

Cabinet

Date: 14th June 2018

Regional Adoption Agency

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services, Cath McEvoy

Policy Board Member for Children's Services: Councillor Wayne Daley

Purpose of report.

The development of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) for the North East will be subject to approval in September 2018 by the Cabinets of each of the participating local authorities: Gateshead MBC, Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council, Northumberland County Council and South Tyneside Council (the Constituent Councils).

This report provides an update on the progress of the development of the proposals for the RAA and seeks authority to undertake consultation with stakeholders on the current proposals to create the RAA. It is also proposed that North Tyneside Council will act as the host authority for the RAA with the other participating authorities delegating their adoption functions, pursuant to the Local Government Act 2000, to North Tyneside Council.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members:

1. Note the progress undertaken with respect to the proposal for the adoption services of Gateshead MBC, Newcastle City Council, North Tyneside Council, Northumberland County Council and South Tyneside Council to be combined to create a Regional Adoption Agency to be known as "Adopt North East";
2. Note that the preferred business model for "Adopt North East" is a local authority hosted model which will operate through the delegation of the Constituent Councils' adoption functions to a host local authority pursuant to

Sections 9EA and 9EB of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Arrangements for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012;

3. Note the proposal for North Tyneside Council to act as the Lead and Host Authority for “Adopt North East” and that it is proposed that the new arrangements will commence in early December 2018;
4. Note the draft summary Business Case associated with the delivery of “Adopt North East” and the associated funding proposals (Appendix 1);
5. Provide agreement for the Authority to consult jointly with the other participating authorities, on the proposals for “Adopt North East” with the relevant stakeholders as set out in the report.
6. Note that a further report will be submitted to Cabinet in September 2018 seeking final approval of the proposals following the receipt and analysis of the consultation exercise and the finalisation of the Final Business Case and agreement of appropriate Heads of Terms for a legal agreement to be entered into by the Constituent Councils.

Link to Corporate Plan

The NCC Corporate Plan 2018-21 does not contain any reference to the regionalisation of adoption services. Nevertheless, its proposed creation and consultation process does support each of the named values:

- Ensuring our services are customer focussed.
- Supporting communities and staff to embrace change and innovation.
- Involving communities and staff in decision which affect them.
- Supporting communities to feel safe.
- Creating a healthy and positive working environment

More specifically, the proposal supports the aim that “we want you to feel safe, healthy and cared for”.

Key issues

1. Disruption during the period of transition and managers/staff becoming focussed on the change process rather than service delivery may lead to delays in plans for children.

Mitigation: Thorough and effective transition planning agreed with service managers and flexibility to enable service delivery priorities to be managed.

Early secondment of a Head of Service to the RAA will support transition planning.

2. Adopters and adoptive children may lose confidence during the change process resulting in the potential for fractured relationships and breakdown in service delivery

Mitigation: Communications planning and involvement of adopters and adoptive children and young people throughout the process. Service monitoring during transition to ensure no impact on service delivery.

3. ICT system change may impact on service information, governance and records. Potential impacts include loss of personal information, delays in processes, safeguarding risk and cost of information security failures, undermining confidence in the new service and reputational damage.

Mitigation: ICT lead officers involvement and collaboration in planning and developing appropriate solutions. Detailed information gathering and analysis prior to service implementation will reduce potential confusion and error.

4. Potential for fragmentation and loss of good working relationships with child care teams in authorities, and disrupted links with health, education and other services.

Mitigation: Engagement of child care teams in the project and specific input into service specification and process changes to ensure links are maintained. Engagement with all partner agencies, service providers and ensuring robust systems are in place to maintain ongoing relationships into the future.

5. Set up and running costs may be underestimated leading to unforeseen liabilities for partners and/or the new RAA.

Mitigation: Financial analysis and modeling involving expert advice is included in the financial and transition plans. Sufficient time will be allocated to these activities and engagement of all partners in agreeing proposals to ensure estimates are understood by all and are as accurate as possible.

BACKGROUND

Context

The development of Regional Adoption Agency proposals is part of the national adoption agenda set out in the Department for Education (DfE) paper 'Regionalising Adoption' in June 2015. This was further developed by the Government in 'Adoption; A Vision for Change' in March 2016.

In these papers the Government has sought to address a number of challenges in adoption as follows:

- Inefficiencies in the delivery of adoption services in England
- Matching of children
- Recruitment concerns
- Adoption Support challenges

The Government has signaled a clear intention that by 2020 all local authorities will be part of regional agencies. The Education and Adoption Act 2016 makes provision for the Government to direct a local authority to have its adoption functions carried out on its behalf by another authority or adoption agency where such provision has not already been made by the Authority.

In November 2015, Newcastle City Council submitted an Expression of Interest on behalf of itself, Northumberland County Council, North Tyneside Council and Gateshead MBC, and four voluntary adoption agencies - After Adoption, Barnardos, ARC NE and Durham Family Welfare (DFW) to the DfE in relation to the development of regional adoption agency arrangements in the North East. South Tyneside Council subsequently joined the project.

Following the approval of the Expression of Interest, a Project Board was established to drive the project forward. The Project Board is made up from the Assistant Directors of Children's Services from each of the authorities and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies of After Adoption, Barnardos, Arc Adoption and Durham Family Welfare. The Project Board is overseen by an Executive Board made up of the Directors of Children's Services from each of the Constituent Authorities.

As an initial starting point the Project Board, supported by DfE appointed project mentors, agreed the following vision and high level objectives:

Vision:

- Excellent adoption services that transform children's and families' lives for the better

Objectives:

- We place all children in a timely way in high quality, successful, life-long adoptive placements which meet all of their needs.
- Families and prospective adopters receive a high quality experience no matter where they live.
- Adoptive children and families receive the support they need for as long as they need it.
- Our skilled and dedicated staff are proud to work for the service.
- We achieve our objectives by working together in a spirit of collaboration, openness and co-production.

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to provide adoption services to all those affected by adoption living in their area. Services to meet those responsibilities are required to meet legislative requirements and Minimum Standards for Adoption Services and are inspected regularly by Ofsted to ensure they do so.

The move towards the proposed Regional Adoption Agency will not remove the statutory responsibilities placed on local authorities but will have far reaching changes for how those functions are organised and managed.

While all the authorities involved with the project have and currently continue to provide high performing adoption services, the Government expects that Regional Adoption Agencies will be better able to target the recruitment of prospective adopters, speed up the matching and placement of children, improve adoption support services and may create efficiency savings.

The proposed RAA would deliver the following main services across the five local authority areas:

- Recruitment and Assessment of prospective adopters;
- Matching and Placement - to match prospective adopters with children in need of adoption
- Post placement and post Adoption Order support (3 year limit)
- Support and advice to all affected by adoption
- Develop and manage all forms of post adoption contact (Post Box) between adopted children and their birth families
- Step Parent Adoption
- Inter-country Adoption

Further information on the functions to be undertaken by the RAA and those which will remain with the Constituent Councils is set out in Appendix 2.

Proposal

To take the project forward the Project Board carried out an options appraisal on a number of potential delivery models for regionalised adoption services. The potential delivery models, which the DfE asked the Project Board to consider, are summarised below:

- Option 1: A single local authority host on behalf of a number of local authorities;
- Option 2: A Joint Venture between local authorities;
- Option 3: A Joint Venture between the voluntary adoption agencies and the local authorities;
- Option 4: A Commissioned RAA (Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies proposed model also considered in addition to DfE options)
- Option 5: Outsourcing to existing Voluntary Adoption Agency

Financial modeling has been carried out on Option 1 and Option 2. Options 3, 4 and 5 were discounted at an early stage as none of the voluntary adoption agencies indicated a wish to enter in such arrangements.

In June 2017 the Cabinets of the Constituent Councils indicated their support in principal for the continued development of a RAA for the North East and the use of a local authority owned Joint Venture Company (JVCo) as the preferred business model to deliver the RAA. This “in principal” support was subject to an analysis of the available options and the final decision on the model.

In March 2018, further financial analysis indicated that although initial results of the options appraisal exercise had indicated that Option 2 could potentially provide flexibility and the ability to innovate in a business sense, the cost this model would be considerably more expensive than current arrangements in each local authority.

The financial modeling highlighted that, between the two options, the ability to recover VAT within the local authority hosted model established a clear and significant financial difference between the two options with the host model assessed as significantly more efficient in this regard.

In relation to ease of implementation generally, the delegation of adoption functions to one local authority is more straightforward than establishing a joint venture vehicle and commissioning that vehicle to provide the required services. In addition the transfer of staff to another local authority and the provision of proper pension arrangements is simpler and cheaper than with a joint venture vehicle. Furthermore it is considered an advantage in terms of the sense of ownership if the regional adoption service is hosted by one of the Constituent Councils.

In the light of the above the recommended delivery model for the RAA is a hosted model (Option 1).

To make the hosted model operate effectively the Constituent Councils must delegate their adoption services functions to the Host Authority pursuant to Sections 9EA and 9EB of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Arrangements for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Host Authority will then deliver the adoption services on behalf the Constituent Councils. This arrangement will be supported by an appropriate legal agreement being entered into by the Constituent Councils covering such matters as the financial contributions necessary from the Constituent Councils, indemnities, sharing of budget shortfalls together with internal governance and oversight.

In identifying the hosted model as the preferred option the Project Board and Executive Board have also considered which of the constituent authorities should act as the host and lead authority. North Tyneside Council was identified as the host and lead authority because of its readiness to undertake this role.

The Project Board and Executive Board have also proposed that the hosted RAA will be known as “Adopt North East” and be based at either Newcastle or North Tyneside with two properties currently under consideration.

Under the proposed Host and Lead Authority arrangement approximately fifty staff from across the constituent authorities will come together, pursuant to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, under the employment of the host and lead authority.

Next Steps

Final Decision

The results of the consultation process together with the Final Business Case for the RAA will be presented to the Constituent Councils in September 2018. At that time the Constituent Councils will be invited to agree the proposed final model and to proceed with the establishment of the RAA as recommended.

Appointment of an interim Senior Manager

In anticipation of the arrangements to mobilise Adopt North East the project will be led by a senior officer from one of the constituent Councils seconded to undertake the role.

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

<p>Policy:</p>	<p>The proposal is in line with the national adoption agenda as set out in the DfE paper “Regionalising Adoption” (June 2015)</p>
<p>Finance and value for money:</p>	<p>The direct financial implications of the RAA on the Authority are in the process of being identified as a part of the development of the final business case. The RAA Project Board have been working closely with the Authority to develop the business case based on the proposal that North Tyneside Council is the host and lead authority for the RAA.</p> <p>The final business case will detail the financial, human resources and asset management matters that will need to be brought to Cabinet’s attention when it makes a final decision on this matter.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>The Government has signaled a clear intention that by 2020 all local authorities will be part of regional agencies. The Education and Adoption Act 2016 makes provision for the Government to direct a local authority to have its adoption functions carried out on its behalf by another authority or adoption agency where such provision has not already been made by the Authority.</p> <p>A decision of the Constituent Authorities to progress with the proposals as set out in this report will trigger the obligations placed on the Constituent Councils under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 to consult with the recognised trade unions/workplace representatives of the employees affected.</p> <p>In relation to the secondment of a senior officer from one of the Constituent Authorities to act as an interim Senior Manager to assist in the mobilisation of the RAA, Newcastle City Council, as the Accountable Body for the Department for Education project grant, will need to be requested to authorise the use of the project grant to fund the secondment. A job description and person specification for the role Senior Manager role been developed and has been approved by the Project Board. The appointment of a</p>

	<p>Senior Manager at this point in time is essential to the project meeting its anticipated start date of early December 2018.</p> <p>The full legal implications of the proposals will be addressed in the report to Cabinet in September 2018 at the point that Cabinet is requested to give final approval to the proposals.</p>
Procurement:	There will be implications however this will be covered in full in the next report as part of the business case.
Human Resources:	LA staff will be TUPE transferred or seconded to the new venture.
Property:	There will be implications however this will be covered in full in the next report as part of the business case.
Equalities: (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	See appendix 3
Risk Assessment:	<p>See above for detailed comment</p> <p>A full Risk Assessment of all financial, legal, human resource and operational delivery issues will be undertaken as part of the next stage of the project and reported back to Cabinet in September. This Risk Assessment will be fully compliant with the Council's decision making risk management guidance. A risk register will be maintained as part of regular project management practice with mitigating actions identified to ensure the likelihood and impact of risks is managed proactively.</p>
Crime & Disorder:	None
Customer Considerations:	Effective transition of children and adopters to the Joint Venture.
Carbon Reduction:	None
Wards:	Across the county.

CONSULTATION

Engagement with stakeholders has been an integral part of the RAA project. Engagement events have taken place with over 250 participants from stakeholder groups including - adults, children and young people affected by adoption; adopters, LA and VAA adoption staff; partners in health – CCG's; education via Virtual Heads; and

the Court Service. Engagement events have been held since February 2016 and continued stakeholder involvement has taken place through web based surveys, staff newsletters and face to face events.

Further engagement with stakeholders will be necessary to consult on the current proposals for the establishment of “Adopt North East” if agreed by the Constituent Councils. Consultation with the stakeholders will include an online questionnaire, promoted through each of the Constituent Councils and engagement sessions with key stakeholder groups, including Adopted children, families and potential adopters. It is anticipated that this further engagement will be for a period of 8 weeks following the Cabinet decisions of each of the Constituent Councils.

Further information is shown at Appendix 4.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Regionalising Adoption - Department for Education \(June 2015\)](#)

[Adoption; Vision for Change - Department for Education \(March 2016\)](#)

[The Education and Adoption Act 2016](#)

Report Sign Off

Finance Officer	SD
Monitoring Officer/Legal	LH
Human Resources	SF
Procurement	N/A
I.T.	N/A
Executive Director	CM
Portfolio Holder(s)	WD

Report Author: Cath McEvoy, Executive Director of Children’s Services
(01670) 624034 Cath.Mcevoy@Northumberland.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Title: Current Summary Business Case - Regional Adoption Agency

(Adopt North East)

Authorisation (sign off):

Approval from	Comment	Date
LA Representatives on RAA Board		
Executive Board		
Section 151 Officers		
Local Authority Portfolio Holders		

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is proposed that a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) is created through combining the adoption services for the Local Authority (LA) areas of Gateshead Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland and South Tyneside. These agencies wish to build on the success of their existing services to improve performance in meeting the needs of those children who require permanence through adoption, by bringing together the best practice from each of these authorities and voluntary agencies through Adopt North East.

This document describes how establishing a single agency will allow these authorities to provide a more cohesive, efficient and effective use of resources and development of practice.

In June 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) published a paper '*Regionalising Adoption*' (1) setting out the proposals for the establishment of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs). The paper gave a very clear directive to local authorities that it was the expectation for all authorities to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency by 2020.

Funding has been made available from the Department for Education (DfE) as part of a national Regional Adoption Agency Programme, set out in legislation in the form of the Education and Adoption Act 2016 (2), which requires local authorities to combine their adoption services in Regional Adoption Agencies or be directed to do so if they do not choose to do so on a voluntary basis.

Through working in partnership with our Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) colleagues, the vision of the proposed RAA is to achieve 'Excellent adoption services that transform children's and families lives for the better' by delivering the following objectives;

- We place all children in a timely way in high quality, successful, life-long adoptive placements which meet all of their needs.
- Families and prospective adopters receive a high quality experience no matter where they live.
- Adoptive children and families receive the support they need for as long as they need it.
- Our skilled and dedicated staff are proud to work for the service.
- We achieve our objectives by working together in a spirit of collaboration, openness and co-production.

A Project Board, Executive Board and workstreams have collaborated to produce the detailed set of Adopt North East proposals.

The initial preference was for a Joint Venture, however following extensive financial modelling DCS expressed the view that a host model should be the recommended delivery vehicle. Further to this DCS agreed to recommend the basis of a potential funding model for Adopt North East and that North Tyneside Council should act as the host Local Authority.

Work has involved extensive financial analysis, operational modelling, including options appraisals on finance, ICT, host suitability and estates.

Stakeholder consultation has been extensive and yielded intelligence and insights which have been incorporated into the planning of Adopt North East.

2 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

2.1 PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document sets out the case for creating a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) to be named “*Adopt North East*” through combining the adoption services for the local authority areas of Gateshead, Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside, Northumberland and South Tyneside, working in partnership with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA), After Adoption, ARC, Barnardos and Durham Family Welfare (DFW). It describes how establishing a single agency will allow the five 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 a governance and operational financial model that set out how Adopt North East will work with its partners to deliver adoption services in partnership with VAA colleagues.

It proposes that North Tyneside Council will host the new adoption agency, costs and funding associated with implementation will be met by a combination of the Department for Education and 5 LA's (Section 4).

This current summary business case also addresses aspects of delivery associated with a Joint Venture model. This has been done to provide the business context for the recommended preferred hosted model.

2.2 PROJECT WORK UNDERTAKEN SO FAR

The implementation of the new RAA follows substantial project work undertaken since January 2016:

- Baseline of the current Adoption Service provided by 5 LA's. Includes

extensive analysis of finance, historical and current spend/income, performance, staffing, pensions actuary report and ICT.

- Development of a Business Solution using the occupational expertise of staff from the local authorities, VAA's and stakeholders and externally commissioned support.
- Establishing local authority and VAA collaborative project, organisation and project governance arrangements. This includes the establishment of a RAA Project Board and Executive DCS Level Board. The board has membership from Assistant Directors of Children's Services or their equivalent and VAA reps from a senior management up to CEO level. A project team, comprising of a DFE sponsored coach, Project Managers and workstream leads has been supported by individuals with expertise of areas such as Adoption Journey (Service or Team Managers of Adoption Services), Finance (Finance leads), Human Resources, Legal, Information Technology and Estates, Communications and Engagement. All workstreams have had strong representation from all of the five Local Authorities involved in the project.
- Continued and ongoing stakeholder engagement and involvement has been a strong feature of this project and included surveys, staff newsletters and face to face engagement events; Consultation events have been held with relevant stakeholder groups. These have included adopters, birth parents, children and young people affected by adoption; staff; and partners in health and education. After Adoption have led on adopter and adopted children consultation and video feedback provided to the Board;
- Elected members and portfolio holders have been consulted in all five local authorities and reports previously provided to Cabinet
- Options appraisal and evaluation of delivery model options, including obtaining independent external legal advice on the Joint Venture and Host options;
- HR advice and support on the different approaches available in relation to workforce reorganization such as secondment approaches and TUPE transfer.
- Process maps have been developed with an optimized journey for adopters and children produced to guide the construction of an improved business model and baseline statistical data has been obtained to inform the development of a business operating model.

2.3 SCOPE AND VISION OF THE NEW RAA

Adopt North East would encompass the local authority areas of Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland and South Tyneside. It is estimated that Adopt North East will initially place 137 children per annum.

Our vision:

Excellent adoption services that transform children's and families' lives for the better.

Our objectives:

- We place all children in a timely way in high quality, successful, life-long adoptive placements which meet all of their needs.
- Families and prospective adopters receive a high quality experience no matter where they live.
- Adoptive children and families receive the support they need for as long as they need it.
- Our skilled and dedicated staff are proud to work for the service.
- We achieve our objectives by working together in a spirit of collaboration, openness and co-production.

2.4 DELIVERY MODEL OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDATION

The Local Authorities (LAs) involved will commission the delivery of adoption and adoption related services from Adopt North East. To this end they have considered which of the following strategic delivery options for Adopt North East might be appropriate for this purpose. The options that have been considered are:

- Option 1 - A single LA hosting on behalf of a the other LAs
- Option 2 - A Joint Venture between the LAs – a Local Authority Trading Company (JV/LATC)
- Option 3 - A Joint Venture between the LAs and VAAs – creating a new VAA
- Option 4 – Outsourcing service delivery to an existing VAA

The Options Appraisal methodology utilised the recommended approach by the DfE and has been used by projects throughout the Regionalising Adoption Programme. Project Board members from each agency individually evaluated the 4 options against a set of criteria considering:

- 1) Desirability i.e. How well the delivery model would promote the objectives and priorities of adopters and adoptees and help meet key outcomes (feel safe, live fulfilling lives, be healthy, have a voice, reach their potential and be resilient;
- 2) Feasibility, that is the extent to which each option could be implemented within required timelines and budgets and allows for an appropriate level of ownership, involvement and control of the partners;

3) Viability, the extent to which the model demonstrates financial and operational sustainability.

The initial Options Appraisal indicated that Options 1, 2 could be considered as possible options. Other options were not considered appropriate for the following reasons:

- Option 3: A Joint Venture between the LAs and VAAs – essentially this was dismissed as an option for two reasons, firstly there being no appetite within the VAA partnership to become involved in such an enterprise. Secondly, there was also significant concern expressed by local authority partners about sharing control of any such JV entity with VAA's whilst being fully funded by local authorities.
- Option 4: Outsourcing service delivery to an existing VAA – as above there was no appetite from VAA's to take on this role. There are in fact very few such arrangements nationally.
- A VAA inspired "blind matching" model – this was proposed after the work nationally was underway and was supported by CVAA. It was intended to manage matching both in terms of the child's best interest but also in terms of a level playing field for VAA's in the market place. This was less a model rather than strategic issue and although getting matching right is critical it says little about the type of legal entity being established or the need for viable financial control and sustainability for local authorities as they deliver Adopt North East.

Further independent legal advice was obtained on Options 1 and 2 and presented to Local Authority RAA Board members and their Local Authority legal officers (Appendix 3 and 4)

Financial modelling has been carried out on Option 1 (LA hosted model) and Option 2 (JV/LATC). Although originally results of the Options Appraisal exercise had indicated that the Option 2 JV/LATC model could potentially provide greater flexibility and ability to innovate in a business sense, as the financial modelling progressed it became clear that concerns around the financial robustness of this model might mean that LAs would be creating a less affordable model than was originally anticipated. This, combined with the fact that LA stakeholders who originally expressed some disquiet about the hosted model, latterly expressed contentment in principle with exploring this model meant that both models were in reality considered. As a result, this business case examines both a JV/LATC and a Hosted model, in particular in relation to financial outcomes, with the cabinet being asked to agree a hosted model recommendation.

More broadly, when reviewing the options, Board and Executive Board (DCS's)

considered ease of implementation issues as important as well as the critical financial differentials between the two approaches. A pensions actuarial assessment was commissioned and demonstrated no significant difference financially between hosting and a JV/LATC. However, recoverable VAT established a clear and significant financial difference between the two options with the host model assessed as significantly more efficient in this regard. In relation to ease of implementation generally, including commissioning, governance structures, establishing a new legal entity and practice improvement there was no critical difference associated with either option although it was considered an advantage in terms of the sense of felt ownership that Adopt North East be located within one of the LA's.

Following a comprehensive financial analysis the RAA Executive Board met and agreed that the delivery model would be Hosted and that North Tyneside Council was identified as the potential host authority.

2.5 STRATEGIC BENEFITS

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. LA's 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, with the potential for efficiencies and improvements at scale.

2.5.1 The Local Perspective

The statutory functions required of local authorities in respect of adoption are provided by each of the five local authorities within their own geographic areas.

It is envisaged that by joining the five local authority services together within Adopt North East and working more closely with VAA's, this will enable efficiencies to be achieved and improvements to services for all those affected by adoption.

In terms of recruiting adoptive parents all the agencies are currently competing with each other. There is a duplication of effort and associated costs with the risk that some people wanting to be considered as adoptive parents are confused about where and how to proceed with their enquiry. Adopt North East 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 regionally 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. These proposals build on feedback received from adoptive parents as part

of Adopt North East stakeholder consultation (Appendix 4) and some excerpts from the consultation conclusions are set out below for illustration:

“A key message within parental feedback included the benefit of having one key/main worker involved in the oversight throughout the whole adoption process.”

“The general consensus included that many parents felt they have received a lot of information around the issues that can be faced by adopted children and children in the care system, however there was greater need for more information with regard to how this can impact the child later in life and how parents can manage and support the child effectively.”

“A key message given from participants highlighted the need for greater focus on post adoption support for parents, with parents identifying that this needs to be of ‘high quality’ and ‘long term’. Parents highlighted the need for preventative post adoption support and earlier interventions rather than allowing situations to escalate and require crisis intervention,”

“Parents highlighted the importance and benefit of the Adoption Support Fund, however many commented that some social work teams do not know the full range of services that could be accessed via the ASF.”

“Parents also highlighted that the regional adoption agency should prioritise ensuring the access to services is experienced in a seamless and effective way to all adoptive children, parents and families that require support. ‘Too much bureaucracy’ was highlighted as a substantial barrier to a timely and successful adoption journey.”

“A vital message within the feedback received included the need for a ‘one point’ service that can be accessed by parents advising of all ranges of support available to them and how this can be accessed. In addition, parents added that they felt access to services should be made a clearer process, with some commenting on their frustrations around being ‘passed from pillar to post’.

It was felt that a regional adoption agency should give clarity to families of the support available, with regular timely updates of information of all services that may be beneficial to them. In addition, parents felt that they should be encouraged to feel confident enough to access support as early as possible, with some suggesting that this message should be outlined throughout the initial stages and beyond.”

Combining services should ensure that management overheads and fixed costs will be reduced over time. The new regional service will allow for the more efficient use of staff time, for example more flexible and responsive training as part of the assessment process. Adopt North East will deliver training courses across the whole area resulting in economies of scale and more timely access to training courses for

prospective adopters.

It will no longer be necessary for the 5 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 approval of the match.

Adopt North East will bring the existing local expertise among managers and social workers together in respect of what makes a good match, for support plans to be realistic, meaningful and resources available as and when needed. The successful VAA led and Adopt North East PIF collaboration provides capacity and expertise in supporting the five LA's in their development of a consistent model of early identification of children with likely adoption plans.

Being more strategic in terms of recruitment will also widen the diversity and choice of potential adoptive families for children. This will be of particular value in delivering the benefits of improved early permanence planning and matching panel practice. The whole journey model developed during the scoping period is built on the "best practice" from the five LA's adoption services and will continue to be reviewed throughout the first year of operation as the evidence of LA practice and Adopt North East impact emerges.

2.6 STRATEGIC RISKS – Related to being part of the project and not being part of the project

2.6.1 Being a part of the Project

Moving to a RAA may lead to concerns that Adoption services will no longer be in control of individual LA's. Adopt North East will be formally constituted in such a way to ensure that LA's can exercise sufficient control of its activities. A related concern relates to the risk that a 'business as usual' approach may emerge driven by a single dominant LA culture 'inherited' by Adopt North East. This risk will be mitigated through the continuation of genuine partnership working and governance of Adopt North East focusing on the improvement and efficiency agenda.

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, consistent and regular staff engagement events have been facilitated. Alongside more focused meetings for practitioners in specific areas of the adopter's journey, for example, recruitment, assessment, panel practice and post adoption support.

In addition the development of North East wide adopter support groups, recruitment

and panel approval functions prior to the official launch mitigates potential impact of implementation on service delivery. Performance measures aligned with the revised operating model and regular monitoring arrangements will be established and monitored by the Board.

The organisational staffing levels proposed in this Business Case have been based upon actual demand experienced over the past three years, however because of the known difficulties in accurately predicting the numbers of children who are subject to a Placement Order there is a risk that suggested staffing levels might not be consistent with demand. Any significant variation in demand will be shared at Board level and responses agreed between the five local authorities.

Consultation feedback from adopters clearly raises the importance of getting post adoption support right, from the provision of comprehensive information at an early stage to a focus on the long-term impact of support needs. We will therefore endeavour to use staff capacity to develop a consistent, highly responsive offer in post approval support and post placement support to improve outcomes for children with a view to reducing placement breakdowns including in relation to later difficulties when adopted children reach their teenage years.

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.

2.6.2 Not being part of the Project

Any future difference in opinion across the LA's as to the role and scope of Adopt North East and future governance arrangements could delay implementation. There is a risk to the Local Authority if it fails to join a regional agency. This would include central government directing how and by whom its service would be delivered.

The formation of Adopt North East may have an adverse impact upon the adoption activity and finances of LA's who are situated geographically close but outside of the Adopt North East area. For example, any difficulty in recruiting adopters who are over time expected to be interacting more closely with their regional agency, may as a consequence lead a LA to buy from the market at a higher cost than previously generated 'in-house' adopters.

Current levels of income generation through the selling of adopters may be at risk as the market adapts to the presence of a regional agency and these agencies expand the number and percentage of placements delivered 'in-house'. Essentially RAA's are almost certain to change market conditions and previous expectations regarding

income generation for individual LA's are likely to significantly deteriorate.

LA's who are not currently involved within an RAA and may need to join an RAA at a later date risk having to negotiate terms of membership with an already established partnership who may be less responsive to their particular needs.

2.7 REALISING THE BENEFITS OF ADOPT NORTH EAST

Benefits expected to be realized through the project include:

- Improved timescales for adopter assessments
- Higher conversion rate from enquiry to approval of prospective adopters
- Wider diversity and choice of adoptive families
- More timely matching of approved adopters
- Improved timescales for placing children with their adoptive families
- Greater adopter engagement in service planning and delivery
- More extensive and consistent core offer re therapeutic training pre placement and post placement/Adoption Order
- Support improved skills and confidence to enable field Social Workers to earlier identify children with potential adoption plans and more children placed in Early Permanence placements (Fostering for Adoption or concurrency).
- Improved performance measurement and management across the service

2.8 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Engagement with stakeholders is an integral part of the Regional Adoption Agency project. Engagement events have taken place with over 250 participants from stakeholder groups including - adults, children and young people affected by adoption; adopters, LA staff within Gateshead, Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside, Northumberland and South Tyneside and VAA staff from ARC, DFW, AA and Barnardos, partners in health – CCG's; education via Virtual Heads; and the court service. Engagement events have been held since February 2016 and continued stakeholder involvement has taken place through web based surveys, staff newsletters and face to face events.

Elected members and portfolio holders have been consulted in all five local authorities. This report follows on from an earlier agreement by Cabinet's in 2017 on the development of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) with partners under the working title of "Adopt North East".

Some key topics raised by stakeholders have been referenced earlier in the

document in “The Local Perspective”. The importance of transparent, open and inclusive communication and engagement throughout the project has been evident in the various engagement and workshop activities that have taken place. Details of which are contained within the Integrated Impact Assessment/Equalities Impact Needs Assessment document (Appendix 5).

Ongoing stakeholder engagement and feedback are included in plans for the implementation phase of the project. Going forward, as well as having the appropriate governance arrangements in place, there will also continue to be a Communications and Engagement workstream and plan to ensure continued effective engagement with various stakeholder groups including LA’s Children’s Social Care staff, service users and partners.

3 OPERATING MODEL

3.1 Services in scope of the Adopt North East

The target operating model for the Adopt North East has scoped its role in the delivery of the following main services across the 5 LA’s:

- Recruitment and Assessment of prospective adopters;
- Matching and Placement – to match prospective adopters with children in need of adoption
- Post placement and post Adoption Order support (3 year rule)
- Support and advice to all affected by adoption
- Develop and manage all forms of post adoption contact (Post Box) between adopted children and their birth families
- Step Parent Adoption
- Inter-country Adoption

3.2 Services not in scope of Adopt North East

Special Guardianship Orders (SGO’s), assessment and post order support for Special Guardians are not in scope for Adopt North East.

3.3 Overview of the proposed Adopt North East organisational structure

From undertaking extensive work on the Adopter Journey with stakeholders including Service Managers, Assistant Directors of Children’s Services and HR leads, estimates, in broad terms, that 50 FTE staff, will be required as part of Adopt North East to deliver these services across the LA boundaries of Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland and South Tyneside. Detail on the proposed organization, including staffing roles and functions can be found in the Solution Design section contained within the Business Model update (Appendix 7).

The current adoption staff cohort across the four LA’s who are potentially in scope of

a TUPE transfer have been matched against the potential requirements in Adopt North East. The host LA Adoption staff will not be subject to a TUPE transfer. Our understanding is that there will be jobs for all of the current staff in scope of a transfer albeit they will be organised differently.

Three new roles would be created in the establishment of the new organization including:

- Head of Service
- Finance and Office Manager
- Trainer

Other roles within Adopt North East relate to team management, social workers, a Social Services Officer and administration support staff will be included in the organisation. In designing the organisational structure, there has not been a simple consolidation of the post types and numbers of the current 5 LA's Adoption services, but the structure has been designed and shaped to maximize the journey outcomes for children and prospective adopters. The operational staff numbers have been determined to meet the current demand and to ensure the ability to deliver and sustain practice improvement for the benefit of children, adopters and those affected by adoption.

3.4 Property and IT implications

The project team has been working with property representatives from all LAs to determine options on existing premises that may be available and suitable as a central location for Adopt North East operational base. Adoption team staff are currently located in multiple sites across the region.

Adopt North East will be "headquartered" in a single location, with access to existing office bases across the county for staff and service users. The service covers a broad geographical area from south of the Tyne to the Scottish border and a high degree of mobile working is anticipated to make the most efficient use of staff time and accessibility for service users. It is also important that the main operational base be able to provide a visible identity for the service, offer cost effective training venue as required and ensure a degree of separation from operational children's social work staff to ensure that birth parents and adopters are not put in difficult position of using the same facilities at the same time.

The relocation of in scope staff from their current working base to a new location will be required to meet the needs of the organisation as a regional agency.

The IT provision for Adopt North East will involve establishing a new Case Management System and related infrastructure.

3.5 HR implications and activities

A work stream for HR has been established and representatives from the 5 LAs have been involved in the project to date. The HR work stream has considered the advantages and disadvantages of transferring staff under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE) or by using secondment arrangements.

Due to the uncertainties and legal risks potentially of TUPE avoidance, the HR Workstream's recommendation is that secondments are not used in this manner and to undertake a TUPE transfer to Adopt North East. This has been accepted by the Board

A formal consultation process with individuals and recognised Trade Unions will need to be undertaken by all the partner employer(s) for all staff affected by the transfer; this will form part of this HR Work Stream project plan.

3.6 Data and Information

Data and Information will be required for the day to day operation and management of Adopt North East. Management Information will be generated automatically from core systems where possible. Information is required to be presented to the Adopt North East Management team, Ofsted, Local Authorities including senior management teams and elected members, the Adoption Leadership Board, the Department for Education and other partners. Flows of data between partner LA's and Adopt North East are being considered and will be GDPR compliant.

3.7 Communications and marketing activity

In order to facilitate a seamless transition it is advisable for the marketing and recruitment campaigns to commence pre-launch. This will ensure that the right numbers of adopters are available at the right time and there is no gap in the supply chain.

3.8 Proposed Governance Arrangements and Legal Implications

3.8.1 Adoption Services

The provision of an adoption service is a statutory requirement and the Council is required to monitor the provision of adoption services.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the structure for an adoption service. Under section 3 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, each Council must continue to maintain within its area an adoption service designed to meet the needs of children who may be adopted, their parents, natural parents and former guardians.

These services are referred to as the 'adoption service', meaning either a local authority or a registered adoption society (section 2(1) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002).

3.8.2 Delegation of Functions

The development of Adopt North East will not absolve each local authority of its statutory responsibilities, but will allow for certain functions to be delegated to facilitate the operation of a regional adoption agency model. Legal Services representatives from each of the five local authorities are engaged in a work stream to assist with developing the legal framework for the design and delivery of the new service, and independent legal advice has been sought to help inform discussions about potential delivery models for the new agency.

3.8.3 Governance

There are two possible options to the hosted model, (a) the delegation of functions to a local authority and (b) delegation of Function to a Joint Committee. Final recommendations regarding Governance of Adopt North East will be included in the report to cabinets in September.

4 FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT

4.1 Baseline Costs

The Finance workstream consists of representatives from each of the five local authorities, who have been tasked with identifying the 'baseline' cost for the adoption service for their respective authorities, and subsequently the unit cost, shown in Table 1. The gross cost used reflects the 2016/17 position.

Costs 'in scope', and therefore reflected in the gross cost, include:

- Staffing costs directly related to the adoption service
- Non-staffing/running costs
- Corporate Overheads
- Cost of purchased placements/inter-agency fees
- Post adoption support, including staffing costs and commissioned services

Costs 'out of scope' and therefore not reflected in the gross cost shown below, and assumed to be retained by individual authorities are:

- Post adoption financial support (allowances)
- Commissioned post adoption therapeutic support, that exceeds the £5k funding limit imposed by the Adoption Support Fund (ASF)

Table 1: Gross Unit Cost of Adoption Service (per adoption)

Authority	Gross Unit Cost per adoption £
Head	£30,498
Castle	£19,957
Tyneside	£25,176
Imberland	£24,648
Tyneside	£25,612
	£24,280

4.2 Business Model and Funding Options

The RAA Board commissioned Aleron to assist in the development of the proposed business model for the RAA, which suggests an indicative cost for the RAA of £3.205m.

Four funding models were then proposed by the Finance workstream, where each LA:

1. Does not participate in an RAA, and risks paying the equivalent of the inter-agency fee per adoption by joining an RAA at a later date
2. Takes a stepped approach, to pay current level initially with a view to move to a standard unit cost model over a three year period
3. Pays a standardised unit cost per adoption
4. Pays current level indefinitely

Directors of Children’s Services from each Local Authority, have agreed in principal to adopt option 4, but with a view to review the contributions model after 2 years. This model is to share the cost of the RAA based on each authority’s proportion of the current overall gross cost. Table 2 shows the comparison of current gross cost for each Local Authority, to the estimated allocation of net cost of the RAA to each Local Authority.

Table 2: Comparison of current gross cost to each LA, to net cost of RAA

Local Authority	Gross cost 2016/17 £000's	% of Total Cost	No of adoptions in RAA (based on 5 year average)	% of adoptions	Net Cost RAA Model 2018/19 £000's	Net Cost RAA Model 2019/20 £000's	Net Cost RAA Model 2020/21 £000's	Net Cost RAA Model 2021/22 £000's	Variance 2021/22 compared to 2016/17 £000's
Gateshead	£805	23%	27	19%	£726	£725	£724	£724	£-81
Newcastle	£841	24%	41	29%	£759	£758	£757	£757	£-84
North Tyneside	£477	13%	19	13%	£430	£429	£429	£429	£-48
Northumberland	£746	21%	30	21%	£673	£672	£671	£671	£-75
South Tyneside	£684	19%	26	19%	£617	£616	£616	£616	£-68
Total	£3,553	100%	143	100%	£3,205	£3,200	£3,197	£3,197	£-356

There are a number of assumptions to note in the proposed Business Model, including:

- The RAA will generate income from selling 25 adopters each year
- There will be no redundancy costs
- All set up costs (including ICT requirements) will be fully funded from the DfE implementation grant.
- The cost of purchased placements is included, but assumes that the inter-agency fee will be passed onto the relevant authority.
- Income generated from selling adopters is retained by the RAA

4.3 Financial Analysis still to be completed

Work is ongoing to complete a full financial appraisal of the option for North Tyneside Council to host the RAA, and to finalise the funding commitment of each participating Local Authority. There are a number of considerations to be finalised, which could potentially impact on the overall cost of the RAA:

- Confirmation of ICT costs
- Confirmation of premises
- Review of the proposed staffing structure
- Financial risk analysis for North Tyneside Council as host authority
- Review of post adoption support costs, and implications of any change to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF)
- Agreement of apportionment of share of any surplus/deficit
- Review and standardisation of post adoption means tested allowances across participating authorities

5 COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS

The delivery of any service is underpinned by a range of support functions that seek

to ensure that staff have the necessary infrastructure to undertake their role. From a practical perspective, it is anticipated that in most instances the host organisation will extend existing corporate services to meet need (eg IT support) and existing contracts and this infrastructure will be used to accommodate any extension or changes to service.

Further is being undertaken in relation to commissioning and post adoption support.

6 PROJECT MANAGEMENT APPROACH

This section sets out the project organisation and actions which will be undertaken to support the achievement of intended deliverables. As part of Adopt North East initiative, project organisation and governance arrangements are already well established. It is expected that the project organisation structure will remain in place, subject to modifications of project team members and resource allocation to the project work streams below:

6.1 Key roles in the project team:

Seconded Head of Service/Operational Workstream Lead – to own the overall approach to project delivery and ensure that the project meets its objectives and expected outcomes. It is anticipated that the seconded Head of Service will work alongside the project team until a permanent appointment is made which will follow Cabinet's formal approval of the formation of Adopt North East.

Project Team- responsible for overseeing and managing the overall Adopt North East project plan on behalf of the seconded Head of Service to ensure that the desired project objectives are delivered.

Based on our previous experience of running similar projects we plan to utilise a work stream model across the following areas:

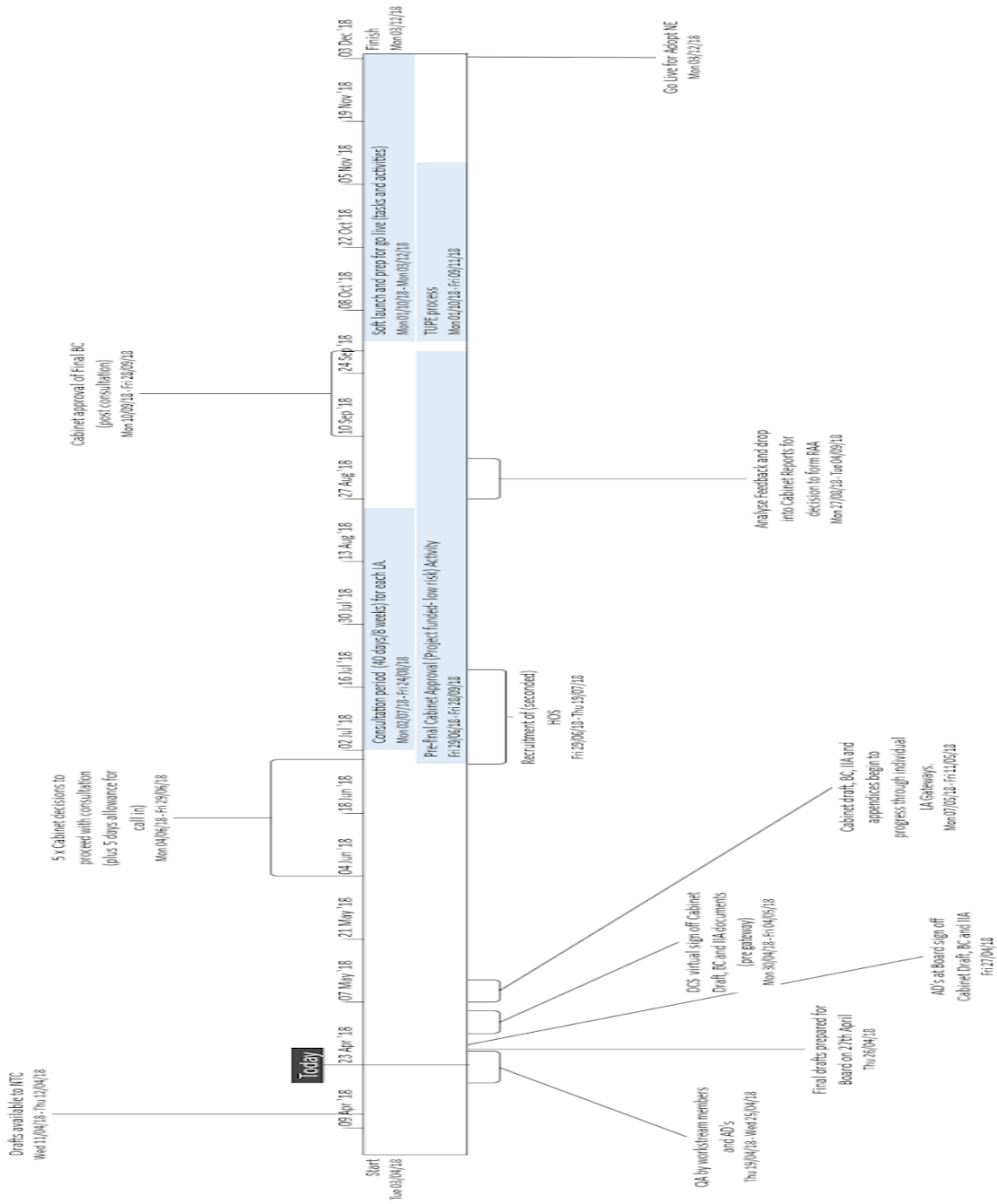
- Communications
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Information Technology
- Legal
- Operations
- Procurement/Commissioning
- Property/Estates

Each work stream will be led by North Tyneside officers who will be accountable for managing individual work stream project activities and ensuring the delivery of scheduled work stream outputs. Deliverables and accountabilities will be set out in individual work stream terms of reference.

We anticipate maintaining project governance through the **Management Board** (membership includes Director of Children's Services, Heads of Service, Project Management and Workstream leads).

A key area of activity role in the project will be change management. Our financial plan includes costs for **HR/Organisational Development work** to support the project team to be successful by building support, addressing resistance and developing the required knowledge and ability to implement the change (i.e. managing the 'people' side of the change). Part of this task will be to work with the HOS and others to develop a Change Management Strategy.

6.2 High Level Project Plan



7. REFERENCES

Regionalising Adoption- DFE – June 2015

Education & Adoption Act 2016

Appendix 2

Services to be delivered by the Regional Adoption Agency

Child Journey	LA	RAA
Case Responsibility and Care Planning	X	
Pre-adoption support assessments and support planning at the point of the SHOBPA decision	X	
ADM best interest decision / SHOBPA	X	
Support to Children's Social Work Teams in assessing children's needs and early identification of children for whom an adoption plan is suitable	X	X
Challenge and decision making in relation to Care Plans and Child Placement Reports	X	
Provision of advice, support and training in relation to completion of Child Placement Reports	X	X
Early identification and tracking of children requiring adoption, primary LA responsibility. Non-identifying information to be provided to RAA	X	X
Tracking children with a plan for adoption	X	X
Early Permanence Placements		
Allowances and fees as per LA Fostering Service payments for duration of fostering placement	X	
Responsibility for early permanence placements and supporting Fostering For Adoption foster carers under these arrangements		X
Recruit, register and supervise the Fostering For Adoption foster carers		X
Approval of Fostering For Adoption foster carers	X	
Responsibility for identifying at the earliest opportunity where a child has 'harder to place' characteristics	X	
Supporting, challenging and raising LA ambition around the identification at the earliest opportunity where a child has 'harder to place' characteristics		X
Shared use of a common tracking tool	X	X
Identifying where adopters able to meet specific needs may be required, e.g. where a child has 'harder to place' characteristics		X
Identifying suitable adopters at the earliest stage		X
Preparing profiles of the child, including completing the early profile of the child (with Child's Social Worker)	X	X
Identifying early matching considerations.	X	X
Preparation of the child		
Preparing the child for an adoptive placement.	X	

Responsibility for the preparation of the child's Life story book.	X	
Partnership working to ensure that preparation work for 'harder to place' children is progressed	X	X
Funding decision including therapeutic support	X	
Producing the Later Life Letter.	X	
Relinquished children		
Family finding (requires partnership working, RAA lead)	X	X
Linking and matching (requires partnership working, RAA lead)	X	X
Introductions (requires partnership working, RAA lead)	X	X
Organising the Matching Panel and LA Agency Decision Maker (ADM) arrangements for matches, including sourcing legal advice		X
ADM decision on matches	X	
Adopter Journey		
Recruitment and approval of adopters		
Marketing and recruitment activity including targeted marketing and recruitment of prospective adopters for children who may be harder to place. Provision of information DBS checks for prospective adopters Preparation and training Assessment of prospective adopters Additional training and preparation for prospective adopters to meet the needs of specific children Quality Assurance Visits Approvals of prospective adopters		X
Purchase and sale of inter-agency placements where most suitable match.		X
Family finding for adopters	X	X
Approvals of prospective adopters		X
Introductions and adoption support assessments		X
Matching Panels		X
ADM decision making for adopter approval		X
Annual reviews of prospective adopters		X
Support and supervision of placements, including early permanence placement		X
Independent Review Mechanism		X
Post placement pre-order		
As part of adoption support planning, assessment and proposal to LAs of Adoption Allowances using a common protocol, with agreed financial limits, across all LAs around	X	X

eligibility for Adoption Allowances for new adoptions made through Adopt North East		
Approval of RAA assessments for Adoption Allowance, and making payments for current and future adoptions and annual review mechanism	X	
Support and supervision of placements including statutory visits, LAC reviews	X	
Post-approval support to adopters inc contribution to LAC reviews		X
Therapeutic intervention identified and commissioned	X	X
Assessments and funding applications to the Adoption Support Fund		X
Match funding where fair access limit reached (£5K)	X	
Disruption process	X	X
Annex A co-production	X	X
Cost of court applications for adoption order	X	
If Adoption Order contested or appeals (financial support for Independent Legal Representation for Prospective Adopter)	X	
QA of Adopter Journey once AO granted		X
Post Adoption support for families		
Post adoption support assessments and support planning for relevant children /families in first 3 years of placement or at the request of the LA (at any time during the adoptive placement), for example alongside a joint assessment for a child in need. Also for new families moving to the LA area after 3 years.	X	X
Review of adoption support plans		X
Creation of a menu of support and ability to tailor support in line with need		X
Provision of a core adoption support offer (Tier 2) as set out in assessment for the first 3 years of placement for relevant families.		X
Providing or commissioning Tier 3 targeted and specialist support, via a) direct services within RAA, b) VAA block contracts and c) commissioned bespoke adoption support provision.	X	X
Assessments and funding applications to the Adoption Support Fund.		X
Match funding where fair access limit reached (£5K)	X	
QA of intervention once completed		X
Support for those affected by adoption		

Pre-adoption support and post adoption contact for birth family members, including Letterbox		X
Birth Parent Support		X
Support for adopted adults – access to records (LA) and counselling (Adopt North East)	X	X
Step parent adoption assessment		X
Step parent statutory checks costs	X	
Inter-country adoption		X

Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's), assessment and post order support for Special Guardians are not in scope for Adopt North East.

Appendix 3

Equality and Diversity: People with Protected Characteristics

<p>Younger people and / or older people (age)</p>	<p>There is no upper age limit to adopt, although the applicant has to be physically and mentally fit to provide a high standard of care and in recognition of the life-long nature of adoption. The legal minimum age to adopt is 21. Children can be adopted up to the age of 18 (19 in exceptional circumstances) though adoption is usually only considered in relation to children under the age of about 10. Moving to a RAA is expected to widen the pool of potential adopters particularly for harder to place children including those at the upper end of the usual age range to be adopted. Moving to a RAA will not change the current situation with regard to age with regard to other service users (adopted adults, birth parents, adoptive families) affected by adoption.</p>	
<p>Disabled people</p>	<p>Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to disability</p>	<p>Disability is not a barrier to adopting. Any disability is assessed in terms of the potential impact of the applicant's ability to care for a child. This will not change with a move to a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). From the perspective of children needing adoptive families, moving to a RAA will widen the pool of potential adopters for children with</p>

		more complex needs including those related to a disability, as will the opportunity for more targeted recruitment.
Carers	Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency is not seen to have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to caring responsibilities.	Prospective adopters are considered on their capacity to care for a child and having a caring responsibility would not be a bar in itself to adopting. Setting up the local RAA will provide opportunities for positive benefits as the agency will be a specialist adoption agency with experienced staff who will be able to offer independent and more targeted support to birth parents in need.
People who are married or in civil partnerships	Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to marriage and civil partnership.	Those who are married may adopt as may those in civil partnerships. There are no additional benefits or positives from moving to a RAA.
Sex or gender (including transgender, pregnancy and maternity)	Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to gender.	Prospective adopters are assessed, irrespective of gender. Female and male adopters are considered and approved as single adopters or as a couple in a relationship.

		There are no issues with regard to gender in respect of services to other groups affected by adoption, for example, adopted adults & birth parents. Services are open to all, and this will not change with the creation of a RAA.
People's sexual orientation	Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to sexual orientation.	Sexual orientation does not affect whether an applicant is approved to adopt or not. This will not change with the implementation of the RAA.
People of different races	Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to race.	Considerable efforts are already made to attract prospective adopters from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds to reflect the diverse needs of children requiring adoption. A wider pool of prospective adopters and more targeted recruitment for children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds is seen as one of the potential positive benefits from moving to a RAA.
People who have different religions or beliefs	Moving toward a Regional Adoption Agency will not have any actual or potential negative outcome with regard to religion or belief.	Applications to become adopters are encouraged from all religious and faith groups. Few birth parents are themselves of active faith backgrounds but where they are,

		<p>we try to find families for their children, locally or nationally, to reflect their wishes.</p> <p>This will not change with the implementation of the RAA.</p>
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Appendix 4:

Consultation/community engagement

Date	Who	No. of people	Main issues raised
February 2016 (ongoing to date)	RAA Board- comprising of Assistant Directors from five LA's and 4 VAA representatives	12	Responsible for approving the direction of project, receiving and accepting reports including adoption journey, legal, human resources, financial, IT and estates relating to the project. Making recommendations to DCS'.
From June 2016 to date	Representatives from each of the five local authorities and VAA's (where appropriate) in relation to Adoption Journey, Finance, Legal, Human Resources, IT and communications and engagement.	30	Advice and guidance on the project, detailed work in relation to producing draft process maps such as current adoption journeys and optimised one. Providing information on finance and performance, procuring and reviewing specific legal advice, advising on HR practices, undertaking options appraisals on Information Technology and Estates.
October 11/12 2016	1 day staff engagement workshop	35 staff with reps from 5 LAs, 4 VAAs	Two staff conferences held north and south of the region to introduce the context and the overview to the RAA – the who, what, why, how and when. The national DfE vision, the Adopt NE vision and the role of VAA's were on the morning agenda, together with an overview of proposed workstreams and a presentation on the adoption journey. The afternoon was spent in group work to 1) review the adoption journey 2) discuss what an RAA should look like 3) questions/ concerns/ thoughts. A brief presentation was given outlining the current options for delivery models.
15 Nov 2016	DCS and portfolio holders from a number of LA's	9	Undertook an options appraisal on the potential delivery models. Participants expressed a desire for a Joint Venture delivery model to be explored.
December 2016	Children and young people engagement consultation event	18 adopted children and young people directly participated within the	After Adoption were commissioned to hold a consultation event with adopted children and young people – the aim of the consultation (titled Consult NE) included capturing the views of the adopted children and young people involved to enable Adopt NE to understand and incorporate these

		consultation process.	within future development. This centred on key issues relevant to adopted children and young people, their views on making services better in the regionalised context and how they might participate in the co-production of adoption services in future in the region. A Consult NE event was held on Saturday 3rd December 2016 at St. James' Park, Newcastle. In addition to this, adopted children and young people were also able to participate via completing a questionnaire. The main points from the consultation were captured in a report. These included ideas and suggestions on; How can the regional adoption agency make sure adopted young people don't feel on their own in being adopted? ; How can the regional adoption agency help adopted young people work out their feelings and emotions?; How can the regional adoption agency help adopted people understand about their birth family? please note that due to the sensitive nature of this questions, this was only explored with young people aged 12+ at the event); How can the regional adoption agency help adoptive parents be more prepared and supported?; What are the best ways for the regional agency to make school better for adopted young people, including school staff and wider professionals involved?
February 16/17 2017	Second 1 day staff engagement workshop	40 staff with reps from 5 LAs & 4 VAAs	Two staff conferences held north and south of the region to update on work done on the preferred model, an overview of workstream activities to date (finance, legal, communication and engagement, workforce/human resource, IT & performance. Further group work on the adoption journey together with open discussion around innovation, risks and concerns, the consultation notes and comments were highlighted and added to a new version of the adopter journey boards. After Adoption gave a presentation on the outcome of the children and young people engagement consultation event held in December.
March 9 2017	External stakeholder workshop	7	A workshop was organised for external stakeholders who would be impacted in some way by the re-organisation of

			adoption services in the area. They included medical advisers, clinical psychologists, consultant paediatrician, social workers, safeguarding and care planning services and legal representation. They too contributed to the development of an improved adopter journey and their comments were noted, particularly in respect to the vital timings of medical involvement.
March 2017	Legal Representatives from five LA's and AD's	10	Acceptance of report on potential legal structure of a Joint Venture. Raised the issue of looking at the hosted option as some participants expressed a desire for a Hosted model to also be explored alongside the Joint Venture model-citing possible cost differences.
April 3 2017	Engagement with regional Medical Advisors	5 -7	To present an overview and gave an update on work so far on the RAA and to seek input and engagement from medical advisors throughout the process.
April 4 - 2017	Consult NE event – consultation with adoptive parents	106 responses to the online consultation survey A total of 18 adoptive parents participated in the consultation event (including the two parent ambassadors).	After Adoption were commissioned on behalf of Adopt NE, to host a consultation with adoptive parents. The purpose of the consultation was to engage adoptive parents so that they could influence the future development of regional adoption services within the North East region. The aim of this consultation included capturing the views of the adopters involved to enable Adopt NE to understand and incorporate the emerging themes within future development of service delivery. This centred on key issues relevant to adoptive families from the adoptive parents' perspective and their views on making services better in the regionalised context. The consultation process involved an online survey for adopters to complete as well as a consultation event. The main points from the consultation were captured in a report. These included; Service in the early stages of the adoption assessment; Support received after child was placed. The general consensus of the participants regarding the location of adoption services highlighted the wish for regional services/ hubs to ensure accessibility for all. within this, parents identified that these hubs

			should provide all information required, especially in terms of knowledge of all relevant support and advice available to adoptive parents regardless of which stage they are in the adoption process. Parents also highlighted that the regional adoption agency should prioritise ensuring the access to services is experienced in a seamless and effective way to all adoptive children, parents and families that require support. 'Too much bureaucracy' was highlighted as a substantial barrier to a timely and successful adoption journey.
April to July 2017	5 LA Cabinets	Cabinet members of each of the Five LA's	Individual Approval by each of the five Local Authorities who agreed to endorse the outline proposals for the continued development of the Adopt NE Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), including the preferred business model option for Adopt NE in the form of a Local Authority owned Joint Venture and await a full business case to be presented for consideration to Cabinet in Late Summer/Autumn 2017.
June 6/9 2017	Third 1day stakeholder staff engagement workshop	50 staff with reps from 5 Las and 4 VAAs	Two staff conferences held north and south of the region to update on progress on the RAA Project and to focus on post adoption support. The agenda included an introduction to Optimised (LA) post-adoption support with round table discussions and optimising the matching process. After Adoption gave a video presentation on their consultation process with adoptive parents.
June 26 2017	Medical Advisor consultation meeting	8 representing all LA's	General issues discussed included medical advisors need to main knowledge of both children and adults which assists with matching. Comment was made that within the context of the RAA it would be good to separate adult and children roles. Discussion took place on how panels should be arranged and attended with acknowledgement of the significant pressure currently between issuing of placement order and panel. Agreed a red line needed that MA speaks only in relation to children they have seen –and not to 'cover' for other MAs. Questions raised about how contracting will work.

Aug 21 2017	Medical Advisors consultation meeting	Full regional representation	Project representation at Medical Advisors meetings to discuss RAA and interface with them by potential RAA.
Aug 30	Representatives from Clinical Commissioning Groups	3	Raising awareness to CCG partners of Regional Adoption Agency
Aug 2017	Regional Unison Trade Union Rep.	1	Briefing note shared with Trade Union.
June to Dec 2017	Human Resource personnel from each of the 5 LA's	5	Production of a series of papers for Board on secondment /TUPE options and Head of Service.
June to Dec 2017	Legal Representatives from each of the 5 LA's	5	Advice and guidance in respect of governance relating to the project.
June and July 2017	Service/ Adoption Team Managers from each of the 5 LA's	2 separate sessions with 5 personnel.	Feedback views on resource model, including staffing structure. Following this a revised structure was produced and accepted by (LA only) RAA Board
June to Dec 2017	Finance Representatives from each of the 5 LA's	5	Work on agreeing finance baseline for adoption services and the resource requirements including finance, pensions, relating to potential future delivery model/s i.e. Joint Venture and latterly host.
July 28 2017	Directors of Children's Services and Assistant Directors Children's Services	8	Agreement that the project explores both Joint Venture and hosted models for consideration.
Aug 2017	Legal Representatives from five LA's and AD's	10	Acceptance of report on potential legal structure of a potential Hosted delivery model.
Sept 8 2017	Directors of Children's Services and Assistant Directors Children's Services	8	Discussed the need for a detailed Business case analysis to be on the table before proceeding further and making any recommendations. Agreement that going forward DCS meeting would operate as the RAA Executive Board
September 2017	RAA Board-comprising of Assistant Directors from five LA's and 4	12	Change in how RAA Board operates. This included a separation of Board into two parts; A whole RAA Board with LA and VAA reps and following on from this a separate LA only Board.

	VAA representatives		
Nov 2017	Finance Workstream lead and specialist VAT LA rep.	2	Production of a report outlining VAT implications on a Host or Joint Venture Local Authority Trading Company (JV/LATC)
Nov 2017	Adopted Adults	16	The main points from the consultation were captured in a report. These included; Access to adoption records and the information included; How to best support adopted children to understand their journey; Counselling, support and advice for adopted adults; Collaboration between adult adopted people, their adoptive parents, birth parents, relatives and professionals.
Nov 2017	Birth Parents and Relatives	9	The main points from the consultation were captured in a report. These included; Involvement in permanency planning of the child; Providing information to help children understand who they are and where they came from; Post adoption Contact; Support services available for Birth Parents and relatives; Relationships and collaboration with professionals; Searching and Intermediary (once child is 18). Most of those involved within the online survey perceived the idea of a regional adoption team having one central location and delivering services across five local authorities as a positive.
Dec 11 2017	Stakeholder staff engagement workshop/s	50 staff attended with representation from all five local authorities, 4 attendees from Unison; from the VAA's only After Adoption personnel were present.	Two x 2 hour staff conferences, the agenda included a summary of the current situation, including progress on the business model and the current project timeline. Where new information was available updates were also given on each of the workstreams – HR, IT & Performance, Finance, Legal and Communication & Engagement. Staff expressed feelings of insecurity and concern at the lack of information currently available in relation to proposals. They also shared their views on potential 'early win' activities including; Build on the model already structured, for an allocated worker to develop a core offer of adoption support

			(from recruitment to post adoption) through consultation with CYPS etc; Establish an in-depth training programme to include new IT recording systems and familiarisation of new policies/procedures/forms etc. prior to go-live; Focus on maintaining the adopter pipeline and how this is best handled through the transition.
Jan 26 2018	Directors of Children's Services	5	Agreed to recommend host model as the preferred delivery model for Adopt North East and to recommend that North Tyneside Council act as host for the RAA subject to further work on financial modelling and cabinet decision making processes.
March 15 2018	Directors of Children's Services	5	Agreed to recommend the overall financial approach to funding the RAA this is subject to further work and cabinet decision making processes.