	Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee **17 November 2016**
Title	**London Regional Adoption Agency**
Report of	Commissioning Director, Children and Young People
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Key	Yes
Enclosures	**Appendix 1** - Regionalising Adoption: Vision for London **Appendix 2** - Adoption journey outcome summary **Appendix 3** – Assessment of potential delivery models **Appendix 4** – Summary of legal advice on two preferred models **Appendix 5** – Stakeholder engagement sessions
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Summary

This report seeks the committee's approval for the council to continue to work collaboratively with other London boroughs to develop the London Regional Adoption Agency with the intention of joining the agency, when it becomes operational (2017/18).

Recommendations
That the Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee: 1. **Agree, in principle, the council to join a London Regional Adoption Agency;** 2. **Delegate authority to the Commissioning Director, Children and Young People (Director for Children's Services) to progress arrangements relating to the development of the detailed financial analysis and the implementation of the London Regional Adoption Agency model;** 3. **Agree that a paper setting out the detailed financial analysis, and the detail of the proposed model, will be brought back to a future meeting of Children's Education Libraries and Safeguarding Committee for consideration and agreement.**

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

1.1 Overview & Summary

1.1.1 In June 2015, in its Regionalising Adoption paper, the Department of Education set out proposals for new regional adoption agencies ("RAAs") to speed up matching, improve adoption support and achieve cost efficiencies. The paper invited councils and Voluntary Adoption Agencies ("VAAs") across England, to submit Expressions of Interest in becoming part of new regionalised arrangements. In response, the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) submitted a high level London proposition that was subsequently approved by DfE.

1.1.2 A number of possible models for the London Regional Adoption Agency ("LRAA") have been explored. ALDCS have recommended the creation of a new, local authority owned entity operating in a hub and spoke approach. The model is expected to retain a strong local link. It is recognised that local knowledge and relationships will be essential.

1.1.3 The London Borough of Barnet (LBB) will need to formally agree whether they wish to join the ALDCS Regional Adoption Arrangements, or seek other arrangements. The final detailed operational arrangements should be developed by September 2017. In its final policy paper, Adoption: A vision for Change – March 2016, DfE indicated that to ensure long term, sustainable success, the adoption system must operate at the right scale and to facilitate this, it will ensure that all local authorities will become part of a RAA by 2020 The DfE has confirmed that it is committed to working with the sector to ensure, where possible, that all local authorities move to RAAs voluntarily and in a way that works for them. If some local authorities fail to do so by 2017, the DfE will consider using the new powers in the Education and Adoption Act 2016 to require them to make arrangements for their adoption functions to be carried out by a RAA.

1.2 Background

Adoption as a permanency option

1.2.1 Adoption is a way of providing new families for children who cannot be brought up by their biological parents. It is a legal process in which all parental rights and responsibilities are transferred to the adoptive family. Once an adoption has been granted, it cannot be reversed. Alternative permanency options include special guardianship orders (SGOs) and long term fostering.

1.2.2 Successive governments have raised concerns that children in care may experience poorer outcomes due to a low rate of adoption as well as delays in the process. Children in care are more likely to be unemployed, to experience mental health problems, to become homeless and to have their own children removed from them. It should be noted that children in care often arrive in care with significant issues that contribute to poor outcomes; however, a poor care experience can exacerbate rather than remedy these issues. Conversely, a well-timed and good, adoptive placement match can make a significant and positive difference to the long-term outcomes of children who have had difficult and damaging pre-birth and early year's experiences.

The policy background to regionalisation

1.2.3 In order to improve outcomes for children in care, the Coalition Government introduced *An Action Plan for Adoption: tackling delay*[1] with legislative changes to the monitoring of the adoption process through an Adoption Scorecard. This set targets for Local Authorities to speed up the adoption process. In many authorities, those targets have not been met and the speed of adoption remains a local corporate parent and central government concern.

1.2.4 The DfE paper, Regionalising Adoption,[2] proposed the move to regional adoption agencies in order to:

- Speed up matching
- Improve adopter recruitment and adoption support
- Reduce costs
- Improve the life chances of vulnerable children

1.2.5 This policy ambition has now been included in primary legislation by virtue of the Education and Adoption Act (2016). The DfE's aim is for all local authorities to be part of a regionalised service by 2020.

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[1] An Action Plan for Adoption: tackling delay (DfE, 2012)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/180250/action_plan_for_adoption.pdf
[2] Regionalising Adoption (DfE, 2015)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/437128/Regionalising_adoption.pdf

1.2.6 Through 'Adoption: a vision for change'[3], the Department highlighted the need to draw on the best of both the statutory and voluntary sectors to ensure that systems are designed around the needs of children. It also reinforced the vision to ensure that the voice of children and adopters is at the heart of policy making and service delivery.

1.2.7 Despite some ministerial change following the changes in government leadership during July, the DfE has reaffirmed its commitment to this policy. A communication from the DfE to DCSs on 15th September stated 'RAAs will make an enormous difference to some of our most vulnerable children… We and the team would welcome any further feedback on how we can best work together to deliver the great potential which RAAs have to offer.'

Working together in London

1.2.8 The prospect of a London-wide agency is not such a big step for London boroughs generally, nor LBB in particular. London boroughs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) have a history of working together to improve adoption services.

Consortia arrangements

1.2.9 All London boroughs belong to an adoption consortium. These consortia allow best practice sharing between local authorities and enable joint working on some aspects of the service. In some cases, services are carried out jointly between boroughs via these consortia arrangements. Examples of service areas that are carried out jointly include adopter training, recruitment activity, and joint subscriptions. There is a range of levels of integration within the different consortia. Figure 1 shows the current consortia regions.

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[3] Adoption: a vision for change (DfE, 2016)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/512826/Adoption_Policy_Paper_30_March_2016.pdf
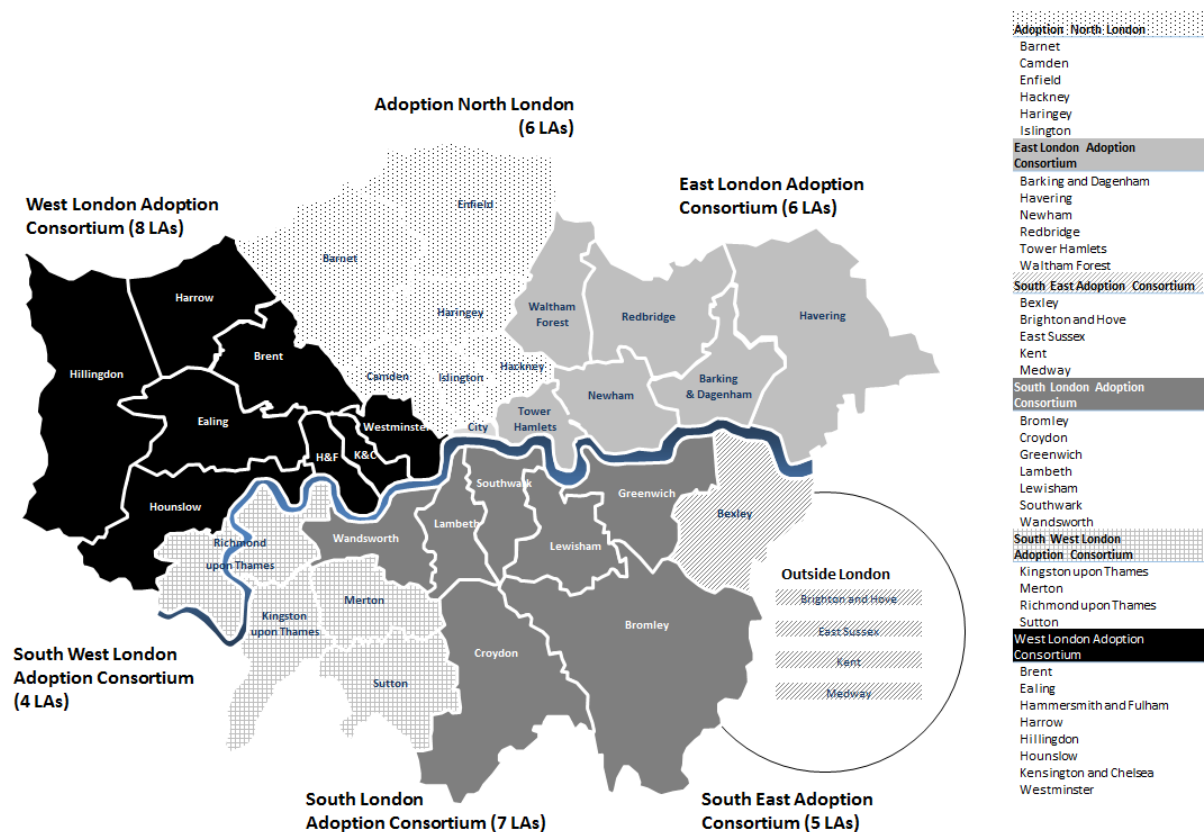
Figure 1. London adoption consortia arrangements

1.2.10 The engagement between boroughs and VAAs ranges from individual service contracts and spot purchase arrangements with VAAs to outsourcing the full adoption service. Many VAAs are involved in the consortia arrangements shown above.

1.2.11 LBB is part of the Adoption North London Consortium. Adoption North London is a partnership of six local authority adoption agencies: Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey and Islington. The consortium is a specialist adoption recruitment service across the North London area who work together to find adopters for the children within the 6 boroughs who need new families, offering the best possible support and preparation to adopters.

Pan-London joint working

1.2.12 The council also works across London. In 2013, the London Adoption Steering Group was set up to enable pan-London good practice sharing and development. This group transitioned to the London Adoption Board in 2014. The London Adoption Board includes London boroughs and VAAs and is sponsored by the Council of Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The London Adoption Board has supported the collection of adoption data, facilitated best practice showcase events, advocated with external groups on behalf of London, and enabled the development of standards for adoption services.

1.3 The London Regionalisation Adoption Project

Governance

1.3.1 Following DfE's approval of their proposition for a London regional agency, ALDCS established a Regionalisation Steering Group. Chaired by Chris Munday, DCS for LBB, this Group has driven the development of the initial recommendations outlined in this document. The Regionalisation Steering Group sits under the governance of ALDCS and makes operational decisions to drive the project forward. An ALDCS reference group (5 DCS members) has also been set up to support the Regionalisation Steering Group Chair, ensuring that the views of London as a whole are represented at a senior level. A diagram of the governance arrangements is shown in Figure 2.
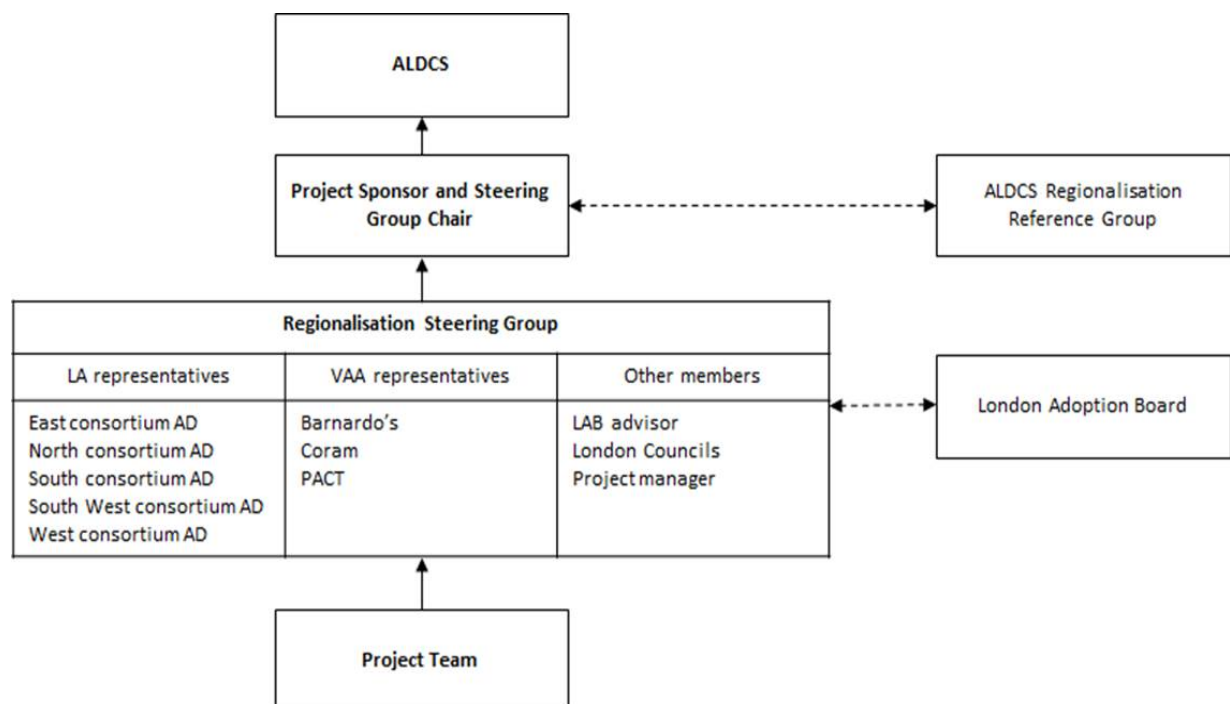

Figure 2. London Regional Adoption project governance and membership

The Vision for London

1.3.2 The development and assessment of models for the London Regional Adoption Agency was preceded by the development of a vision for London. This vision was agreed by Directors and shared with stakeholder groups.

1.3.3 The core of this vision is to ensure that all London's children who require adoptive families receive excellent services that meet their needs, leading to excellent outcomes for them and their adoptive family. See **Appendix 1** for the vision statement. The vision highlighted a determined focus on achieving the best outcomes for all London's children in need of an adoptive placement and reducing any current postcode lottery of provision.

Outcome performance for children and adoptive families

1.3.4   Current outcome performance across London is very mixed. The majority of London boroughs do not achieve the national average waiting time from entry into care to moving in, and there is wide variation in the timeline from placement order to matching. LBB performs well on this indicator as the data below shows:

- Threshold – 487 days
- England Average – 593 days
- Barnet – 472 days

1.3.5.   An activity survey carried out in the first phase of the project showed variable practice regarding the use of adopters approved by other agencies (other LA or VAA), and variation in the use of the adoption support fund. These practice differences may influence the placement timelines.

1.3.6   Adopter focus groups reinforced the need to improve equality in service provision across London. In particular, they raised concerns that training availability was limited in some areas and there was inconsistent access to adoption support.

1.3.7   Within these performance metrics, there is some clustering of performance seen within some consortia groups. This suggests that there is opportunity to improve performance across London through closer integration (although the cohorts of adopters and children in the different consortia may also influence the difference in outcomes).

Cost and efficiency performance

1.3.8   For local authorities, the vision cites a need to support cost efficient and effective delivery that enables future flexibility. Figure 3 shows the variation in adoption numbers by borough during 2015-16. This shows that adoption is a very small service within many boroughs, which may result in inefficiencies and may reduce focus on this area within staff training and development.

Figure 3. Number of children adopted from care Q1-3 2015/16, ALB data set (unrounded)

1.3.9   There is also significant variation in cost per adoption, which partially relates to the efficiency issue described above, but also reflects savings opportunities. An economic analysis during the first phase of work estimated the average cost per adoption in local authorities was £58,900, based on submissions from 21 local authorities, compared to an interagency fee average spend of £33,300. This does not include indirect costs, adoption allowances, Adoption Support Fund spend, and third party payments. Further analysis is required to confirm the data and identify which tasks are carried out by local authorities and not by external agencies.   This will provide an indication of the opportunities for efficiency improvement.

1.3.10 The greatest area of saving potential was identified within staffing, but the potential models are hypothetical and need further testing in the context of the service design. Further analysis is required of local authorities with low cost per adoption and good performance on timeliness and quality to identify whether it is possible to extend these achievements to other areas. The London RAA will:

- Measure performance against Adoption Leadership Board statistics;
- Monitor quality metrics including breakdowns, process efficiency and satisfaction, and;
- Implement processes to support proactive tracking and problem solving.

1.4   Development of the Options

1.4.1   To create a London Regional Adoption Agency that best meets the needs of children and adopters in line with the expected Government guidance, there was a need to consider the different models that would make the biggest difference in improving our outcomes. In January 2016, the project team held an options development workshop with LA, VAA and adopter representatives

(list of attendees is at **Appendix 5**). Participants were asked to identify the outcomes expected from each aspect of the adoption journey in order to achieve the vision. Groups then identified the commissioning and delivery scale required to achieve the outcomes. A diagram showing the outcomes identified in this workshop can be seen in **Appendix 2.**

1.4.2 In order to be able to advise Boroughs, ALDCS has also sought legal advice regarding the proposed London scheme and the options. In addition, there have been two events for elected members, as well as engagement with adopters, prospective adopters, and adopted young people. Feedback from these events is included in **Appendix 5**. Taking all this into account, the Regionalisation Steering Group considered the options and is now recommending two for further investigation.

Options analysis on the delivery model

1.4.3 Building on this service design, the workshop participants were introduced to the potential delivery vehicles and structures. They agreed the desirability and feasibility criteria for scoring these vehicle/ structure combinations. These criteria were agreed by ALDCS.

Delivery vehicles considered

1.4.4 The following delivery vehicles were considered as part of the options appraisal process:
- Single LA hosting on behalf of other LAs
- New LA owned entity
- LA-VAA joint venture
- Outsourcing to existing London VAAs

1.4.5 Within the above delivery models, a number of structures were considered:
- Fully centralised: a single London body
- Hub and spoke: central hub for London-wide co-ordination, commissioning and delivery, with sub-regional spokes for delivery and local commissioning under the same organisation.
- Tiered approach: top strategic tier, second strategic/ operational tier, third delivery tier.
- As-Is+: current arrangement with more formalised partnerships.

Recommendation on preferred models

1.4.6 The Regionalisation Steering Group carried out scoring of desirability and feasibility criteria and held a discussion of the available options based on engagement with stakeholders and other data captured. The group recommended the following options for further investigation:
- LA controlled company delivery model with a strategic VAA partnership operating in a hub and spoke structure (Option 1).
- LA-VAA joint venture operating in a hub and spoke structure (Option 2).

A summary of the assessment of the individual options can be found in **Appendix 3.**

1.4.7 At the March meeting of ALDCS, Directors received the stakeholder report about the potential regional delivery models. Those preferences, based on guidance from stakeholders including VAAs, were a local authority trading company and a joint venture. Directors supported this recommendation.

1.5 Legal advice on the potential delivery models

1.5.1 At the direction of ALDCS, legal advisors were appointed to produce detailed advice on the two preferences. Their report containing the legal advice is now complete and covers the following areas for the preferred models:

- Benefits and limitations of VAA involvement in the ownership and/or strategic partnership, with advice on the joint venture options.
- Governance implications with regard to the need for accountability to the LAs responsible for the child.
- Legal entities that would be appropriate for securing the optimum balance with non-statutory organisations.
- Income and tax implications of the models, including VAT treatment and the ability to trade with other regional agencies.
- Procurement implications of these models, with reference to Teckal exemption.
- Implications for registered charities including charitable assets and income.
- Potential staff transfer implications.

Recommended model

1.5.2 The report received from the legal advisors confirmed that the LRAA would have to be a not-for-profit entity. It also concluded that Option 2 would likely require more time and be more costly to implement than Option 1 and did not appear to offer any additional benefits. It recommends that the Regional Adoption Agency should be a not-for-profit community benefit society that is jointly owned by all of the LAs (Option 1) who wish to participate in the project from the outset (Founding Councils). The figure below shows the structure of the recommended model.
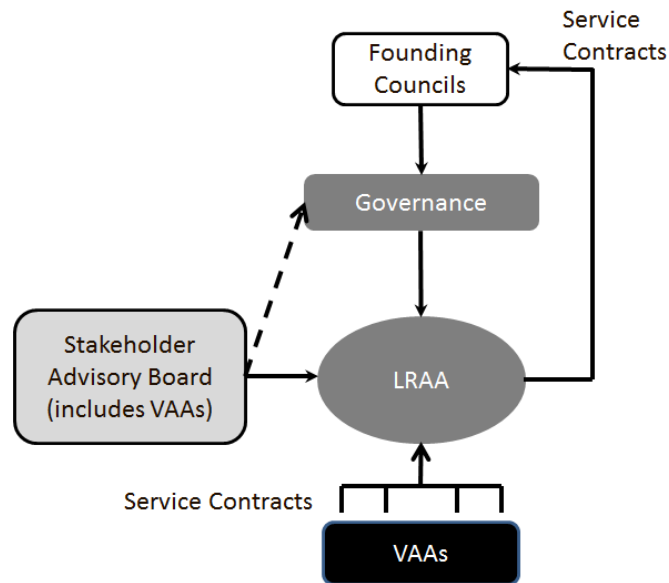
Figure 4. A multi-LA owned corporate entity working in partnership with VAAs to deliver adoption services

Further details on the two models can be seen in **Appendix 4.**

1.6   Proposal

1.6.1 Each London Borough is asked to reach its own decision on whether to join in principle the London Regional Adoption Agency.

1.6.2 London Borough of Barnet Council will need to formally:

I.   Agree, in principle, the council to join a London Regional Adoption Agency;

II.   Delegate authority to the Commissioning Director, Children and Young People (Director for Children's Services) to progress arrangements relating to the development of the detailed financial analysis and the implementation of the London Regional Adoption Agency model;

III.   Agree that a paper setting out the detailed financial analysis, and the detail of the proposed model, will be brought back to a future meeting of Children's Education Libraries and Safeguarding Committee for consideration and agreement.

2.   REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   The Founding Councils' involvement in the Agency would be governed by a Members' Agreement. The Agency would be managed by a board of directors including officers of the Founding Councils, with places reserved for elected VAAs, and potential for other service user or stakeholder involvement.

ALDCS and the legal advice suggested that the preferred model set out in para 1.5.2 had a number of benefits:

- It provides the scale that DfE are looking for in the new agencies
- A Hub and Spoke model allows us to maintain a local dimension to our adoption work and maintain relationships with the child and adopter
- The governance model retains a close VAA partnership working
- Configuration flexibility – elements can be commissioned in hubs or spokes
- It is quicker and cheaper to establish than the other models considered

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

This covers two areas: The alternatives to the proposed joint-owned Hub and Spoke model governed by the Founding Councils, and; the alternatives to not joining the proposed London Regional Adoption Agency.

3.1 Alternatives to the Joint LA owned, Hub and Spoke Options

Model	Key points
Single LA hosting on behalf of other LAs	Steering group agreed that this option was not viable due to: • Scale and complexity is too large for a single LA to manage. • Organisational culture would be strongly influenced by the individual LA identified. • Likelihood of limiting membership of some LAs for political and geographical reasons.
Outsource to existing London VAA	This was eliminated prior to scoring as VAAs attending stakeholder forum identified significant concerns with this model as indicated in the single LA host commentary.

Structure	Key points
Fully centralised: single London body	Steering group agreed that this option was not viable due to: • Inability to deliver the adoption journey as mapped • Reduces benefit of local knowledge and relationships.
Tiered approach: top strategic tier, second strategic/ operational tier,	Steering group agreed that this option was not viable due to: • Similarity to current arrangements likely to lead to continuation of postcode lottery.

	• Additional tiers adding complexity to management and funding arrangements.
As-Is+: current arrangement with more formalised partnerships	This was eliminated prior to scoring as DfE learning events identified that this would be viewed as insufficient change.

3.2 Alternatives to joining the ALDCS regional adoption arrangements

3.2.1 The London Regional Adoption Agency has been developed to meet the needs of London Boroughs. It would operate in a similar manner to the London Admissions and London Grid for Learning Teams, with governance through ALDCS and London Councils.

3.2.2 The DfE has confirmed its intention that all local authorities to join a regional agency by 2020 and once brought into force, there will be a statutory power of direction requiring an LA's adoption services to be provided via an alternative local authority or adoption agency. Alternatives to the London RAA option would be to either:

- Join another developing regional agency
- Create a new model
- Do nothing and risk a direction from DfE in the future.

Join another developing regional agency
3.2.3 Other developing regional agencies have not been developed with the involvement of London boroughs. No other regional agencies have proposed a model linked to the governance of London local authorities. The London model is being developed with the complexity of the borough and provider landscape in mind. Many of the models being developed in other regions e.g. single LA host, would not be appropriate to meet this complexity of need. It is not certain that a non-London RAA would allow us to join.

Create a new model
3.2.4 Any new agency being developed would have the same timescale requirements and would need to access development funding independently. ALDCS identified that using existing arrangements (e.g. consortia) would not remove the performance and service variation across London and most current consortia regions would not achieve the DfE aims for scale. A sub-divided London would lose the benefit of the wider pool of adopters and the standardisation of service offering. It is not certain that sufficient other local authorities would join us in the development of an alternative model given that every other London Borough has already been involved in the development of the option developed by ALDCS.

Do Nothing
3.2.5 Do nothing is not a viable option. DfE has made it clear that regionalisation will become mandatory. Any local authority not working towards regionalisation in 2017 will risk a direction being made for its services to be

provided by another local authority or adoption agency. Not only may this have less of a strategic fit to the council's needs, but as a latecomer, LBB will not have had the same influence over the design and shape of whatever RAA the council would be compelled to join.

3.2.6   Therefore, given the policy drive from the Government and examples of good joint working in other areas of children's services, an RAA as described in this paper is considered to be the only viable option at present.

4   POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

4.1.1   Subject to committee agreement, LBB will be full participants in the next phase of the London regionalisation project. This next phase will develop the detailed operational arrangements and the final proposed design, along with detailed financial analysis and business case, is expected by **September 2017**. At this point, a further paper containing the detailed design and financial implications will be brought back to Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee for a decision to join the LRAA.

4.1.2   The key activities for the Project over that time will be:

- Detail the design of the service with staff and users
- Understand the detailed financial business case
- Test any new processes
- Begin planning for implementation

4.1.3   Within Barnet and the Adoption North London Consortium, key activities will be:

- DCS to continue to lead the ALDCS Regionalisation Project across London
- Staff and our service users to engage fully with the design workshops
- Managers to build understanding of staffing and resource implications in line with design development

5   IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1   Corporate Priorities & Performance

5.1.1.   Moving to a regionalised model supports our ambitions for Barnet's children to be resilient as set out in Barnet's Children's and Young Peoples' plan. Evidence shows that outcomes for children in care are often worse. A well-timed and good, adoptive placement match can make a significant and positive difference to the long-term outcomes of children who have had difficult and damaging pre-birth and early year's experiences. It is therefore our responsibility to ensure that children are in care for the shortest time possible and for those who cannot return to their biological parents, to find an adoptive family as soon as possible. Being part of a Pan-London regional adoption agency will give us access to a wider pool of potential adopters helping our looked after children to find a suitable family more quickly.

5.1.1   Overall, Barnet and the North London consortium performs reasonable well compared to other London boroughs. However there is some evidence that cost per placement is somewhat higher in Barnet than the London average. This may well be due to economies of scale (Barnet has a relatively small number of children waiting for adoption). Being part of the London Regional Adoption Agency would help us eliminate any higher costs due to size of service.

5.2   Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

5.2.1. At this early scoping phase of the project, no high level or detailed financial analysis has been completed. The financial implications will become evident after the next phase when the detailed design can be costed and a financial business case developed. Currently there are no additional direct cost implications for Barnet. Staff will be involved in the development of the detailed design and business case. However there are benefits that will result from staff attending these design workshops and they will be a key part of the consultation process.

5.2.2   The current Adoption Team budget is £1.47m and savings of £150k in 2018/19 relating to Adoption Regionalisation have been proposed and will be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee on 1 December 2016. This will form part of the delivery of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy

5.3   Legal and Consitutional References

5.3.1   The Committee is asked to support LBB joining in the development of a London Regional Adoption Agency, which aims to improve adoption services, and deliver all adopter recruitment, matching and support functions for all of the London Boroughs.

5.3.2   Section 3 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 ("the 2002 Act") requires the local authority to maintain a service within their area designed to meet the needs, in relation to adoption, of (a) children who may be adopted, their parents and guardians, (b) persons wishing to adopt a child, and (c) adopted persons, their parents, natural parents and former guardians, and must provide facilities in connection with this purpose. The facilities must include making and participating in arrangements for the adoption of children and for the provision of adoption support services. In addition to providing the services itself, the local authority may provide such facilities through a registered adoption society or persons prescribed by regulations. Regulations provide that prescribed persons are another local authority, a registered adoption support agency, an individual falling within adoption regulations or a local health board. There is a further duty to ensure that facilities are provided in a co-ordinated way with other children's social care services.

5.3.3   Section 4 of the 2002 Act requires a local authority to carry out an assessment of a specified person's needs for adoption support services if requested.

5.3.4   A registered adoption society is defined in the 2002 Act as a voluntary organisation which is an adoption society registered under the Care

Standards Act 2000. The adoption society must be an incorporated body and a voluntary organisation is defined as a body other than a public or local authority the activities of which are not carried on for profit.

5.3.5 The Education and Adoption Act 2016 has amended the Adoption and Children Act 2002, however the relevant section is not yet in force. The proposed changes to the 2002 Act will permit the Secretary of State to give directions requiring one or more local authorities in England to make arrangements for all or any of their adoption functions within subsection (3) to be carried out on their behalf by (a) one of those authorities or (b) one or more other adoption agencies.

5.3.6 The Council has anticipated the implementation of the legislative changes. It joined the Regional Adoption Agency Project for London. All London Boroughs and 10 Voluntary Adoption Agencies are included, and the continued involvement in the London RAA will best ensure an effective pan-London service. The approval of committee is required to enable the Council to participate in negotiations about the delivery model for the adoption services through the London RAA.

5.3.7 Annex A of the Responsibility for Functions – as outlined in the council's constitution – states that the committee has responsibility for those powers, duties and functions of the council in relation to Children's Services.

Social Value

5.3.8 The business case completed at the end of the next phase (September 2017) will give consideration to the wider social, economic and environmental benefits that could be gained through the options.

5.4   Risk Management

5.4.1 There are no risks with proceeding to the next stage. At this stage, the proposal is simply to continue the project and begin the more detailed, financial and performance analysis. There are significant risks if the council doesn't proceed. The council is not part of any other development work and DfE has made clear that any council not actively pursuing regionalisation by 2017 will be forced to do so.

5.4.2. The London Regional Adoption Project carries out risk assessment throughout the project with escalation via the Regionalisation Steering Group and ALDCS. The project plan includes expert advice on transition planning and change management. DfE funding to enable the implementation of the model is dependent on borough sign up.

5.4.3 Council staff have been and will be involved in shaping the development of the new agency. The project team will work closely with staff from all founding councils to identify, mitigate and manage any risk. The final model design will be subject to consultation.

5.5   Staffing issues

5.5.1 The London Regional Adoption Agency model recognises the need for local links with children and families, alongside a central team. As the model is developed staff will continue to be consulted. The final model is likely to

involve current adoption teams being transferred over to the London Team via TUPE.

5.6 Safeguarding children

5.6.1 Adoption of the recommendations will contribute to the Council's objectives to improve the wellbeing of children in the Borough, reduce inequalities and ensure Looked After Children have the best opportunities to transition to a secure family environment permanently, where they are not able to return to their own family.

5.6.2 Practice expertise will be utilised in transition planning to ensure safeguarding children during transition to the new agency.

5.6.3 The London Regional Adoption Agency plans to improve collaboration with universal services for adopted children and their families through the development of the collective voice and through the increased scale of commissioning. This will support safeguarding links with universal services.

5.7 Equalities and Diversity

5.7.1 Equality and diversity issues are a mandatory consideration in the decision-making of the Council. This requires elected Members to satisfy themselves that equality considerations are integrated into day to day business and that all proposals emerging from the finance and business planning process have properly taken into consideration what impact, if any, there is on any protected group and what mitigating factors can be put in train.

5.7.2 The public sector equality duty is set out in s149 of the Equality Act 2010:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

(a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

(b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and

(c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

(a) Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;

(b) Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it; and

(c) Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

5.7.3 The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.

5.7.4 Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, the need to:

(a) Tackle prejudice, and

(b) Promote understanding.

5.7.5 The relevant protected characteristics are:

- Age;
- Disability;
- Gender reassignment;
- Pregnancy and maternity;
- Race;
- Religion or belief;
- Sex; and
- Sexual orientation.

At present, the service design is not sufficiently advanced to understand the full impact on staff and service users. A full equality impact assessment will be developed when the project team has more information on the plans for the future service. However, whilst the proposal will not advantage or disadvantage one group of children with protected characteristics more than another, the proposal should have a positive impact on vulnerable children in care by placing them in stable adoptive families more quickly, resulting in better outcomes and life chances. The Government has carried out an impact assessment of the July 2015 Paper, 'Regionalising Adoption', and a link to this can be found below in Paragraph 6.1.

5.8   Consultation and Engagement

London-level member engagement

5.8.1 In July 2015, London Councils published a Member Briefing[4] and informed members that ALDCS had submitted an Expression of Interest. This was followed by a report to London Councils' Executive in October 2015 setting out the regionalisation project in high level terms and seeking Executive's in principle support, which was agreed.

5.8.2 In November 2015, the project team hosted a London Councils Member Event[5]. The feedback from members subsequently informed the project vision and detailed project plan. In July 2016, a further London Councils Member Event was held to share the initial options analysis and the report on legal implications of the potential models.

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[4] http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/members-area/member-briefings/children-and-yound-people-member-briefing/regionalising-adoption
[5] Reforming Adoption in London. Nov 6th 2015.

Other stakeholder engagement

5.8.3 The Project Development Group has engaged with voluntary adoption agencies, adopters and prospective adopters, and children and young people during the development of the recommendations. A list of these engagement sessions can be found in **Appendix 5** along with details of attendees and the feedback from the events**.**

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1 There are three Government papers relevant to this report:

- **Regionalising Adoption** (DfE, 2015)
  https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/437128/Regionalising_adoption.pdf

- **Considering the impact of the Education and Adoption Bill provisions** (DfE, July 2015)
  https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/450013/Considering_the_impact_of_the_Education_and_Adoption_Bill_provisions.pdf

- **Adoption: a vision for change** (DfE, 2016)
  https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/512826/Adoption_Policy_Paper_30_March_2016.pdf