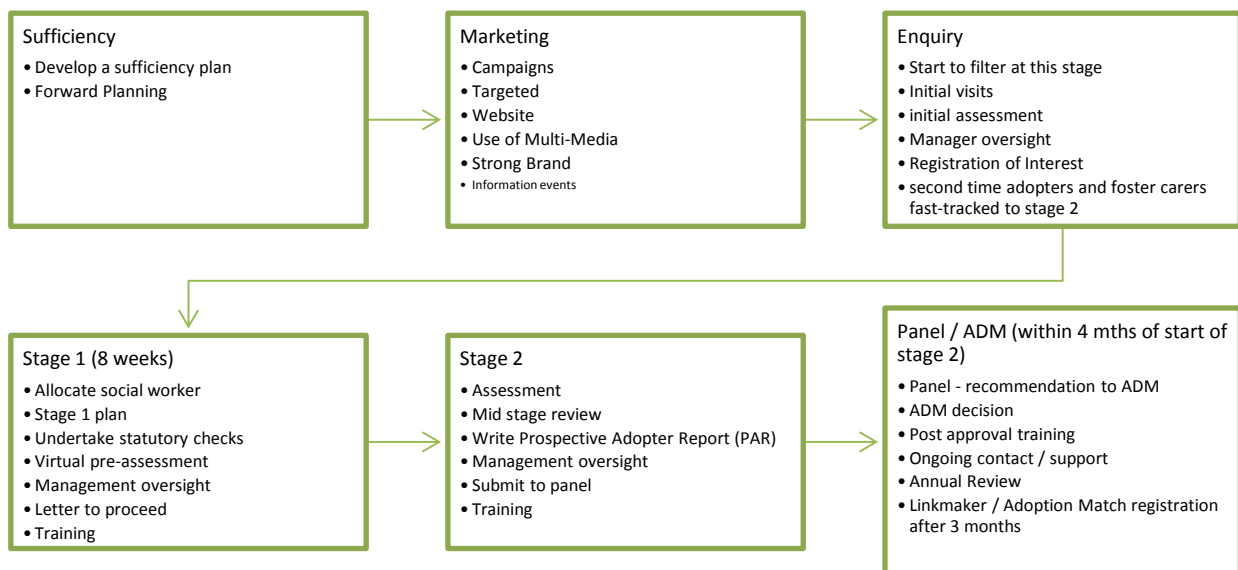
7. How the Service will be Delivered

7.1 High Level Processes and Pathways

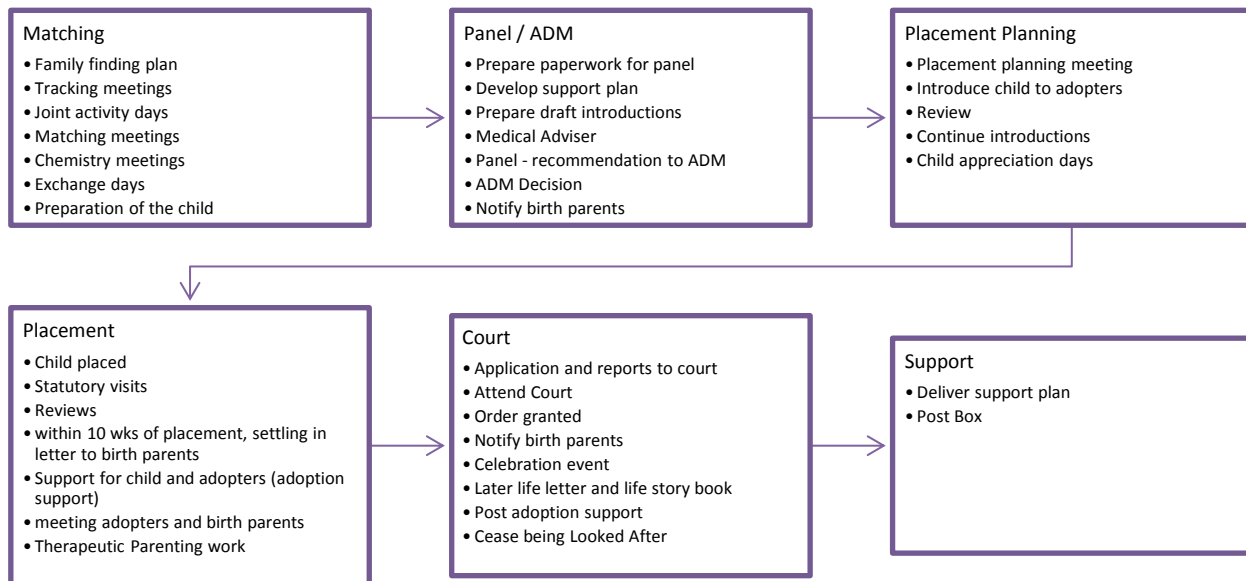
Child Journey



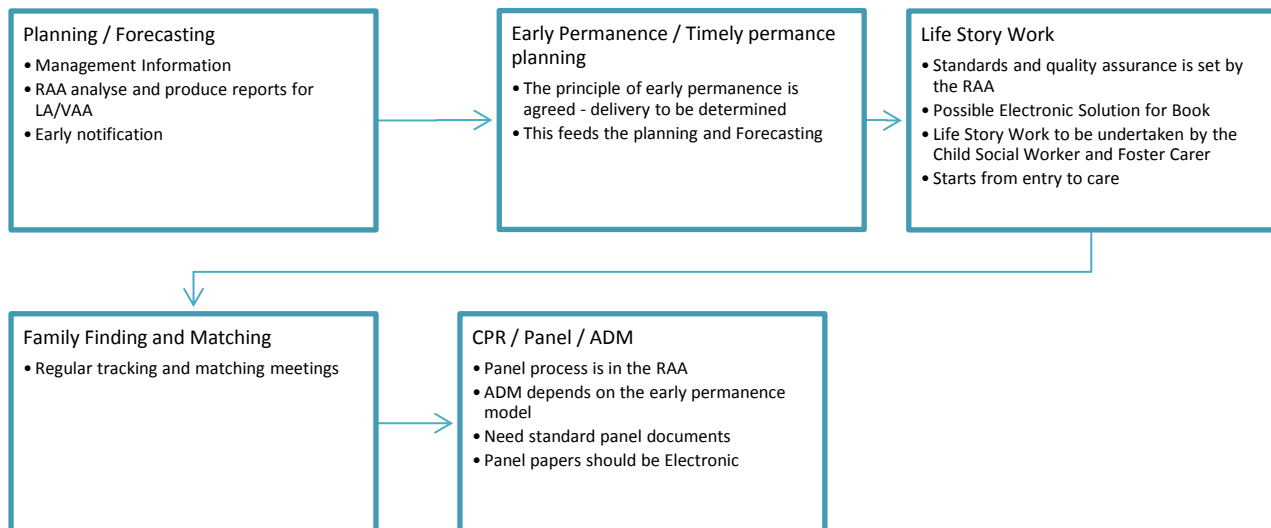
Adopter Journey



Matching Process



Interactions between the Local Authority and the RAA and VAA



7.2 Functions and Responsibilities

Set out below are different models for Adopter recruitment and the Child's journey. The RAA wants to take a transformational approach with a strong relationship between the RAA and the VAA organisations as described in section 5.3 and it wants to implement Early Permanence planning as described in section 5.4. Set out below are the key differences in approach.

<p>Scenario 1a – Traditional Model of RAA Adopter Recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RAA responsible for Adopter Recruitment (includes: Recruitment, Assessment, Support, Training, Matching) - Local Authority would be responsible for the Child - RAA would undertake the Family Finding - RAA would be ADM for the Adopter Recruitment decision <p>Scenario 1b – Traditional Model of Interagency Recruitment (from VAA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VAA responsible for Adopter Recruitment (includes: Recruitment, Assessment, Support, Training, Matching) - Local Authority would be responsible for the Child - RAA would undertake the Family Finding - VAA would be ADM for the Adopter Recruitment decision 	<p>Scenario 3 – Shared Adopter Recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RAA and VAA are responsible for Adopter Recruitment (includes: Recruitment, Assessment, Support, Training, Matching) - VAA would be 'commissioned' to deliver a number of Adopter families to help meet sufficiency over a period of time (e.g. 3-5 years) - RAA would undertake the Family Finding with VAA at the table - RAA and VAA would be ADM for the Adopter Recruitment decision (depending on who recruited) - Interagency fee applies if Adopter is recruited by the VAA
<p>Scenario 2 – Traditional Model of Child Permanence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local Authority responsible for the Child until the Child is no longer looked after - RAA would undertake the Family Finding - Local Authority would be ADM for the Match decision 	<p>Scenario 4 – Early Permanence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local Authority would be responsible for the Child up to Placement Order - RAA would then be responsible for the Child - RAA would undertake the Family Finding - RAA would be ADM for the Match decision
<p>Traditional Models</p>	<p>Transformational Models</p>

The Functions tables set out below show who is responsible for the function depending on the different scenarios as outlined above. It should be noted that some functions can be commissioned.

In the tables below

X is used to denote Traditional

(n) is used to denote Transformational Scenario (see above)

Y is used where the function would always be undertaken by that organisation

J is used to denote where a function is undertaken jointly

Child Permanence Planning

Process	RAA	LA	VAA
Early identification of child possibly requiring adoption		Y	
Tracking and monitoring of child possibly requiring adoption	Y		
Support and advice to child social worker on adoption process	Y		
Sibling or other specialist assessments if commissioned by Local Authority		Y	
Direct work to prepare child prior to placement	(4)	X	
Preparation of Child Permanence Report	(4)	X	
ADM for 'should be placed for adoption' (SHOPA) decision		Y	
Case management prior to the point agreed by LA ADM		Y	
Case management from the point of placement order	(4)	X	

Child / Adopter Matching and Placement

Process	RAA	LA	VAA
Family finding	Y		
Children Looked After reviews	Involved (4)	X	
Shortlist and visit potential families	(4)	J	
Organising child appreciation days	Y		
Ongoing direct work to prepare child prior to placement	(4)	X	
Adoption Panel administration and management	Y		
Agency Advisor role	Y		
ADM for matching prospective adopters and child (agency for the child)	(4)	X	
Placement planning meetings administration and management of introductions	Y	IRO in Cumbria	

Process	RAA	LA	VAA
Support to family post placement and planning and delivery of adoption support	(4)	J	(3)
Ongoing Life Story work and preparation of Life Story Book	(4)	X	
IRO monitoring of quality of child's care and care plan		Y	
Support prospective adopters in preparation and submission of application for Adoption Order – including attending court	(4)	J	(3)
Preparation of Later Life Letter	(4)	X	

Adopter Recruitment and Assessment

Process	RAA	LA	VAA
Marketing and recruitment strategy	Y	Provision of information	Provision of information
Adopter recruitment and enquiries	X		(3)
Assessments of prospective adopters stage 1 and stage 2	X		(3)
Completion of prospective adopter report	X		(3)
ADM for approval of adopters	X		

Adoption Support

Process	RAA	LA	VAA
Post Approval Training	X		
Matching	(4)	J	J
Post placement training for prospective adopters	X		(3)
Assessment for adoption support	Y		
Developing and delivering adoption support plans	Y		J
Agree and administer financial support to adopter families pre and post adoption order	J	J	
Adoption support delivery including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support groups - Social events - Post adoption training - Independent birth relative services - Support with ongoing birth relative contact - Specialist Life Story practitioners - Adoption counselling and training 	Y		
Therapeutic Services	Y		
Psychology Services	Y		

Others

Process	RAA	LA	VAA
Special Guardianship Orders		Y	
Post Box	Y		
Step parent / partner adoptions	Y	Y (Cumbria)	
Intercountry adoption support assessment, post approval and post order support	Y		
Long Term Foster Placements		Y	
Foster to Adopt	J	J	(3)
Court Liaison	(4)	X	
Schools Liaison	(4)	X	
Final Quality Assurance / Consistency e.g. CPR / Life Story / Setting minimum standards	(4)	X	
Identify and share best practice	J	J	J
Relinquished Children	(4)	X	

7.3 Staffing Roles

The proposed staffing roles for the RAA, as set out below, reflect the complexity of the new organisation. A full staffing structure will be set out in the Full Business Case.

Role	Description
RAA Head of Service	Accountable for delivery of the service Responsible to Directors of Children's Social Care and the RAA Board
Agency Decision Maker	This would be the role of the Head of Service and / or Service Manager(s)
Service Manager	This is a large organisation – this is strategic and operational management role
Team Manager	Middle management roles
Assistant Team Manager / Advanced / Senior Practitioners	Practice lead who will deputise for the Team Manager
Adoption Social Worker	Career Grade Social Worker leading on the

Role	Description
	Adopter recruitment, assessment and support
Family Finding Social Worker	Career Grade Social Worker lead on Family Finding / Early Permanence and Matching
Family Finding Support Workers	
Adoption Support Worker	To provide Life Story Work support, training, calendar events, parenting work
Business Support Officer / Performance and Information Officer	<p>Development and provision of management information</p> <p>Performance information</p> <p>Understands the IT systems – linked to reporting</p> <p>Analysis of information</p>
Marketing and Recruitment Officer	Marketing in widest sense not just PR and promotion
Senior Administration Administration Officers / Business support / Panel Administrator	Administration Support to the RAA
Therapists Psychologist	Roles depending on the Adoption Support Offer. Some of this support may be commissioned

8. Delivery Options

8.1 Potential Legal Forms

The Legal teams in the three Local Authorities developed an options paper which explored the potential delivery models for the RAA.

The report identified four potential legal forms for the RAA as follows:

Option 1: RAA hosted by single lead Council

Under this model, one Council would act as lead authority and host the RAA on behalf of the other Councils under a shared service arrangement. No new legal entity is created.

The host authority would act as the accountable body for the RAA and exercise the relevant statutory functions on behalf of the Councils.

The host authority would therefore hold the pooled budget for the RAA, employ the relevant staff via TUPE and hold, or have rights to use, the relevant service assets.

It would also be assumed that the host authority would provide all or most of the relevant support services to the RAA.

Operational decision making within the RAA (i.e. the day-to-day agency decision maker functions) would be carried out by the host authority, whilst the strategic management and performance of the RAA would then be overseen by a partnership board, or potentially a formal joint committee, of the three Councils.

This arrangement would be governed by a partnership agreement between the Councils under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972. This would appoint the host authority and formally delegate the exercise of the adoption functions of each Council to the host (subject to the supervision of the joint board or committee of the three Councils) for the duration of the RAA. The agreement would also cover, amongst other things, governance, budget/funding, performance framework, staff and assets.

Option 2: RAA established as a jointly owned local authority company

Under this model, the RAA would be established as a jointly owned local authority company by the three Councils.

The relevant RAA adoption functions would then be performed on behalf of the

three Councils on an arms' length basis by the new jointly owned company via a service contract(s).

The company would need to be Teckal¹ compliant to enable the three Councils to contract directly with it for the performance of the relevant adoption functions for the duration of the RAA.

Each Council would directly contribute to the company's budget through an annual contract payment. The relevant staff and assets would transfer to the new company.

Support service arrangements between the company and the Councils would also need to be established. As under this model there is no single lead authority, the support service functions could be apportioned across a number of the Councils.

The Councils could rely on their powers under Sections 1 and 2 of the CYPA 2008 to formally contract out the performance of their adoption functions to the company, provided the company is registered with Ofsted as an adoption agency.

As a requirement of the CYPA 2008, the company must be a "not for profit" body corporate. Therefore, the company would need to be limited by guarantee (rather than limited by shares) and the three Councils would be the sole members of the company.

A company limited by guarantee has a well-established, clear and flexible governance model.

The management of the company would be vested in the board of directors who would act in accordance with the defined objects and in the best interests of the company. The board would comprise of appointments made by the three Councils (although the board does not have to be limited to local authority officers and/o members and could include executive directors and/or co-optees).

The company's members (i.e. the three Councils) would be effectively the joint owners of the company and to whom certain key decisions may be reserved under the articles of association.

The exact governance arrangements (e.g. the defined objects, the composition of the board and the scope and extent of the members' reserved matters) could be designed to meet the requirements of the Councils.

¹ The company would need to meet the two limbs of the Teckal test to enable a lawful "in-house award" by each Council of a service contract to the company (i) control test (i.e. that the Councils jointly (in their capacity as members of the company) exercise a "decisive influence" over both the strategic objectives and key decisions of the company and there is no private capital participation within the company (i.e. no private VAA membership) and (ii) activities test (i.e. 80% of the company's activities relate to tasks carried out for the three Councils).

Option 3: RAA established as a joint venture company between the Councils and VAAs

Under this model, the RAA would be formed as a joint venture company between the Councils and third parties (e.g. other VAAs).

The key difference between this model and Option 3.2 is that in this case the company would not be solely owned by the three Councils and would have third party (private) participation in terms of membership and voting rights.

Putting to one side key commercial questions such as the extent of these third party rights and the level of control that the Councils would want to exert within the company, this arrangement would not be compliant with the Regulation 12 PCR 2015 public procurement exemptions. Therefore, a public procurement exercise would be required in order to appoint the relevant joint venture partners.

Accordingly, subject to clarifying the intended role (if any) of existing VAAs within the proposed RAA, it is not considered that this option is an appropriate form of structure for the RAA.

Option 4: Appoint a third party to act as the RAA

There are two potential options under this model:

1. Appointment by the Councils of TfC to act as the RAA

This is a potential variation on Option 1 if TfC (rather than Sunderland Council) was to participate in the arrangement on the basis that it was agreed TfC should act as the “host authority” for the other two Councils.

TfC is a contracting authority in its own right (as a wholly owned subsidiary company of Sunderland Council which has been established to meet needs in the public interest) and a registered VAA. Therefore, it would be appear that a shared services arrangement between Durham, Cumbria and TfC under which TfC was to act as the “host” authority could be lawfully implemented pursuant to Regulation 12 of the PCR 2015 (mutual co-operation between contracting authorities to provide public services in the public interest (see Section 2 above)) and Section 1 of the CYPA 2008.

This option would require a shared services agreement for the duration of the RAA similar to Option 3.1. The services contract between TfC and Sunderland Council

for the provision of Sunderland's adoption services would need to be at least co-terminus with this shared services agreement.

2. Appointment by the Councils of a third party (other than TfC) to act as the RAA

Under this option, the Councils would effectively appoint a third party VAA (or consortium of VAAs) to act as the RAA on their behalf.

As with Option 3.3, this would require a procurement process to identify and appoint the third party provider. The Councils would then contract with the third party for the performance of the RAA functions and the relevant staff would TUPE transfer to the provider.

Under this option, the Councils would still need to co-ordinate their contract governance and management arrangements via a lead authority.

In the circumstances, it is not considered that this option is an appropriate form of structure for the RAA.

8.2 Conclusion

Following an initial review of the potential models for the RAA, it has been identified that in principle the following could potentially be appropriate models for the RAA:

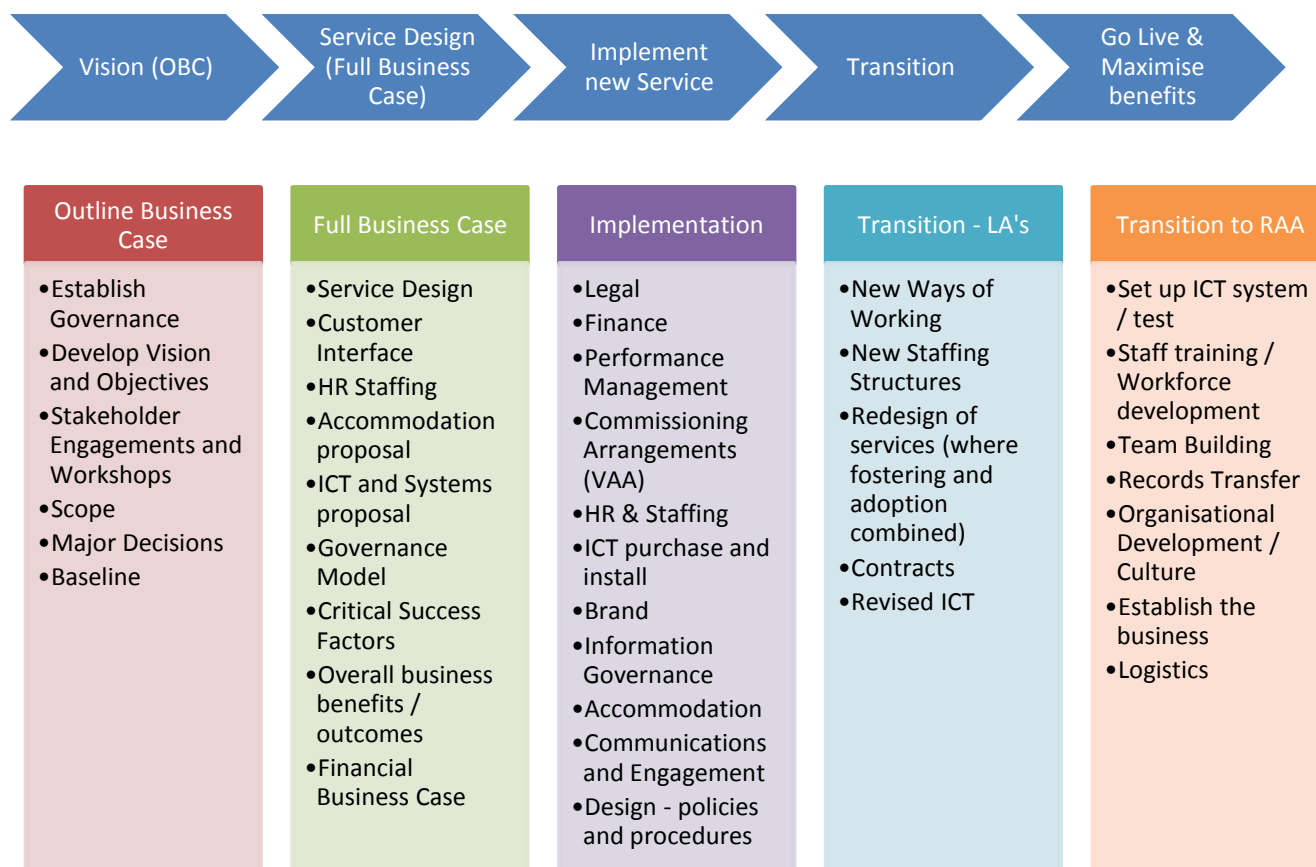
- (I) RAA hosted by single lead authority;
- (II) RAA established as a jointly owned local authority company; or
- (III) RAA hosted by Together for Children.

These options were considered by the RAA Governance Board and concluded that, their preferred model was either the RAA hosted by a single lead authority or the RAA hosted by Together for Children.

9. Plan and Next Steps / Risk Assessment

9.1 Overall Project Plan

There are five stages to the project:



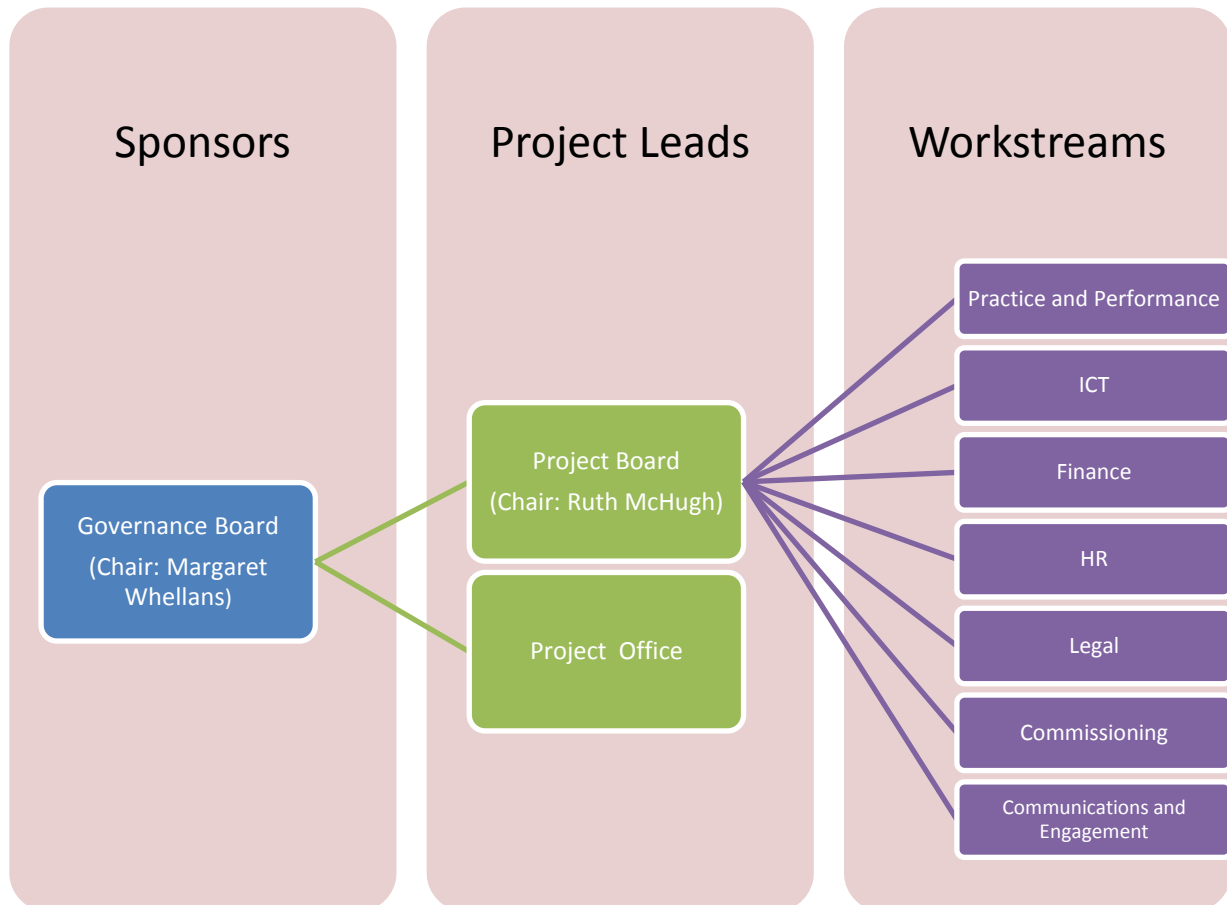
The next stage of the project is to develop the Full Business Case which will include the detailed service design, staffing and financial implications of the Regional Adoption Agency.

The Key milestones for the project are:

- Outline Business Case approved by all three partners – January 2019
- Full Business Case approved by all three partners – March 2019
- Live – October 2019

9.2 Project Governance Arrangements

The existing project management and governance arrangements will remain in place throughout the project.



9.3 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 Coast to Coast	M	Staff continue to be involved in the development of the RAA
Costs of new service are too high and or unsustainable.	H	Detailed financial plans are developed for the Full Business Case. This will include sensitivity analysis of what would happen if there was an increase or decrease in the number of adoptions
Sharing risk and gain - there is a risk that one or more Coast to Coast partners might not commit	M	Transparency and option dialogue about the potential risk and gains for

Risk	H/M/L	Mitigation
due to lack of assurance on cost / benefit		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.	H	Need strong leadership from all the Children's care planning team leads and need to involve them in the design of the service. Project team consider this issue now as to how best to engage and begin changes. Actions on how to do this should be updated and brought to Board regularly
It isn't possible to recruit a Head of Service in time to go live in October 2019	H	Start recruitment process as early as possible after the Full Business Case is approved
ICT system cannot be implemented in time, impacting on service delivery	M	Work has already started on the specification of the ICT requirements
Lack of involvement of Medical Advisors is a risk to good continuity of service once live	H	Involve Medical Advisors as soon as possible in the development and design of the panel arrangements
Adopter recruitment and sufficiency becomes an issue for the RAA prior to going live	H	Consider recruitment of a dedicated Marketing and Recruitment officer as part of the project
Information Governance issues may prevent effective working and sharing of data before and after going live	H	Need to establish IG workstream as soon as possible to understand the issues and build in solutions

Appendix 1 – Case Study Examples

A1.1 Early Permanence

Children:- Jake and Abigail (not their real names) – twins, born on 14th November 2017.

History

Jake and Abigail's birth parents were both in prison when the pregnancy became known to Children's Services. The Support and Protect Team carried out their assessments and concluded that due to the nature of the offences, they could not safely care for their unborn children. Other family members were considered, but no-one identified who could potentially meet the children's needs.

The babies' due date was November 2017. The Support and Protect Team made a referral for consideration of a Foster to Adopt placement on 17th August 2017. This enabled good planning to take place. Due to the extensive adverse publicity about the parents' offences, it was agreed that a placement outside Cumbria would benefit the children in the longer term.

Through the contract with ARCAAdoption NE, potential Foster to Adopt carers were identified by the Family Finder. They had not yet been approved, but were due to be considered at the ARC Panel in October 2017. Their draft PAR (Prospective Adopters Report) was shared with the Family Finder and children's Social Worker, and they were subsequently approved as adopters. The Family Finder and Social Worker met the adopters to share information about the unborn children and the family background. A Planning meeting took place on 20th October 2017 and on 1st November 2017 the Agency Decision Maker in Cumbria approved the adopters as foster carers for the two specific children. As ARC is not a Fostering agency, a Social Worker from the Cumbria fostering service was allocated to support them as temporary foster carers.

The Placement

Jake and Abigail were born in hospital on 14th November 2017. Their birth mother had further contact with them the following day. On 15th November, at 1 day old, they moved to live with their Foster to Adopt carers- and they remain there.

Jake and Abigail are developing well and it is evident they have a secure attachment with their carers.

The children have had some limited contact with birth family members, including their mother. The children are now wary of strangers and one contact had to be cut short due to their distress.

Attempts have been made to engage birth family to contribute to the life story books, with variable success- however, the birth mother is keen to ensure the children have a full and helpful record of their birth family.

Legal Issues

In February 2018, the children's paternal grandparents made an unexpected request, via their son, to be assessed as permanent carers for the children. The court ordered an independent Social Work assessment, which was negative. The final hearing was delayed pending the assessment, and then again when the grandparents had not taken legal advice. It took place in October 2018 when a Placement Order was granted. The match will be considered at Adoption Panel in November 2018.

Outcomes

Jake and Abigail have been able to live with their intended permanent family from being 1 day old. The close bond and secure attachment are clearly seen. This is likely to lessen the problems for them as they grow up, their care and development having been uninterrupted.

The adopters have had to live with the extended period of legal proceedings which has not been easy. However, they are clear this uncertainty is worth enduring for the opportunity to be with Jake and Abigail from birth.

The early completion of assessments and identification of the need for a placement, and the contract with a VAA (Voluntary Adoption Agency) provider outside Cumbria, allowed the placement to be well planned and considered, so support was in place prior to the children's birth. The continued close working between the Children's Social Worker, the Family Finding team, the Adopter's Social Worker and the Fostering Social Worker has reduced anxiety and supported the children and the adopters towards the making of a Placement Order and matching under Adoption Regulations prior to an Adoption order.

Had the children not been placed in a Foster to Adopt placement, their move to their adoptive home would have taken place when they were over a year old. They have been able to live with their permanent family from being one day old. The risks have therefore stayed with the adults for the benefit of the children.

What difference will it make being in the Regional Adoption Agency? (RAA)

The Early Permanence approach will be embedded as a key principle across the whole RAA which supports children being placed with adoptive parents as soon as practicably and legally possible. As a result of the strong partnership with the VAA Alliance, effective joint sufficiency planning and targeted adopter recruitment across

the whole geographical area the 'pool' of prospective and approved adopters will be larger. Consequently, the likelihood of a suitable match being made earlier will be enhanced, securing the desired loving, safe and secure family environment for children looked after. The positive outcomes for children illustrated in this case study will be delivered for many more children looked after and at the same time adopter experience will be improved.

A1.2 Working Together

This is an anonymised case study based on a real case. The names in the case study are not the real names.

Oliver was born in September 2016. He has three half siblings, Emma (born 2009), Jack (born 2012) and Charlie (born 2014). Emma is adopted and Charlie and Jack were placed in foster care alongside Oliver in September 2016. Their final hearing was 7th August 2017, Placement Orders were granted for all three children and the court agreed with the plan to family find for Charlie and Jack together, and Oliver on his own.

A family member came forward in October 2017 and a viability assessment was requested. However the viability assessment was not positive and family finding progressed again.

Oliver was considered a harder to place child as he has significant developmental delay and there is considerable uncertainty about his future development. He has benefited from a package of physiotherapy, hydrotherapy and also portage and has made slow but steady progress. Given his complex needs it was clear he would require adopters who understood that he would always be delayed developmentally, could require special educational needs provision and may need support into adulthood and beyond.

Extensive family finding was undertaken which included profiling Oliver on Link Maker and Adoption Match, at the Consortium Exchange meeting, in-house linking meetings with attendance from our regional voluntary partners, and Coast to Coast Family Finding Meetings. He was also profiled at National Coraam BAAF Exchange days. All potential links were followed up but unfortunately none progressed. Potential adopters generally withdrew any interest expressed due to Oliver's complex needs and the uncertainty about his future development.

Due to the ongoing collaboration between Durham, Cumbria and Sunderland as part of Regionalisation, this created the opportunity for Oliver to attend an Activity Day held in Cumbria on the 21th April 2018. Oliver attended this event with his foster carers and a link was made with prospective adopters, Ben and Sophie. They had the opportunity to chat to his foster carers, spend time with Oliver and having felt a connection with him, registered their interest to adopt him.

Following exchange of CPR and PAR as well as other information sharing opportunities, the decision was made to progress with the match. Sophie and Ben had the opportunity to meet his portage worker and to observe a portage session, and to meet his physio and observe a hydrotherapy session. Consultations were also held with the foster carer, and

medical advisor. The adopters also had additional meetings with Oliver and his foster carer prior to panel as Oliver could be very clingy to her and it was felt that these informal meetings would assist Oliver's transition within introductions. Matching panel was held 1st August 2018 and Oliver was placed with Ben and Sophie in August 2018.

The collaboration between Durham, Cumbria and Sunderland has already led to this successful match of a hard to place child, prior to the Regional Adoption Agency going live. Had Oliver not attended the joint activity day it is unlikely that prospective adopters would have been found since extensive family finding had already been undertaken with no success. Furthermore, the joint working prior to and following Panel, has benefited and will continue to benefit Oliver.

A1.3 How the RAA would have made a difference

This is an anonymised case study. The names have been changed.

Age - 4 years old

Gender – Male

Race – White British

Ethan was born 4 weeks prematurely and hospital staff observed that he appeared to have symptoms that were commensurate with withdrawal symptoms for amphetamine and both mother and baby tested positively for amphetamines. Hospital staff also reported that birth mother presented as under the influence of alcohol when attending hospital to give birth, however, this is an allegation that she refutes. Birth mother has a history of alcohol and substance misuse she states that this started when she began to rely more heavily on alcohol after her relationship with her partner started to experience difficulties. Birth mother has had significant involvement with the police as a consequence of her substance misuse and reports from hospital staff state that she was under the influence of alcohol or other substances whilst she was in labour although she strongly denies this.

Birth mother's relationships have, according to her, always been characterised by domestic violence.

Ethan has two adult siblings who live with their respective fathers, one adult sibling who was relinquished for adoption when a baby.

Ethan is fiercely determined, fearless, confident, loveable and cute. He tends to make a decision from the outset to either fully engage with what is going on around him or remain stand offish. He has a very good sense of humour for one so little and he is able to engage someone as soon as they walk into the room.

He is a very smiley, happy little boy; he shows his pleasure through smile, singing and dancing around the room. He giggles and likes cuddles when he is happy. He can express sadness, he is able to tell you when he is sad and will seek reassurance.

When Ethan is highly excited he sometimes struggles to manage this and can become over excited, this can be regulated by his carers and he can be distracted in to another task or activity.

Emotionally, Ethan is continuing to develop and through Theraplay that is being provided his ability to not only identify his own emotions but to also seek out reassurance from his female carer has improved greatly. He can have tantrums however; using the Theraplay techniques these are much shorter in duration. He is also able to regulate his emotions more positively.

Ethan would like a family of his own especially a dad.

What difference will it make being in the Regional Adoption Agency? (RAA)

As the principle of early permanence is a key feature within the business processes of the RAA, engagement with Ethan's mother could potentially start pre-birth and permanence options for Ethan explored sooner.

Should adoption be the identified solution family finding could begin sooner, alongside preparing Ethan and his mother for the adoption journey. Early life story work could also be undertaken so that Ethan's family history is not lost.

Due to the circumstances of Ethan's early start in life and its impact on his behaviour finding a suitable adopter family from with a single local authority adopter pool might be difficult.

Within the RAA the pool of potential adopters would be much wider so identification and matching with an adopter family is likely to be more successful and at an earlier stage. The adoption support offer that has been developed for the RAA will also ensure that Ethan's adopters get access to appropriate help and support when they need it and not just immediately before and after adoption. The birth family support will also ensure that Ethan's mother has the offer of support should she choose to access it.

Ethan is likely to get a family of his own (and a Dad) that is more likely to meet his needs and much quicker so Ethan can live in a safe, loving and stable family.

