

| MAYOR AND CABINET | | |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Report Title | Joining South London's Regional Adoption Agency | |
| Key Decision | Yes | Item No. |
| Ward | All Wards | |
| Contributors | Executive Director for Children & Young People (Lucie Heyes, AD Children's Social Care) | |
| Class | Open | Date: 31 October 2018 |

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to Lewisham joining the regional adoption arrangements for South London.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Adoption is a very important element of our work in securing the best future for looked-after children. Although adoption services in Lewisham are and have been effective, there have been shortcomings nationally and regionally, often as a result of inefficiencies that come from small scale of the operation for many councils. The Department for Education has therefore taken action nationally to address this through a shift to regional solutions. All local authorities in England have therefore been instructed by the Department for Education to enter into regionalised adoption arrangements by 2020.
- 2.2 London Councils have been working together to develop sub-regional solutions for London. All boroughs in London are joining these arrangements apart from a small minority who are partnering with authorities outside London or with an independent adoption agency. This report sets out the proposed approach to regionalisation for Lewisham as part of Adopt London South and seeks formal agreement to begin implementing the new arrangements. The proposals in this report are fully aligned with those being presented to executive decision making bodies across all the boroughs participating in Adopt London South.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Lewisham enter into regional adoption arrangements as part of Adopt London South.
- 3.2 That staff and finances (as set out in the body of the report) are transferred to Southwark who will be hosting Adopt London South on behalf of ten South London boroughs.
- 3.3 That authority is given to the Executive Director for Children and Young People to agree the details of the arrangements including signing off the inter-authority

agreement between Lewisham and LB Southwark and agreeing participation in the governance arrangements.

4. Policy Context

4.1 Joining the regional adoption arrangements for South London will contribute to five of the key priority outcomes of Lewisham's Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2020:

- **Ambitious and achieving** – where people are inspired and supported to fulfil their potential
- **Safer** – where people feel safe and live free from crime, antisocial behaviour and abuse
- **Empowered and responsible** – where people are actively involved in their local area and contribute to supportive communities
- **Healthy, active and enjoyable** – where people can actively participate in maintaining and improving their health and well-being
- **Dynamic and prosperous** – where people are part of vibrant communities and town centres, well connected to London and beyond.

4.2 This will also align with the Corporate Priority of **protection of children** – better safeguarding and joined up services for children at risk.

4.3 Detail

4.3.1 In order to comply with national requirements, a new Adopt London South Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) is being created through combining the adoption services of the ten South London Boroughs of Croydon, Greenwich, Kingston, Wandsworth, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Richmond, Southwark, and Sutton. This new agency will build on the success of their existing services to improve performance in meeting the needs of those children who require permanence through adoption by bringing together the best practice from each authority within the RAA. This proposal forms part of an overarching project to develop four RAAs across London.

4.3.2 This document describes how establishing a single agency will allow the ten authorities to provide a more cohesive, efficient and effective use of resources and development of practice to the benefit of children, adopters and others who gain from adoption services. It proposes that the London Borough of Southwark will host the RAA, the cost of development to be funded by the Department for Education. This document also sets out how the RAA will work with its partners to deliver Adoption Services.

4.3.3 In March 2016, the government announced changes to the delivery of adoption services setting a very clear direction that all local authorities' adoption services must be delivered on a regionalised basis by 2020. This followed a range of national policy changes since 2012, including the 2015 'Regionalising Adoption' paper by the DfE that sought improvements in adoption performance. Following the general election in June 2017, the Minister of State for Children and Families reaffirmed commitment to this policy. In March 2018, the DfE brought into force the legislation that allows them to direct a local authority into a RAA if there is no progress being made.

4.4 The objective of regionalisation is to:

- Increase the number of children adopted

- Reduce the length of time children wait to be adopted
- Improve post-adoption support services to families who have adopted children from care
- Reduce the number of agencies that provide adoption services thereby improving efficiency & effectiveness.

4.5 The implementation of the new RAA for South London follows substantial project work from March 2018 where the decision was taken and agreed with the DfE to pursue four separate RAAs in London, not a single RAA as had been discussed through 2016-17. The South London project has the benefit of being able to access previous learning from those RAAs across the country that are already live. Project Managers across London have also worked together to ensure as much consistency pan-London as is possible whilst retaining an awareness and consideration of the specific demographics and other issues specific to their region and within their region.

4.6 The South London RAA will be known as Adopt London South (ALS) and will build upon the previous positive practice established within the two South London consortia – South London Adoption and Permanence Consortium (SLAPC) and South West Consortium which have acquired, over the years, good reputations for delivering effective services.

4.7 Over the summer 2018, and prior to formal agreement of this business case in autumn 2018 further work has begun to implement ‘quick win projects’ which enable South London to move to regionalisation in specific areas where it makes sense to do so. Over the summer more detailed planning work has also been underway to support the successful implementation of ALS. This work will continue with the ten member boroughs through the winter with transition planning and implementation beginning as soon as the business case is formally agreed.

4.8 This business case is founded on a number of key principles:

- There is one host for the south London RAA and it is proposed this is Southwark; however, it is expected that staff will be located across all ten LA sites; and that there is a host site for the South west in Merton.
- There is one Head of Service and centrally located functions, with senior management, performance, commissioning and back office located in Southwark.
- Wherever possible practice and processes will be the same across all south London boroughs; however, there is a recognition of the scale of the South London RAA (and that it is bigger than all other RAAs in the country), therefore there will be tailoring and delivery based within two spokes which are based on the existing consortia (Merton, Sutton, Kingston, Wandsworth and Richmond in the South West and Southwark, Lambeth, Lewisham, Greenwich and Croydon in the South East).
- All agencies have the resources available to actively lead on and participate in agreed work streams and achieve the deliverables within agreed timescales set out in the plan;
- Adopt London South (ALS) will share case work responsibility for the child at the earliest possible point, at the discretion of each Agency Decision Maker but in most cases at the point of the Placement Order being granted;
- Staff affected will retain their existing Terms and Conditions, including pension rights, holiday entitlements and sick pay policies. Staff will be transferred to the

host authority under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE). In Lewisham 6 FTE staff have been identified as in scope for TUPE;

- Any applicable redundancy costs will be underwritten by the currently employing LAs as this will not be funded by the DfE or the host;
- Premises – ALS will be delivered from office bases in all ten locality areas. This will ensure: continuity of provision as far as possible; close working relationships with children’s social workers and easy access for local communities to a service within their community. A small number of workers undertaking central functions (mainly senior management and back office staff) will work from a central base in the Host authority. To ensure the new ALS team is established with a cohesive and single culture it is expected that particularly in the early stages that staff will be based for team building events, conferences, team meetings at Southwark’s Tooley Street offices

5. The Principles

5.1 The principles which this business case has followed were agreed by the Adopt London Executive Board which was delegated by the Association of London Directors of Children’s Services (ALDCS) to oversee the development of the four London Regional Adoption Agencies. These principles have been endorsed by the DfE:

1. Local authorities involved in Adopt London and each of the four RAAs are committed to collaborating adoption arrangements so that the best interests of children and their adoptive families are secured and kept at the forefront of decision-making.

2. Adopt London will provide an overarching framework for enabling effective coordination, coherence and partnership working across London.

3. Adopt London authorities, and the four RAAs will make sure that there is consistency of approach in relation to key strategic and operational decisions, e.g. about whether staff are transferred under TUPE arrangements or seconded. Project teams in the four RAAs and RAA governance arrangements should reflect the ambition to promote such consistency of approach.

4. We are committed to working effectively together with Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs), making sure that their unique and important contribution is maximised and that VAAs are involved in the development of the RAAs and Adopt London.

5. The focus of work over the next 18 months will be on establishing the four RAAs; in phase two, developmental work on the Adopt London hub will progress. We will use the Adopt London Executive Board to operate a virtual Hub in the coming period, with a view to exploring options for joint commissioning across London, maintaining common design principles for the spokes and exploring opportunities for further development of the Hub in phase 2.

6. Detailed Business Case.

6.1 Purpose of this business case

6.1.1 This document sets out the case for creating a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) to be named ‘*Adopt London South*’ through combining the adoption services for ten local

authority areas in South London. It describes how establishing a single agency will allow the nine authorities to provide a more cohesive, efficient and effective use of resources and promote the development of practice to the benefit of children, adopters and others who gain from adoption services. It proposes that London Borough of Southwark will host the new adoption agency, the cost of implementation to be funded by the Department for Education. This document also sets out how Adopt London South will work with other RAAs pan-London to develop a Regional Hub for the provision of some services yet to be determined.

6.2 Background and case for change

- 6.2.1 Current measures show that performance across London is variable but, even where performance and outcomes are good, there is a case to be made that further improvement can be achieved. The current average number of children being adopted by each London borough is 11 per annum, which reflects the fact that each borough is trying to deliver a small specialist service for a small number of children.
- 6.3 Following the publication of the DfE paper, Regionalising Adoption (June 2015), the Department invited local authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies to submit Expressions of Interest in becoming part of new regionalised arrangements. Following the scoping phase, twenty-six London boroughs signed up in principle to joining the London RAA between November 2016 and March 2017.
- 6.4 London Councils hosted project resources funded via the DfE to develop the case for change that addressed London's requirements for a new model. The brand "Adopt London" was created.
- 6.5 The initial focus was on a London wide RAA. However, in October 2016 an Outline Business Case was approved by the member authorities and agreed by the DfE that set out a revised model that proposed four separate RAAs to be established with an option for a central hub to be iteratively developed for shared functions. The role of the hub will become clear as the programme evolves.
- 6.6 The recommendation was not to create a new entity or entities, but to take forward a model in which the RAA adoption service is hosted directly by London boroughs. The costs of creating a new entity were considered to be prohibitive; this was also the conclusion of other pilot RAAs around the country.
- 6.7 The recommendation is to create four additional RAAs to cover London, with programme coordination to deliver those functions most effectively carried out once. A fifth RAA is being developed by Harrow working with Coram. This fifth London RAA includes the south London borough of Bromley. Our neighbour Bexley is joining Kent's RAA.
- 6.8 The rest of this document builds on the work that has gone before to develop a more detailed business case for the South London RAA – Adopt South London.

7. **Project work undertaken so far**

- 7.1 Through the development of this business case a number of priority areas have emerged, which put the ambitions of regional working into practice. Taking forward

these smaller projects over the last few months has helped develop and iterate our thinking, both making the case for regional working, but also creating a sense of momentum, moving to regional working where it makes sense to do so more quickly.

7.2 The South London projects are

- BME and single parent peer support networks:
- Developing pre-birth foster to adopt practice:
- Coordinating and streamlining approaches to panels, information events, and preparation groups across South London:

8. Scope and vision of the new RAA

8.1 The proposed Regional Adoption Agency will encompass ten Local Authority areas in South London. It is estimated, based on 2017/18 outturn data and assuming consistent levels that approximately 115 children annually will be placed by the RAA (some in sibling groups) and 98 adopters recruited. It is hoped that these figures will be maintained, and possibly increased over the first few years of the RAAs implementation.

8.2 The RAA will operate in partnership with three other RAAs and a developing Hub in London. Additional adoption functions will be provided by the Hub as regionalisation plans develop, where they can further improve the outcomes for children and achieve better value. The London-wide hub will begin its development from 2018/19 onward and will need to be resourced from existing funding arrangements.

8.3 Across all of London the four RAAs have a shared vision to achieve excellent outcomes for children and adults affected by adoption through:

- Working closely with the Local Authorities and partners to ensure that children's best interests are at the heart of placement decisions which will fully meet their needs;
- Targeting recruitment and establishing a wider and more diverse pool of prospective adopters;
- Matching so that children are placed without delay in secure, loving families;
- Providing creative and outstanding adoption support services;
- Investing in the workforce to ensure they have the right skills and capacity to deliver excellent services;
- Continually seeking to apply best practice and innovation to our ways of working;
- Actively listening to and learning from children, adults and staff to develop and improve the services provided.

8.4 In South London further work has been undertaken to tailor the pan-London vision to the specific priorities for the region. The areas of practice improvement identified as priorities for the ALS are:

- Post-adoption support
- Family recruitment for harder to place children (older children, larger sibling groups, substance addicted babies, disabled children and those with special educational needs, and children from black and other ethnic minority backgrounds)
- A consistent adopter experience across south London from initial contact and recruitment through to training and post-adoption support.

- More coordinated, innovative, different and potentially larger scale contracts with voluntary sector and VAAs (better commissioning and understanding of placement providers)
- A longer-term ambition for the RAA to undertake lobbying/stakeholder work with the legal system to be more receptive to adoption

9. Delivery Model

- 9.1 A range of delivery model options was assessed and the decision to pursue four RAAs in London was agreed by the Association of London Directors of Children’s Services, and endorsed by the DfE in May 2018. This business case does not revisit that decision, but provides more detail for how the agreed delivery model will work in south London.
- 9.2 Whilst a number of options were considered early on including the creation of a new single entity to deliver adoption services across South London, the preferred option is to combine the ten London boroughs with one borough becoming the host authority. Creation of new single entities is time consuming and costly and not a preferred option elsewhere with RAAs already live.
- 9.3 Governance of the RAA will operate through a board comprising of senior representatives from all LAs with executive voting powers with non-executive advisory representation from VAAs, adopters and adoptees. The RAA will continue to be accountable to Corporate Parenting Boards and other Local Authority bodies.
- 9.4 The RAA will aim to provide a high-quality service to adopted children with improved outcomes; taking the best models of delivery from each of the nine services, and considering the best level of geography on which to deliver (sub-regional, regional or pan-London). The RAA will also aim to provide savings through economies of scale.
- 9.5 The delivery model for the RAA addresses the five areas set out by the DfE as their minimum expectations of a Regional Adoption Agency:
1. A single line of authority with the ability to act as a single service and a head of service in place.
 2. Transfer of staff into the organisation.
 3. Inclusion of core adoption functions of recruitment and assessment of adopters, early permanence and family finding, and adoption support.
 4. Pooled funding from local authorities into the RAA.
 5. Pan-regional approach to matching i.e. one pool of children and adopters.
- 9.6 The preferred option for South London addresses these requirements and proposes to work collaboratively with 3 other RAAs across London namely:
- Adopt London West – Ealing
 - Adopt London North – Islington
 - Adopt London East – Havering

- 9.7 It is important to note that each of the other London RAAs has between 5-7 local authorities, and no other RAA has gone before nationally which combines such a large number of Local authorities.
- 9.8 The south is comprised of ten local authorities. Each one of the ten local authorities believes that it will not be possible to deliver an RAA of sufficient quality and at sufficient pace across ten local authority areas. Therefore, ALS will be implemented as two spokes with the south west comprised of Sutton, Merton, Wandsworth, Richmond and Kingston (with Merton acting as a spoke office) and the south east comprised of Southwark, Lewisham, Greenwich, Lambeth and Croydon (with Southwark acting as both spoke office and overall hub).
- 9.9 The reasons underpinning this proposal are set out below:
- Different sorts of adoption need:** The sorts of potential families needed for ‘harder to place children’ are very different across the ten boroughs, reflecting their different demographic profiles. While across all boroughs there is a need to recruit more families receptive to adopting larger sibling groups and older children, substance dependent babies; there is a particular need to increase recruitment of families from black and minority ethnic groups in Lambeth, Croydon, Lewisham, Greenwich and Southwark.
- 9.10 **Differing levels of performance:** There is significant concern, particularly from higher performing boroughs, which have been judged by Ofsted to have a Good or Outstanding Adoption service that moving to such large regionalised arrangements will negatively affect performance, rather than improve performance. The stronger performing authorities are keen to share best practice and provide peer support without compromising timeliness, and outcomes in their own authority. It is felt that moving to smaller groupings will reduce the potential negative impact of the less strong authorities on overall performance.
- 9.11 **Existing sub-regional relationships:** The existing consortium arrangements are felt to be strong and improving. Trust and relationships between consortium members is good and boroughs feel they provide a good basis for achieving the practical improvements outlined above. Indeed, there are many existing consortium projects and initiatives which may be augmented through formal regionalisation. Moving to regional arrangements loosely based on consortium arrangements would also mirror the approach taken in North, East and West London and so provide parity of approach.
- 9.12 **Transport:** Developing approaches to potential collocation and joint working will be difficult across the whole of South London given the issues associated with transport in the South of the capital and the current inability of the public transport network to enable travel east to west and vice versa. For example, it may take someone in Sutton nearly two hours to get to Greenwich or Lewisham.
- 9.13 From a local perspective, within their spokes the boroughs have a long history of working together and South London has a clear identity. The two consortia have focussed on developing joint services and activities across Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship. Adoption services have worked cooperatively in sharing practice and training opportunities.

- 9.14 Robust working relationships are already established within the spokes and have started to become established across the South London area through the ALS project board which has driven the development of this business case. This has enabled constructive working together in developing the target operating model.
- 9.15 Adopt London South will therefore bring together best practice from these LAs while providing the opportunity to create clear practice improvements and enable a viable future market for recruitment. Approximately 60 FTE LA staff, many of whom work part time, are expected to become part of the new organisation to deliver the following main services across South London:
- Recruitment and Assessment – to provide the prospective adopters;
 - Permanence Planning – ensuring that children identified as requiring adoption achieve a placement;
 - Matching and Placement – to match prospective adopters with children in need of adoption;
 - Adoption Support – to help all affected by adoption;

More detail on the Operating Model is found in Section 3 and a detailed breakdown of the proposed split between the LAs and the RAA is provided in the appendix.

10. Strategic benefits

- 10.1 The key aim in combining services to create a single Regional Adoption Agency is to achieve better outcomes for all children and young people with adoption plans in the region. Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies will come together and combine adoption services into a new regional agency to benefit children and their adoptive families, with larger operating areas giving a wider pool of adopters and children, more effective matching and better support services.
- 10.2 The Government set out the challenges they are seeking to address nationally through the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies in the paper 'Regionalising Adoption', published in June 2015.

In summary, these are:

10.3 Inefficiencies

- 10.3.1 Across London there is a highly-fragmented system with around 180 agencies recruiting and matching adopters for only 5,000 children per year (this number has subsequently decreased). The majority of agencies are operating on a small scale with over half recruiting fewer than 20 adopters in 2017/18. This is not an effective and efficient scale to be operating at and is likely to mean that costs are higher because management overheads and fixed costs are shared over a smaller base. Having a system that is fragmented in this way reduces the scope for broader, strategic planning, as well as specialisation, innovation and investment. Large numbers of small agencies render the system unable to make the best use of the national supply of potential adopters, more vulnerable to peaks and troughs in the flow of children, and less cost effective.

10.4 Matching

10.4.1 The system needs to match children with families far more quickly. Nationally, the data also shows that, as at 30 September 2015, there were 3,060 children with a placement order waiting to be matched. 38% of these children had been waiting longer than 18 months. The costs of delay, both to children and to the system, are high. It is vital that children are given the best and earliest possible chance of finding a family, irrespective of authority boundaries and lack of trust of other agencies' adopters. It is unacceptable that children are left waiting in the system when families can be found. Successful matching relies on being able to access a wide range of potential adopters from the beginning and operating at a greater scale would allow social workers to do this, thus reducing delay in the system. It could also reduce the number of children who have their adoption decisions reversed. In 2015-16, this happened to 900 children nationally. Furthermore, the opportunity for practice innovation created by moving to a new delivery model also has real potential to improve matching.

10.5 Recruitment

10.5.1 Whilst there has been growth in adopter recruitment there are too few adopters willing and able to adopt children with a range of different backgrounds and life circumstances. Recruitment from a wider geographical base as part of a regional recruitment strategy. Incentives also need to be better aligned and recruitment activity more nuanced and targeted so that agencies are encouraged to recruit the right kind of adopters given the characteristics of the children waiting. Recruitment from a wider geographical base than an individual local authority, that takes account of the needs of children across a number of those local authorities in a regional recruitment strategy and uses specialist techniques for recruiting adopters for hard to place children, would potentially lead to fewer children waiting.

10.6 Adoption Support

10.6.1 Currently adoption support services are provided by a mix of local authority provision, the NHS and independent providers (voluntary adoption agencies, adoption support agencies and small independent providers). There is a risk that the public and independent sectors are unlikely to be able to grow sufficiently to meet increased demand for adoption support. There are regional gaps in the types of services on offer and little evidence of spare capacity. The sector is currently dominated by spot purchasing and sole providers. This is not an efficient way to deliver these services. For providers to expand and therefore operate at a more efficient scale, services need to be commissioned on bigger and longer term contracts. RAAs should enable this to be done. It is envisaged that the Hub will act as a conduit to the wider voluntary sector, providing economies of scale and opportunities for innovation

11. **The Local Perspective**

11.1 The statutory functions required of local authorities in respect of adoption are provided by each of the ten local authorities within their own geographic areas. There is already a great deal of joint working between the boroughs' adoption agencies to provide parts of the current service.

11.2 Joining the ten local authorities' services together within Adopt London South will enable efficiencies to be achieved and improvements to services for all those affected by adoption.

- 11.3 In terms of recruiting adoptive parents some of the agencies are currently competing with each other. There is a duplication of effort and associated costs with the risk that people wanting to be considered as adoptive parents are confused about where and how to proceed with their enquiry. Adopt London South will have a single point of contact for prospective adopters, reducing the current fragmentation of services. Similarly, a single point of entry to the adoption service locally will improve access to adoption support services for adoptive families, and also for adopted adults and birth family members, who have a statutory entitlement to receive a service.
- 11.4 Combining the services should ensure that management overheads and fixed costs will be reduced over time. The new service will allow for the more efficient use of staff time, for example Adopt London South will deliver training and preparation courses at stage one and two of the adoption process across the whole area resulting in less duplication and more timely access to the training courses for prospective adopters. There will also be the opportunity for trialling new approaches, including the use of experienced adoptive parents as trainers. There are currently nine Adoption Panels operating across the ten Local Authorities with around ten panels being held each month, many of which do not have full agendas.
- 11.5 It is proposed that through Adopt London South one RAA Panel is formed for consistency and quality and meets three to four times a month, providing quality assurance, at one go to location. It is proposed that two RAA Panels are formed one in the South East and another in the South West. These will meet 2-3 times each per month reflecting the number of cases being presented.
- 11.6 Agency Decisions in relation to prospective adopter approvals will be made by the Agency Decision Maker for the RAA. Therefore, it will no longer be necessary for the ten Local Authorities to retain their individual Adoption Panels, but each will continue to have a designated Agency Decision Maker for considering and agreeing the plan that a child should be placed for adoption and agreeing the match to appropriate adopters.
- 11.7 The new combined service provides the opportunity for the provision of a service of excellence for adoption support. This will be a multi-disciplinary service in partnership with colleagues from health and education and providing comprehensive and high level targeted support for adopted children, adoptive parents, adopted adults and birth family members. The proposed structure provides capacity for employing or commissioning a team of therapists with a range of skills relating to systemic family therapy and play therapy.
- 11.8 ALS will aim to reduce the proportion of children whose plans are changed from adoption because an adoption placement cannot be found and the number of adoption Placement disruptions. The RAA will bring the existing local expertise among managers and social workers together in respect of what makes a good match, and will be looking at a high proportion of children being referred to the RAA prior to the point of Placement Order. Early identification of children with likely adoption plans by the Permanence Coordinators, and the plans for the RAA worker to liaise with the child's social worker during the court proceedings will enable fuller and more accurate assessments of an individual child's needs to inform matching, and prepare the child. Being more strategic in terms of recruitment will also widen choice of potential adoptive families for children, which again should lead to better and more sustainable matching.

- 11.9 Benefits will be delivered through adopting the “best practice” from the ten contributing organisations. This will be of particular value in delivering benefits from the areas of Early Permanence (concurrency and fostering to adopt), improved adoption support, making optimal use of colleagues in health and education as well as those in ALS registered as social workers and those without social work qualifications but with other relevant knowledge, skills and experience.

12 Strategic risks

- 12.1 A full risk analysis has been undertaken considering in detail the risks associated with adoption regionalisation in South London. The major risks are summarised here:

- There is a risk to all Local Authorities who fail to join a regional agency. This would include central government directing how its services would be delivered.
- There is a risk of fragmentation in South London, with the spokes operating too independently of each other, alongside the 5th London RAA which includes the South London boroughs of Bromley. This may make things more confusing for potential adopters and adoptive families, children and other stakeholders. To mitigate these risks there will be a single Head of Service overseeing the whole of ALS, and there will be a single web landing page and phone numbers directing stakeholders to the right regional arrangements.
- Major reorganisation of adoption services in the region may have an impact on service delivery to children and adoptive families in the short term. To mitigate these risks, practice is being regionalised more quickly where it makes sense to do so, and implementation will be on a phased basis. Performance measures aligned with the revised operating model and regular monitoring arrangements will be established between the host and non-host authorities as quickly as possible and before go-live for the new arrangements. This approach to governance, quality assurance and performance management will draw on lessons learned and best practice from previous
- Separation of functions could cause delay through ineffective communication. The service delivery model promotes co-location and local delivery in all Local Authority areas. Effective information sharing agreements and close working relationships between children’s and adoption social workers will mitigate against this risk
- Any future difference in opinion across the LAs as to the role and scope of ALS and future governance arrangements could delay implementation.
- The organisational staffing levels proposed in this business case have been based on actual demand experienced over the past three years, however because of the current difficulties in predicting the levels of activity (e.g., numbers of children with adoption plans) there is a risk that suggested staffing levels might not be consistent with demand.
- There is risk, even regionally, of not being able to recruit adopters able to meet the needs of the children waiting, leading to more interagency placements and financial viability issues. More coordinated and targeted recruitment activity is expected to address this, scope for enhanced recruitment and assessment has been built into the delivery model.
- Major change will see a potentially worrying time for staff and proposed changes to ways of working could lead to a risk that ALS may find it challenging to retain its existing experienced and qualified adoption team workforce. The engagement of staff directly involved in the delivery of adoption services, and the involvement of current service users will be essential mitigation alongside keeping colleagues in

partner organisations informed. Staff have received monthly newsletters about the progress of Adopt London South from April 2018 onward. A programme of staff workshops and engagement events is scheduled from September 2018 onward. The project team has visited all team meetings where there has been a request for them to do so. In Lewisham, there is the added advantage that the adoption team manager has been appointed as practice lead to support the development of the RAA, and so Lewisham has had a pivotal role in shaping some of the practice proposals.

13. Realising the benefits of the RAA

13.1 Benefits expected to be realised through the project include:

- Improved timescales for adopter assessments
- Higher conversion rate from enquiry to approval of prospective adopters based on better understanding of the most successful routes to adoption
- Early identification of children with potential adoption plans and more children placed on an Early Permanence (Fostering to Adopt or concurrency) basis
- Reduction in the number of children for whom the permanence plan has changed away from adoption
- Increase in the percentage of children adopted for care
- More timely matching of approved adopters
- Improved timescales for placing children with their adoptive families
- Fewer prospective adopter approvals rescinded as approved adopters are not matched with a child
- Fewer adoption placement disruptions pre and post adoption order
- Improved performance measurement and management across the service

14. Regionalising Adoption Agencies Operating Model

14.1 Learning from best practice

14.1.1 Research identifies several factors which contribute to timely, successful family finding and matching outcomes for children with a plan of adoption. The University of Bristol (June 2010) and Oxford University (Feb 2015) identified within research briefs, key factors seen to enhance the adoption journey for both children and their prospective adopters.

- Quality of information – all information at all parts of the process must be of **high quality, factual and comprehensive**. Poor quality information is identified as a direct correlation to disruption.
- Local authorities with access to a **wider pool** of prospective adopters experienced less delay in their family finding and matching processes.
- **Family finding done at the point of ADM** decision (rather than at the granting of the placement order) resulted in children experiencing less delay.
- Delay was reduced when case responsibility for **children transferred to adoption service** at point of placement order.
- Delay was also reduced when **early family finding strategies** were agreed for individual children deemed to have complex needs.

- **Tracking** of children throughout their journey is critical and adoption workers involved in this can drive the process.
- **Timely joint decision making** re whether to pursue ethnic matches or sibling separation also reduced delay for children.
- **Post placement support** (in a variety of formats) is particularly valued by adopters, contributes to positive transitions and reduces the risk of disruptions.

14.1.2 Proposals contained within this business case have taken account of these key factors alongside the need for quality and efficiency.

14.2 Scope

14.2.1 The target operating model for the new RAA considers its role in the delivery of the following main services across South London:

- Recruitment and Assessment – to provide the prospective adopters;
- Permanence Planning – Identifying children who need adopting;
- Matching and Placement – to match prospective adopters with children in need of adoption;
- Pre and Post Placement Support – to help all affected by adoption.

14.3 Roles and Responsibilities

14.3.1 Appendix 1 sets out how the RAA and LAs will work together, summarising roles and responsibilities for each.

15 **Overview of the Proposed Organisation of ALS**

15.1 There will be approximately 30 FTE social worker positions within Adopt London South, and approximately 56-60 FTE in total including management, administration, performance, commissioning, panel advisor and administration capacity. 6 FTE from Lewisham have been identified as in delivering services in scope. Two thirds of the capacity in the new RAA will be focused on adoption in the South East (Lewisham, Lambeth, Southwark, Greenwich and Croydon), as this is where two thirds of the adoption work happens. Funding from the South East also accounts for around two thirds of the RAA budget.

15.2 Detailed structure charts outlining the new roles available in the RAA were signed off by ALDCS on September 17.

16. **Property and IT Implications**

16.1 It is proposed that over the course of the first year, and as quickly as possible, that all staff will have equipment, if they do not already, to enable them to work flexibly and remotely. This will mean that staff can dial in to participate in some meetings via Skype or similar, and that where it is appropriate information will be communicated via email or online to prevent unnecessary travel. That said, as is the case now, it is expected that staff will need to travel to occasional whole RAA staff meetings/conferences, and to more regular spoke meetings in the South East and South West, likely at least once a month.

- 16.2 It is also proposed that Merton, as one of the five boroughs that make up the South West (Sutton, Kingston, Richmond, Merton and Wandsworth) acts as the central location for that spoke. As a spoke location Merton will need to physically host some of the workers for that area.
- 16.3 As far as possible it is proposed that teams will be collocated in Southwark's Tooley Street offices so that staff can build a sense of shared endeavour, mutual support and trust. However, this needs to be balanced against the need for some work, in particular recruitment, assessment and matching to be undertaken and based within each of the ten local authorities with the Adopt London South social workers working closely with the child social workers in each local authority much as they do now.
- 16.4 To deliver this, it is proposed that each local authority, including Lewisham, agrees to provide some touchdown or hot desking space for social workers and access to meeting rooms. This should mean, for example, that social workers who are undertaking family assessments can do this from any of the ten local authorities or from home as appropriate. This will amount to less space than is currently used by existing adoption services.
- 16.5 It is proposed that to ensure clarity and maintain and improve timeliness that specialist teams will operate in each of the spokes (a recruitment, assessment, family finding and matching team, and a post adoption team). There are currently different practices in operation across the authorities. The alternative to specialist teams is that social workers operate in generic teams undertaking a range of tasks.
- 16.6 Whilst the generic model offers more opportunity for staff to be based out in their existing local authority undertaking a wider variety of work and travelling less; it reduces the opportunity for teams to sit together, to develop a single RAA approach which builds and develops the practice from the individual LAs, to really change the culture and it is likely to require more robust performance management to ensure that team managers have a grip on cases.
- 16.6 The specialist team model will require slightly more space in the spoke authorities – Merton and Southwark - and will enable a sense of one team to develop more quickly. However, it may require slightly more travel for social workers to be based in the spoke when it is appropriate for them to do so.

17. HR Implication

- 17.1 If TUPE applies, all staff whose roles have been agreed as being in scope for the new RAA to deliver will be transferred to Southwark as the new employer. For Lewisham this equates to 6 FTE posts. TUPE protects contractual terms and conditions of employment for transferring employees at the time of the transfer. TUPE does not apply to workers engaged as an Agency Worker or contracted as an individual Personal Service Company. All transfers are subject to consultation with staff and their trades unions. Both staff and the trade unions have been briefed and staff have been involved in the work on the RAA proposals to ensure that their concerns are addressed. Formal consultation with staff and their trade unions will take place on the transfer and any proposed measures.
- 17.2 Ongoing pension provision and responsibility for past and future pension liabilities will need to be addressed in the transfer arrangements.

18. Financial Implications

18.1 Project Cost

18.1.1 The costs of developing the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) for South London have been underwritten by a DfE development grant which is managed by the Adopt London South project board and paid in arrears quarterly.

18.2 Financial Model

18.2.1 The budget for the RAA has been built through each of the 10 authorities considering the agreed scope and outcomes for the RAA and identifying the existing budget available to deliver these activities. Local authorities have ensured that sufficient resource is retained to deliver the activities which will remain the responsibility of the local authority.

18.2.2 Lewisham has identified a budget of £458k which will transfer to Southwark to host Adopt London South. This is based on a staffing FTE of 7.9 and is inclusive of a sum to cover hosting charges incurred by the London Borough of Southwark. The proposed budget for transfer can be fully contained within the existing 2018/19 revenue budget for adoption services.

18.2.3 Data has been collected on boroughs' adoption allowances, including the proportion funded by ASF and the proportion funded by local authorities. However, this is not included in the proposed base budget which will be transferred to Southwark as it will be retained by the boroughs. However, expertise in securing ASF will sit within the RAA and the RAA will have a role in the future in reviewing the approach to allowances across 10 boroughs. In total, the approximate budget for Adopt London South to deliver all the services within scope is likely to be in the region of £3.2million.

19. Governance

19.1 It is proposed that Adopt London South will be governed by a board. This board is already meeting monthly as the Adopt London South project board. At the point of 'go-live' the board will move from being a project board to the strategic governance board for Adopt London South.

19.2 It is proposed that the board is comprised of DCS or assistant director-level representatives from each local authority and that for the first year it meets every two months, then moving to quarterly. Lewisham will participate fully in this board, since it is vital that there is accountability for outcomes for children and effectiveness.

19.3 The board is the place where performance and budgets can be scrutinised and where the local authorities can hold the head of the RAA to account. The running of the board will be supported by the PA to the head of the RAA and meetings will be held in Southwark.

19.4 It is proposed that there are two levels of board membership, executive members (the funders of the RAA), and non-executive members which will include an adoptive

parent and adopted person, and a representative from We are Family and possibly other local VAAs.

- 19.5 It is also proposed that there is an operational group, made up of the heads of service/service managers. This group would meet at a similar frequency but investigate and challenge on operational detail and service quality.

20. Implementation Timeline

- 20.1 The approach below has been agreed across all RAA projects to ensure consistency. The intention is that all four RAAs will be implemented by April 2019 and the hub function will be considered during this time with an option to deliver as a separate phase.

21. Project approach March 2018 – April 2019

| Stage 1: Mobilisation & on going Project Management | Stage 2: Vision & Design | Stage 3: Service Analysis- Measure and Understand (As is) | Stage 4: Service redesign workstream initiation (Future State) | Stage 5: Monitoring, evaluation and benefits | Stage 6: Transition arrangements/shadow and testing phase | Stage 7: Implementation |
|--|---|---|--|--|--|--|
| This stage ensures that there is an established rationale for integration whilst putting in place the building blocks for defining and scoping the change. | This stage involves working with senior stakeholder to understand and develop the vision for these integrated services and articulate the 'end state'. | The stage involves refining the scope of the project, identifying the cohort to work with and measuring the current situation (the 'as is') and understanding the level of change required to achieve the defined aims and objectives. This is important in providing a solid evidence base for the 'to be' model and developing options for the services and functions in scope. | This stage involves designing the 'to be' model, understanding and developing the options available in order to achieve the desired outcomes and identify the level of change required. | This stage reviews the initial benefit profiles and puts in place monitoring and evaluation measures for the testing and implementation phases | This stage involves working with operational teams to prototype and test out the agreed integration model/option and monitoring effectiveness of it. This stage allows for refinement to confirm the solution as correct/optimum before changes are mainstreamed. | Subject to the evaluation of stage 6, this stage involves fully implementing the new model and associated improvements |
| Deliverable: March - May <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lockdown scope Set up PMO function Project team in place Project plan signed off Workstreams developed and leads identified | Deliverables: April - May <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish clear design features & evaluation criteria Agree key outcome measures and anticipates benefits Articulate vision for the new service | Deliverables: May - July <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of current position Stakeholder engagement HR analysis of workforce implications and options Review benefit profiles Complete current position statement Identify opportunities for change and improvement | Deliverables: July - November <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service design model options Legal appraisal of options and impacts Agree support service functions Completed Business Case Sign off and permission to proceed Complete transition and full implementation plan | Deliverables: August - September <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree on evaluation approach Set performance measures/KPIs for new service Review benefit profiles and produce realisation plan | Deliverables: October- November <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies/procedures, referral routes agreed Functions & Structure agreed Systems tested Legal requirements for new entity in place Future model governance and SLAs agreed | Deliverables: November - April 19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation review process Engagement and change management process Fully implement the new model Go live with new service |

- 21.1 Following the completion of the Business Case for each of the 4 RAAs, sign off of the formal documentation will be sought by each individual Borough from November 2018. This report proposes that this is delegated to the Executive Director for Children and Young People.

22. Legal Implications

- 22.1 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 brought in new measures relating to permanency options for children, new Adoption Registers and the requirement for all Local Authorities to act as adoption agencies in order to promote permanency options for children coming into Local Authority care. Lewisham had already been operating as an Adoption Agency for many years prior to this, and in essence was not affected constitutionally by these changes. However, in recent years there has been increasing concern as to the differential performance of the nationally fragmented adoption services, as described in this report, and the idea of Regional Adoption Agencies was formulated to address this. There were also two significant

judicial decisions, namely Re B and Re B-S which changed the landscape of the Courts thinking in relation to adoption, and which has resulted in far fewer Placement Orders, which allow children to be placed for adoption and away from their birth family being made nationally. There is no specific duty to enter into a RAA, rather it is a policy initiative from Central Government launched in June 2015 with the “Regionalising Adoption “ discussion and proposal paper. The development work has been progressed at differing rates around the country, as the proposals are underpinned by a recognition of good practice, the existence of variable practice in different Agencies, the need to maximize outcomes and significant additional funding being made available to support the changes. In 2016 the Government announced changes to the delivery of adoption services proposing that all local authorities’ adoption services be delivered on a regionalised basis by 2020.

- 22.2 However, the government reinforced their policy ambition through provisions in the Education and Adoption Act 2016. The Act gives the Secretary of State a new power to direct one or more named local authorities to make arrangements for any, or all, of their adoption functions to be carried out on their behalf by other local authorities names, or by another agency, and require such plans to be carried forward within two years of the enactment of the provision.
- 22.3 Further legislative amendments have been made to enable sharing of information, in the Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations, March 2018, with consequential amendments of the Family Court Practice Directions and the Disclosure of Adoption Information Regulations 2005 and the Care Planning and Placement (England) Regulations 2010.
- 22.4 The employment implications of the new arrangements are set out elsewhere in this report. The governance arrangements for the RAA will be discharged by way of a Board, and be subject to inter- authority agreements regulating the terms of its appointment. The detail of this will be available in October 2018.

23 Equalities Legislation

- 23.1 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 23.2 In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 23.3 It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct, or to promote equality of opportunity or foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and

those who do not. It is a duty to have due regard to the need to achieve the goals listed at 8.4 above.

23.4 The weight to be attached to the duty will be dependent on the nature of the decision and the circumstances in which it is made. This is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. The Mayor must understand the impact or likely impact of the decision on those with protected characteristics who are potentially affected by the decision. The extent of the duty will necessarily vary from case to case and due regard is such regard as is appropriate in all the circumstances.

23.5 The Equality and Human Rights Commission has issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled "Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice". The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-codes-practice>

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-technical-guidance>

23.6 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:

- [The essential guide to the public sector equality duty](#)
- [Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making](#)
- [Engagement and the equality duty: A guide for public authorities](#)
- [Objectives and the equality duty. A guide for public authorities](#)
- [Equality Information and the Equality Duty: A Guide for Public Authorities](#)

23.7 The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty-guidance#h1>

24. Crime and Disorder Implications

There are no such implications.

25. Equalities Implications

Equalities and diversity will be at the heart of the new RAA as these considerations are fundamental to successful adoption. Equalities monitoring and regular updating of Impact Assessments will be a key function of the RAA Board.

26. Environmental Implications

There are no such implications.

27. Conclusion

The report explains the business case for the RAA and it is recommended to proceed on the basis proposed.

28. Background documents and originator

Note of relevant background documents and the name and full direct line number of an officer who can be contacted for further details.

Adopt London Newsletters and background information

Held by Shirley Gounder Shirley.gounder@lewisham.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1 – Service Schedule
THE CHILD

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|--|---|---|--|
| Case Responsibility | <p>The local authority will retain case management responsibility for the child until the making of the Adoption Order. The local authority will be responsible for all statutory functions including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory Visits • Management and supervision of contact between child and family members. • Supervision, administration and finance of foster placements and communication with foster carers (including Early Permanence placements). | <p>The RAA will provide specialist advice and support to assist LA staff to fully understand the adoption process, influencing and promoting best practice.</p> | <p>An aspiration – services may wish to consider in future the transfer of responsibility for the child’s case at the making of the Placement order.</p> |
| Early Identification of Children Requiring Adoption | <p>The local authority is responsible for identifying (at the earliest point of consideration of alternative permanence), the children who may require adoption and making them and their needs known to the RAA and providing relevant and timely information. The RAA aims to develop working practices with each LA to ensure close involvement in care planning to assist with early identification.</p> | <p>Representatives of the RAA will attend relevant meetings in each local authority such as care planning meetings to better understand the needs of the children who may require adoption and, where appropriate, to begin to identify suitable adopters at an early stage. The RAA will work with other RAAs and VAAs to assist where children</p> | |

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|---|---|--|---|
| | | might be hard to place within its own resources. | |
| Early Placement | Fostering arrangements and supporting potential adoptive families as foster carers. Close working with the RAA. This will build on the Southwark EP practice which is being rolled out as a 'quick win' | Where appropriate, and in agreement with the local authority, the RAA will make available an Early Permanence Placement (EPP) e.g. Concurrent Planning/ Fostering for Adoption Service for children who may benefit from the possibility of early placement with potential adopters. (Placements will depend on the availability of appropriate carers). | The fostering element of any EPP placement will remain with the LA as a fostering agency for the carers. The LA would have the responsibility for supporting prospective adopters as foster carers unless specific agreements are agreed with a commissioned service. |
| Twin Tracking of Children Requiring Adoption | The local authority will track the progress of children in care proceedings or accommodated under section 20 (Children Act 1989) to maintain an up-to-date knowledge of their potential need for an adoption placement. This information will be shared with the RAA and will assist regional tracking via the adoption register. | The RAA will actively track all children for whom initial information indicates that adoption may be a likely plan | |

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Pre-Placement Reports | <p>The LA will be responsible for the completion of all reports prior to an adoption placement being made including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Placement Reports <p>The local authority will be responsible for assessing the child's needs in respect of a future placement and in ensuring that any required financial support for a future adoptive placement is available.</p> | <p>The RAA will advise on and support the completion of the Child Placement Report and early profile of the child. The RAA will provide support and challenge to help ensure that the CPR's are of a consistent high quality across all 9 boroughs.</p> <p>The RAA will be responsible for the early and any subsequent profile of the child (even before the CPR is compiled) and in identifying early matching considerations, including advice on likely adoption support needs of the child/ren once placed and potential sources of future support. The RAA will also provide support to undertake more specialist assessments e.g. sibling assessments.</p> <p>The RAA will provide additional information and advice on the placement needs of the child and the likely need for post adoption support services, including financial support. It will be necessary for the RAA and LA to work closely and collaboratively to ensure that the needs of the child can be met and that planned support is sustainable.</p> | <p>In the future the RAA could provide training on CPR's across the region</p> |
| Medical Information | <p>The Local Authority will be responsible for obtaining all required medical information in respect of children who are being</p> | | |

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|--|---|---|-------|
| | considered for adoption and will meet with prospective adopters to ensure they are fully aware of the child's future medical needs as appropriate. | | |
| Decision that Adoption should be the Child's Plan | The Agency Decision Maker in each LA will be responsible for the 'Should be placed for adoption' decision. The LA will undertake a regular review of this decision and associated plans and keep the family finder in the RAA informed of any changes. (Decision will be reviewed by the IRO in the first instance in line with statutory review dates) | The RAA will support the decision-making process as requested, particularly in the provision of Professional Advice to the LA's ADM and administrative support. The RAA will provide an adoption panel for relinquished children's plans to be heard. | |
| Family Finding Process | | The RAA will lead the tracking/family finding process in consultation with the local authority. | |
| Communication during the Family Finding Process | It will be the responsibility of the LA to keep the CPR updated on a 6-monthly basis and to inform the family finder of any changes in the child's development or circumstances (e.g. change of placement). | A Family Finder will be allocated during the early stages of profiling, and will continue to be informed of plans/decisions to the point the decision has been made that the plan should be adoption (or not). The RAA will keep the LA regularly updated about progress on family finding. | |
| 'Hard to Place' Children | The LA is responsible for identifying and informing the RAA at the earliest opportunity where a child is: | The RAA in conjunction with the VAA Alliance when necessary, will provide or commission a service for HTP | |

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|---------------------------------|--|--|---|
| | <p>Aged four or over From a BME heritage Part of a sibling group of two or more Has uncertainty about their emotional development Has a disability or medical condition The LA will gather the relevant information, assess and forward to the RAA as soon as possible.</p> | <p>children which may involve some or all the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased publicity – DVD, Photos etc. • Profile the child at specific events • Press and digital media advertising • Attempt to recruit carers specifically for the child • Provide additional training and preparation for potential carers • Advise on or assist with additional preparation work with the child. | |
| Preparation of the Child | <p>The LA will be responsible for preparing the child for an adoptive placement alongside workers from the RAA. The LA and the RAA will be jointly responsible for the preparation of the child's Life story work. This often needs to start early in the child's looked after career and will contain information to which the LA has immediate access.</p> | <p>The RAA will work alongside the LA in the preparation of the child, in respect of the future placement The RAA will develop or commission specific expertise in the preparation of children who are hard to place and who are being prepared using the a more 'bespoke' family finding model (see above)</p> | <p>Need to work up in more detail how RAA and LA will work together to prepare the child.</p> |
| Later life letter | <p>The LA in partnership with the RAA will be responsible for producing the Later life letter and will be ultimately responsible for sign off.</p> | <p>The RAA will provide advice, quality assurance and written guidance</p> | |
| Linking and Matching | <p>The LA, by agreement, will meet the costs of introductions between children and carers.</p> | <p>The RAA will take lead responsibility for all aspects of the linking and matching process, but will always</p> | |

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|
| | The LA has final decision on the match. | involve the LA in the decision-making process. The RAA will chair linking/ matching meetings as part of the process. | |
| Updating reports | The LA is responsible for updating of the CPR and Delegation of Parental Responsibility report | The RAA will be responsible for completing the Adoption Placement Report, apart from the section on the child. | |
| Life appreciation days | | The RAA will chair and organise life appreciation days | |
| Matching Decisions | The Agency Decision Maker in each LA will be responsible for the Matching decision. | The RAA will organise the Matching Panel The RAA will support the process with information as required, including Panel Minutes and administrative support including letters regarding the decision. | |
| Adoption Allowances | A standardised Adoption allowance may be paid by each LA. All adoption allowances to be agreed by the LA and the LA to hold the budget. Exceptional allowances may be agreed by the LA-e.g. vehicles for larger sibling groups. | The RAA will undertake the assessment and liaise with each LA to ensure clear information about adoption allowances is conveyed to the adopter and included in the support plan. The RAA will also be responsible for any post-adoption reassessments for additional/changes in adoption allowances and put together a package for the LA to approve. | It is envisaged that streamlining of adoption allowances and financial support, including financial assessments & processes. Will take place within the first year of operation so that there is more standardised support. |

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|--|---|--|--|
| Settling grant | LAs will continue to hold the budget for settling grants | The RAA will review the variable approaches to settling grants and work with LAs to agree a standardised approach | This review and implementation will take some time |
| Applications to the DfE Interagency Fund (for Hard to Place Children) | | The RAA will make the application to the fund where children meet the criteria ensuring a more standardised approach. | Needs to be determined who will pay IAFs. |
| Recruitment of Adopters | The LA will signpost any enquiries from potential adopters to the RAA. The LA will ensure that information relevant to potential adopters is included in its own marketing materials (i.e. Fostering) and on its website, clearly signposting potential adopters to the website of the RAA. | The RAA will be responsible for recruiting adopters appropriate to the needs of children waiting in each LA and in line with their developed recruitment and marketing plan Marketing information will reflect the fact that the RAA is delivering the service on behalf of partnering LAs. | |
| Enquiries | | The RAA will provide a centralised enquiry process for the region to meet all statutory requirements. The RAA will provide written information to potential adopters and will hold information events. The RAA may at times signpost potential adopters to other agencies if they are unlikely to be able to meet the needs of the children needing placement. | |
| Stage One | The LAs will provide all information required for statutory checks of potential adopter's resident in the LA. This information will be provided within 5 working days of the request. | The RAA will undertake all Stage one functions | |

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|---|--|---|--------------|
| Stage Two | | The RAA will undertake all Stage Two functions | |
| PAR | | The RAA will complete the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) | |
| Approvals | | The RAA will manage the Adoption Panel. The RAA Agency Decision Maker will be responsible for all approvals of prospective adopters. | |
| Post Approval Support and Training | | The RAA will provide post approval support and training to approved adopters | |

POST ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Adoption Support Assessments/ Plans & Services</p> | <p>The LA will consider funding requests for adoption support services which are not included in the core offer e.g. Therapeutic support</p> | <p>The RAA will undertake assessments of adoption support needs or commission these if required.</p> <p>The RAA's core offer will provide general adoption support services: newsletter, social events for children and young people; social/training events for adoptive parents; advice and signposting for adoptive families; independent support and advice to birth relatives; post box services etc.</p> <p>The RAA will undertake applications to the Adoption Support Fund for children and commission services agreed by ASF.</p> | <p>It is recognised that there is a large amount of variability in current practice across the 9 boroughs and that to deliver a consistent and harmonised RAA offer will take some time. It is expected that the offer will be the same in South East and South West (i.e. everywhere will have events), but will be delivered within the spokes to focus on particular geographic locations and demographic groups.</p> |
| <p>Section 47</p> | <p>The LA will signpost requests from adoptive families for adoption order support to the RAA. Alongside needs directly related to adoption, a family may have needs best met by services within the LA e.g. CIN services. The LA will be responsible for providing these services</p> | <p>The RAA will undertake the assessment of adoption support needs of the child and family and produce an adoption support plan. The RAA will liaise with LA to</p> | |

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| | <p>Where a safeguarding referral is made to the LA the LA will conduct any appropriate section 47 enquiry and will allocate an LA social worker where thresholds are met, The LA will notify the RAA of any referral involving an adopted child and will seek discussion in relation to support for the family. If adopted child/young person accommodated, LA will be responsible for social work support to child/family.</p> | <p>agree which services will be provided by RAA and which by LA for families whose needs are complex. The RAA will offer support or an allocated worker during the section 47 enquiry. All practice will be in line with Safeguarding procedures (allegations management). RAA will liaise with LA re any adoption specific work needed e.g. Life Story work or application to ASF for therapeutic support (if plan is rehabilitation)</p> | |
| Out-of-Hours Services | <p>All adopters will have access to the LA's Emergency Duty Team out of core hours.</p> | <p>The RAA may negotiate out of hours support for specific families where necessary, subject to agreed additional LA funding.</p> | |
| Indirect/ Letterbox Contact | <p>The LA will provide info or agree access to files as necessary</p> | <p>The RAA will oversee post/Letterbox contact between adopted children and birth families.</p> | <p>It is recognised that there is a large amount of variability in current practice; logistics of accessing and sharing information may be different and that to deliver a consistent and</p> |

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | harmonised RAA offer will take some time. |
| Supervised & Sibling Direct Contact | Responsibility for Direct Contact requirements are likely to remain with the LA | The RAA could support these arrangements dependent upon the individual arrangements which would need to be agreed on a case by case basis. | |
| Adoption Allowances | Adoption allowances may be paid for by each LA after undertaking the appropriate assessment. | RAA to streamline processes and financial assessment | It is envisaged that streamlining of the adoption allowances and financial support in adoption, including financial assessments & processes. Will take place within the first year of operation. |
| Adoption Support Fund | | The RAA will be responsible for undertaking all funding applications to the Adoption Support Fund. | |
| Access to Children's Care Files | LA to facilitate | Access to be agreed by the RAA | A standardised protocol will need to be agreed. |
| Birth Records Counselling | LA to provide file info and access | RAA to ensure provision | Will take some time to harmonise approach as |

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|--|---|---|---|
| | | | delivered differently through various commissioned arrangements. |
| Independent Support to Birth Parent | | RAA to commission/provide | Will take some time to harmonise approach as delivered differently through various commissioned arrangements. |
| Access to Adopter's Records | LA for historic cases | RAA for cases which it has managed | |
| Intermediary Service to Relatives of Adopted Person Seeking Information and Contact with the Adopted Person | | RAA to commission- service users may have to meet any cost beyond advice and information. | |

SERVICE USER ENGAGEMENT

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|----------------------|---|---|---|
| Adopters | | The RAA will engage regularly with adopters, individually and in groups, with the aim of improving the services available. | It is recognised that it will take some time to develop this practice given variable approaches. It is expected that these will likely be delivered through spokes |
| Adoptees | | The RAA will engage regularly with adoptees, individually and in groups, with the aim of improving the services available. | |
| Birth Parents | | THE RAA will engage regularly with birth parents individually and in groups with the aim of improving the services available. | |

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT & INSPECTION

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|-----------------------|--|---|--|
| Data provision | Each LA will need to provide key data to the RAA on performance. | | |
| Data analysis | | The RAA will produce a quarterly report to each LA on performance and key performance indicators agreed by the Board. | A reporting schedule will need to be agreed with the Board to avoid the RAA being required to produce many different reports in different formats. |

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|-------------------------|--|---|-------|
| | | It is proposed that the Hub will produce monthly reports in relation to tracking and 3 monthly on performance trends. | |
| OFSTED | Ofsted inspections of adoption services will be the responsibility of the LA. | The RAA will support as directed by the LA to ensure Ofsted requirements are met | |
| Sufficiency Plan | The LA will be responsible for the overall sufficiency statement and will use the data and plan from the RAA to cover adoption sufficiency | The four heads of service in London will work together alongside the head of service for the 5 th RAA to develop an adoption sufficiency plan for London | |

MISCELLANEOUS SERVICES

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|--|---|--|-------|
| Step Parents / Relatives who wish to Adopt (Non-Agency Adoptions) | | This is provided by the RAA | |
| Statement of Purpose | | The RAA will produce a Statement of Purpose in relation to its services etc. The RAA will take responsibility for updating this for the functions that have been delegated to the RAA. The RAA will take responsibility for completing each LA statement of purpose regarding the functions left with the LA, in consultation with the LA. | |

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|--|--|--|---|
| Registered Manager | The process for identifying a registered manager will be agreed between the LA and RAA | The RAA will identify a registered manager for LA's. | |
| Children's Guide for Adoption | Each LA has a responsibility for this | The RAA could provide advice and guidance | When this needs updating the RAA will assist with standardising these across the LAs. |
| Children's Guide for Adoption Support | | The RAA will update the Children's guide for adoption support | |
| Inter-country Adoptions | | It is anticipated that this will be taken forward on a pan-London basis. ALS will work together with the other three Adopt London RAAs to commission advice, information and in some cases, support on inter-country adoption from a specialist agency. Service users will have to meet cost of assessment and approval process in the commissioned agency | |
| Adoption Panels | | The RAA will provide adoption panels across the region and will appoint Independent panel chairs and retain a central list and will provide training and support for panel members. The adoption panel will provide a quality assurance report for the partnership on a 6-monthly basis | |

| SERVICE AREA | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY | RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY | NOTES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Training for Social Workers | | The RAA will provide training, advice and mentoring in respect of Adoption to children's social workers, in respect of the production of the adoption process, sibling assessments and the production of high quality Child permanence reports. | |
| Birth Parents Support to Prevent Recurring Proceedings | TBC | TBC | Likely to be commissioned by the London hub going forward and build on practice in the pause project. |