Appendix 5

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS (AS AT 1ST JUNE 2016) - SUMMARY

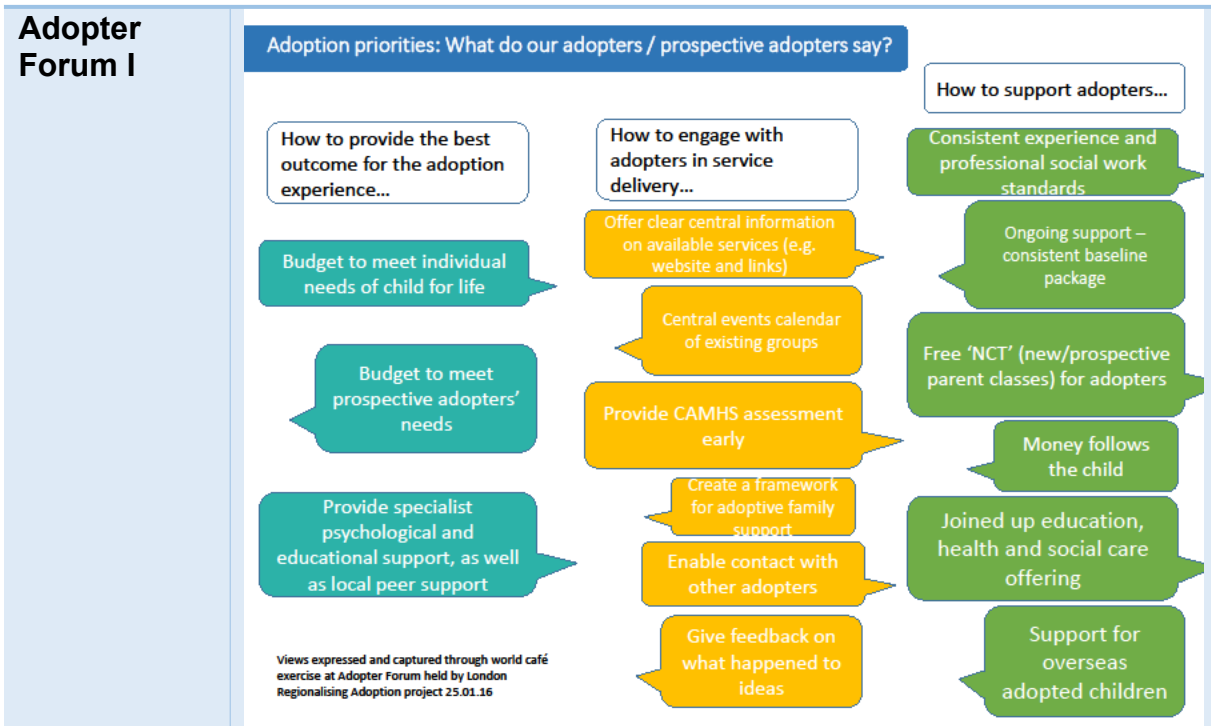| Group	Engagement	Dates/Frequency	Coverage for Project Specific Events
Adopters	Regionalisation members/DCS event	Nov	1 + 2 professional
	Regionalisation options development workshop	Jan	1 + 2 professional
	Regionalisation adopter forum I	Jan	19 adopters
	Regionalisation adopter forum II	Mar	26 adopters
	We Are Family: regionalisation discussion	Mar	1 adopter / 5 prospective
	LAB representation	Monthly meeting agenda item	1 LAB adopter rep
Children	Regionalisation drop-in event	Mar	No attendees - new approach needed
	Research and existing reports. We worked with the Coram Adoptables group to identify the experiences and ideas of children and young people. Coram have produced a detailed report focused on the needs of young people and their thoughts on regionalisation	May	Focus group: 8 young people Wider group: 100 young people Desktop research and assimilation of existing studies (studies ranging from 100 – 208 young people)
	Call for other existing research / reports from other organisations	May	Sent to newsletter database of 116
LAs	Regionalisation members DCS / event	Nov	
	QA doc for DCS	Planned - June	
	Regionalisation steering group	Monthly	Consortia–AD representation
	ALDCS meeting	Jan	
	London Adoption Board	Monthly agenda item	
	Regionalisation options development workshop	Jan	65% LAs represented
	Regionalisation panel advisors workshop	Jan	50% LAs represented
	Adoption and Fostering Network meeting attendance	Dec	
	Consortia meetings	4 x Jan, 2 x Feb	All consortia attended
	PAC-UK event: regionalisation presentation	Feb	
	LAB innovation event: regionalisation presentation	Mar	
	Heads of Communications – attendance at monthly meeting requested	TBC - July	
VAAs	Regionalisation members/ DCS event	Nov	
	Regionalisation steering group	Monthly	30% VAAs represented

	Regionalisation VAA stakeholder forum I	Dec	60% VAAs represented
	Regionalisation VAA stakeholder forum II	Jan	100% VAAs represented
	Regionalisation VAA stakeholder forum III	Feb	50% VAAs represented
	Regionalisation ALDCS-led VAA stakeholder forum	Jan	100% VAAs represented
	Regionalisation option development workshop	Jan	70% VAAs represented
	London Adoption Board	Monthly agenda item	
	Consortia meetings	4. x Jan, 2 x Feb	All consortia attended
Elected members	Elected members events	Nov June	
ALL / Additional	Regionalisation Newsletter	Monthly	116 subscribed, 41 % avg open rate
	Workforce Engagement Sessions: panels and all workers in adoption	May and June (9 sessions over 4 days at different venues)	183 invited 68 registered to date 58 attended to date 21 to attend in June 19 follow up surveys received to date

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS (AS AT 1ST JUNE 2016) – FEEDBACK SUMMARY

Event	Feedback on RAA model
VAA Stakeholder Forum I	What might our involvement with RAA look like: • Closer link with clearer understanding of capacity and demand needs in both directions • Maintain flexibility • Clear connection with RAA knowledge and systems • Integrated offerings • Opportunity for collaboration
VAA Stakeholder Forum II	How do we maximise the talent we have in VAAs/ ASAs? • Sharing talent through joint working • Enhanced training • Learn from CVAA workforce survey What outcomes do we aspire to for children? • Families able to meet holistic needs of child • Adoption support assessment pre and post placement • No postcode lottery • Older children adopted too • Early placement • Placement stability • Access to timely and specialist services How can we streamline and improve systems, structures and processes to get better outcomes for children? • Concurrent planning • IT systems designed around adoption (as in VAAs) • Tap into capacity for innovation • Identify current best practice contracts
VAA-ALDCS Forum	Themes: • Principles and vision of design around improving outcomes for children • This is an opportunity to redesign adoption for the better • Critical factors to address – delays and matching, post adoption support, pressures arising form increase in SGOs, reduce points of contact to improve family service.

VAA Stakeholder Forum III	This session requested feedback on each of the potential delivery models introduced in the options development workshop:
Adopter Forum I	Adoption priorities: What do our adopters / prospective adopters say? How to provide the best outcome for the adoption experience… How to engage with adopters in service delivery… How to support adopters… Budget to meet individual needs of child for life Budget to meet prospective adopters' needs Provide specialist psychological and educational support, as well as local peer support Offer clear central information on available services (e.g. website and links) Central events calendar of existing groups Provide CAMHS assessment early Create a framework for adoptive family support Enable contact with other adopters Give feedback on what happened to ideas Consistent experience and professional social work standards Ongoing support – consistent baseline package Free 'NCT' (new/prospective parent classes) for adopters Money follows the child Joined up education, health and social care offering Support for overseas adopted children Views expressed and captured through world café exercise at Adopter Forum held by London Regionalising Adoption project 25.01.16
Adopter Forum II	**Key points / key themes** 1. **Accountability** Accountability was a key theme. If people felt let down by the LAs, they felt it was hopeless challenging them as they were only holding themselves to account. 2. **Service should be evidence based** 3. **Emphasis on assessing needs of child and putting right support in place from the beginning.** 4. **More opportunities for adopters to be involved in creation of service** Gather feedback via online surveys, webinars, shorter more focused sessions. Create a panel. Maintain engagement throughout. 5. **Adopters to feel more empowered** Demonstrate the new service is adopter lead. Need to remove the frustrations of processes, lack of support from the service and increase accountability. 6. **Communications throughout adoption process** Improve communications frequency, quality and processes throughout adoption process
Children and Young People	📄 PDF Views of children for London RAA.pdf

	  The Adoption Process and Regionalisation Consultation – The Adoptables Residential 2016 8 young people aged 16-23 and from London, Leicestershire, Yorkshire and Kent **Group questions:** *What does 'local' and 'regional' mean to you?* **Local** - Schools - Walking distance - 30-minute drive - 10-minute walk - Area codes - Friendship zones - Town (1 mile) - Cycle (10 miles) - E.g. whole of Sheffield **Regional** - Borough/ county - ' North East' as a region - North/South divide (London and England) - Socio-economics *Do you think it matters what agency provides the adoption services? E.g recruitment of adopters, family finding and adoption support* - It doesn't matter as long as it works - No to the idea of privatisation - Keep adoption at the centre *How would you like the Regional Adoption Agency to seek young people's views in future?* - Through the Adoptables and other groups - Through PSHE - End of Primary school is a good time to seek our views - Someone to meet us physically, who is not a social worker as there are negative feelings and thoughts associated with social workers, so may shut down or not be as open.
Panel advisors	LRAM_Panel Advisors_06012016 S
Options development workshop	Options Workshop Write-Up LG.pptx
LAB Innovation event	Top 5 opportunities of regionalisation: • Best practice sharing • Cost savings through shared panels • Equality of adoption support • Improved support for birth parents • Economies of scale Top 5 challenges of regionalisation: • Loss of workforce due to insecurity • Ensuring clarity of accountability between LA and RAA • Need to avoid creating further bureaucracy • Need to ensure good communication between hub, spokes and LAs • Change communication needs to be right Communication and engagement: • Like newsletters and would like to see webinars • Want to be engaged in development of service design
Members event - June	The following points were raised with answers where given:

Delivery model
- What is the timeline for decision making around which model to pursue? A paper will be released in September.
- Have mutuals had been considered? Legal team informed the group that they would still be viewed as a private organisation from a Teckal point of view.
- DfE view of LA-owned entity option with reference to VAAs Most other RAAs with decisions made have identified LA owned options.
- Pan-London approach – reasons for choice of pan-London model rather than multiple RAAs. Achievement of the vision to achieve the best outcomes for all London's children.
- Financing – They will want to see more detail on the funding model and costs.

Service model
- Outcomes – What are the specific metrics to be improved and extent of improvement? This is an important point. DfE identified metrics i.e. those measured by ALB will be improved. Some outcomes were identified within the first stage high level service design. Further to be identified as part of service design.
- Current model feedback – There was a comment that they were pleased to see consideration of birth parents and teenage adoptees.
- Workforce – asked about the impact on staff. More will be known following the service design.
- Equality and diversity – approach to ensuring the differing BME communities in London are represented. To be developed as part of the next stage of service design.

Engagement
- Member engagement – assurance wanted of involvement as members in developing the vision.
- Engagement with judiciary – extent of current engagement with judiciary around future models. This is carried out through LAB.
- Equality and diversity – A member would like to see involvement of disability charities in design stage.

Project
- DfE funding agreement was discussed.
- Pace – will there be phasing/ testing of implementation? We will seek to use pilots to test service design, and believe that a phased approach is likely to be identified.
- Borough sign up – timetable for papers coming to boroughs to ask for sign up, and whether it is possible to hang back? Paper to be released in September to go through boroughs. Hanging back possible, but may impact involvement in development stages.

On the basis of event surveys, 12/13 rated the event as good while 1/13 rated it is average.

REGIONALISING ADOPTION: VAA & ASA STAKEHOLDER FORUM

EVENT SUMMARY: THEMES AND ACTIONS

Date: Monday 1 February, 10:00 – 14:00
Venue: Family Futures

1. Attendance and apologies

In attendance – VAA / ASA forum	
Name	**Organisation**
Jessica King (Project Team)	NEL CSU
Lisa Garnett (Project Manager)	NEL CSU
Alan Burnell (Chair)	Family Futures
Amy Mathura	Family Futures
Matthew Horton	Barnardo's
Mark Owers	Independent Advisor
Peter Sandiford	PAC-UK
Helen Edwards	Project and LAB Advisor
John Downing	Action for Children
Catherine Clarke	Coram

Apologies	
Name	**Organisation**
Gill Haworth	Intercountry Adoption Centre
Erica Peltier	TACT
Annie Crombie	CVAA
Andy Elvin	TACT
Jacqueline Georghiou	Action for Children
Corienne Strange	SSAFA
Renuka Jeyarajah-Dent	Coram
Jackie Wood	PACT
Jill Farrelly	SSAFA
Jeanne Kaniuk	Coram
Joanne Alper	AdoptionPlus
Jan Fishwick	PACT
Carol Homden	Coram
Carolette Caines	TACT
Lyndsay Marshall	PAC-UK
Christine Allen	Action for Children
Joel Saddler	Adoption UK

2. Options workshop recap

Lisa Garnett presented a summary of the Mutual Ventures[1] presentation from the options workshop held on 15 January 2016.

Questions raised
Q: Can spokes be RAAs in themselves in the hub and spoke type/configuration?

[1] Department for Education appointed national project coach.

A: See Yorkshire model, which as 3 RAAs and a hub that acts as the central concept for the RAAs
C: Governance: who would lead this in London?
Q: Considering regulation in parallel – where are Ofsted in regionalisation?
C: Regulation playing catch-up. National standards will have to change – regionalisation driving new regulation standards in time.
Q: What happens to post adoption support if 'big bang' approach is chosen, given the (in some cases lifelong) support already committed?
Q: Have we considered culture when thinking about combining organisations?
A: Yes. See options workshop summary where this was highlighted as a challenge.
Q: How does the wish from end users for a local service work in regionalisation?
Q: What does 'local service' mean in London, given the transport links and geographic proximity?
A: Following discussion the view expressed was that borough level is considered local in London.
Q: Why are pensions a feasibility criteria when this only affects (a sub-sector of) the LA workforce market and isn't a consideration for the VAA workforce – this seems imbalanced?
C: Weighting of criteria for options scoring should be transparent and a whole workforce view should be taken on matters such as pension.
Q: Are we factoring in how to learn from other pan-London models, e.g. what worked and what didn't?

Q = question
A = answer
C = comment

3. Model work-ups

Using a logic model (outcome focused) approach the group worked through the four high level model types as presented by Mutual Ventures at the Options Workshop.
INSTRUCTIONS FOR FURTHER COMMENTS:
  ❖ There are many possible forms that these models can take, depending on their type (e.g. hub and spoke, tiered, etc.) and reach (regional, sub-regional, etc.).
  ❖ At this stage in the process it is helpful to keep comments high level and appropriate generally to the high level model.
  ❖ If you have more specific comments to make please ensure that it is clear what type and reach you are commenting on.
  ❖ You can comment on all four models, or only the ones that you wish to.
  ❖ Refer to the 'prompting questions' document if you are unsure how to go about the commenting process.

Hosted by single LA			
Features	Benefits	Challenges	USPs
• Direction • Accountable • Could accommodate VAA/ ASA integration in commissioning • Commissioning model • Focus in terms of services • Coordinates regional services • Can commission to deliver for each part of pathway • Support services with child protection and permanency planning • VAA input not specified	• Scope for VAAs delivering services	• Regulation and Ofsted • Which LAs on what basis (high performance; geography) • Undermines the LA / VAA partnership approach that needs to be strengthened	• Pan-London solutions *[desirability criteria 2]*

Joint venture between LAs			
Features	Benefits	Challenges	USPs
• CEO • LAs allow it to commission on their behalf • Mechanism for cross-London due to joint venture • Directors represent cross-London • A 'new' organisation • VAAs could be part of this vehicle (e.g. Community Interest Company)	• LAs without ownership could spot purchase from it • Greater responsibility / accountability of management • Could be constructed so VAAs had voice • Easier allocation of budget to the services • Flexibility • LA ownership so not risk of procurement, pension rights, etc. • Ownership – safety in regulation	• Challenges for staff – TUPE if delivery • Getting mutual consensus • Commissioning focus in set-up could be challenge to current innovation • Reliance on culture of org believing in VAA value • VAAs not part of governance (not 'around the table') as VAA board member could not also be from VAA bidding for work. (An independent VAA Chair could	• New start and new culture, focussed on children not on ways of working *[desirability criteria 1]* • Potential to transition into other models (deliver as well as commission) *[desirability criteria 5]*

	• Could create clearer VAA commissioning ref. volume	resolve this?)	

Creation of new VAA			
Features	Benefits	Challenges	USPs
• Would need to follow procurement rules • Reason for involvement would be delivery • Strategic involvement of VAAs • Is a new registered adoption agency • Would like to see not just about commissioning Reach: • May work in a cluster / sub-regional model	• Mutual responsibility for outcomes • Clean start, new culture • Retains many benefits of LA joint venture • More likely to challenge Ofsted to rise to challenge of new relationship • Attractive to VAAs and like-minded LAs	• Greater challenge in TUPE, staff transfer • How do you maintain sovereignty? • Who owns 'shareholding'? Is it equal? Would be too big? • VAT exemption would be lost, adding 20% to costs	• Looks to best across cross-sector market *[desirability criteria 2, 3, 7, 10]* • New mindset may keep honest to needs of child *[desirability criteria 1]*

Outsource to existing VAA			
Features	Benefits	Challenges	USPs
Type: • Maybe could work as a hub and spoke		• Would need some rebranding • VAAs have to embrace full pathway • Would need VAA	• Building in best practice *[desirability criteria 1]*

Reach:		consortium arrangement	
• Split into lots • Geography or numbers split • Could split into sub-regions (4 London lots) using function or geography		• No 1 VAA would take all of London • What would leadership look like? • Would need significant investment • Scale • Lack of appetite for whole London approach	

4. Overarching consideration

Themes

Configurations / types:
   • Regions not universally strong
   • Would pan-London deliver better outcomes?
   • Management hub but more opts 'spokes'
   • Caution about pan-London as local structures already exist
   • Corporate parent retained in single LA
   • What is the minimum ownership? (LA trading co.)
   • Single LA model does not say anything about collaboration
   • Would 1 LA want to take on big expansion?
   • Are there LAs wanting to take lead?
   • Is there less risk in set-up, culture, and governance?
   • More risk in volumes and finance for lead LA (single LA)
   • CIC run jointly by all boroughs could work but would require great commitment from all boroughs that sign up

Areas of provision:
   • Adoption support
   • Harder to place children
   • Which models of support would best support change for the better?
   • VAAs embracing other permanency options?

Commissioning model
   • Can break down into 'lots'
   • Contracts for specific volumes
   • Known funding
   • Does it automatically expand overall VAA provision?
   • Is it just commissioning? Is there risk if going to cheapest?

Other:
   • LAs involved would shape culture
   • Exchange between RAAs – transaction costs
   • Should think more broadly, to improve outcomes for children, e.g. permanence services covering adoption, SGO's & fostering in NE, SW, NW & SE London

5. Next steps

Actions	*Due date*
Members not present to comment on the 4 models above and submit their own views.	11.02.16

The Adoptables: informing regional agency design with the views and needs of children and young people

Aim: To document/articulate the existing evidence of the views of adopted children in order to inform how regional agency services should be delivered/designed for adoptive families.

Methodology:

A. Desktop review of existing research on children's views
B. Desktop review of adopter's views of their children's needs
C. Assimilation of any London specific information and evidence of London VAAs
D. Co-produce with the Adoptables young people's recommendations for RAA design.

The desktop review covers available research from the period 2001-2016, ranging from small focus group feedback to larger online surveys. It summarises key findings only and draws learning relevant to any regional agency alongside specific elements relating to London (if/as available) to inform further development of the service specification with children/young people and with adopters.

The Adoptables have held workshops across the country including in London to develop and produce resources for adopters, policy makers and children. They propose that London RAA now enables them to lead further specific co-production session(s) in London, promotes the tools and resources they have produced (for schools, for adopters, and for training), and considers a proposal from them for the development of a help line. (See also Appendix 2 for their regionalisation workshop feedback).

Key findings

Adoption is viewed overall as positive

In the Morgan study of 208 adopted children and young people, some of the children reported being more than happy with their adoption process and the majority of children said that the best thing about being adopted is joining a new family and feeling good about them (Morgan, 2006).

The Selwyn et al research revealed that the risk of adoption breakdown is relatively low overall, with a third of 390 children reporting "no or few difficulties" and life as "brilliant" and another 30% describing it as "good" despite challenges getting the right support (Selwyn, Meakings and Wijedasa, 2015).

This is mirrored by the Independent (voluntary) Adoption Agencies of England research of 100 adopted children in 2016 who reported a high overall sense of belonging, feeling listened to and being happy with their lives.

The attached Infographic (published March 2016) indicates in particular the benefits of adoption since 100% of children engaged in the study felt they could depend upon an adult they trust compared to 75% of children generally. See Appendix 1.

Implication: in planning for the development of the regional agency, the <u>celebration </u>of adoption is important to adopted children noting that two thirds of families are working well even if planning might be built on an assumption that around one third of children can be anticipated to be in need of more intensive support.

Awaiting adoption placement

41% of children in the Morgan study found **waiting** to be the worst aspect of adoption and they wanted the process to be quicker in regard to bureaucracy. (Morgan 2006). Adopters echoed this concern in the adopter focus groups conducted by the London Regional Agency, particularly highlighting the matching process as being in need of review.

The impact of **changes in placement** prior to adoption is known to compound risk of difficulties in attachment and in sustainability of placement. Early placement methods prioritising the continuity for children are important in policy and in practice.

The Coram Concurrent Planning **longitudinal study** shows a reduction in time to adoption, cost benefit and reduction in moves to children's benefit yet only 10 authorities in London have made such placements in the last 15 years. (Coram Policy and Research Team 2013).

Morgan emphasised the importance of **Involving and supporting** the child throughout the whole process (Morgan 2006). When family finding (and depending on age), it proposes agencies ask children what type of family they would like or ask them to draw a picture. See Appendix 2 for the Adoptables feedback.

Once a family is identified, children **want to know why** their adopters want to adopt them and what the contact arrangements will be. Although children now often get a book or film of their new family in advance, the findings suggest they want more detail (Minnis and Walker, NFER 2012).

Children are aware of potential issues and recognise that adopters need **detailed information** on their needs prior to placement in order to plan for their support or to "prepare for chaos" as described by one Adoptables young person when asked about the introduction process (Coram focus group 2016).

This chimes with feedback from some adopters in the Adoption UK survey who felt that they did not have enough information about the child's individual needs prior to placement (Adoption UK, 2015). They want a **jargon-free clear report and assessment of needs** with the potential implications for support spelt out.

Children would like it to be a requirement to provide **more information** on what adoption means*.* For example, why they are being adopted, how long it will take, what happens if it goes wrong, when they will see their birth family (Morgan, 2006).

Children and young people are also eager to be kept **updated** on birth family and on the adopters. 85% thought it important to receive information about birth family. (Morgan 2006).

Some children saw the need for *pre placement assessment and therapy*. This was echoed by Family Futures adopters in a focus group (Regional Adoption Agency, 2016) and by the majority of the 390 adopters who wanted pre-adoption work with children and foster carers (Selwyn et al, 2015).

Gradually reduce contact with birth family, seek children's views on frequency and keep on-going contact under review (Morgan, 2006). The risks of unprepared contact are potentially more acute for the future generation (see below) and require different skills.

Don't change social workers in the midst of the process. Children felt the social worker's role was crucial and they want reassurance, practical support and continuity from social workers. They also want to be able to contact them easily and to have regular contact from them (Morgan, 2006).

Some children wanted the *opportunity to meet other children awaiting adoption* so that they could share worries and get peer support. (Morgan, 2006)

Eight young people from **PAC's Youth Council** produced interview questions for social workers which could be used during the recruitment process, including "Are you ready for a curious child". (PAC Youth Council feedback 2015).

The **Adoption UK** survey also states that continuity of SW is a top issue for adopters, as is having a SW who understands the needs of adopted children. They also express a need for their own emotional needs to be considered so that they are better equipped to meet their children's needs. (Adoption UK, 2015).

Implications: the regional agency needs to do different rather than just do bigger tackling the discontinuities in information and pre-placement support which children and their adopters find undermines the effectiveness of their journey and placing a new emphasis on the preparation for the child and of the child.

Looking to the future for adopters and children

Given that children embrace **integrated technology** and there is a wealth of online tools to engage and monitor their activities, more thought needs to be given on how to involve them using interactive methods they find enjoyable and reflects their lived reality which is **digital first** and requires a navigation of life history, relationships and family in a digital space changing the definitions of "local" and of "friends" and "authority". Conversely, social media **also poses a threat** to the privacy /confidentiality of adoption, and children and adopters need support and training regarding this.

Future Foundation also advises of the customer service standards and **expectations** of the digital first generation of both adopters and children. Static websites which are not mobile friendly, unanswered emails, lack of tailored content are all unacceptable in a digital era.

First4Adoption is a digital first service which won the **public sector digital project of the year** award in 2015 and has some two thirds of adopters using its e-learning system. This is government funded and available for all agencies and can tailor information to provide fully digital services for the regional agency.

Research into the future demographic landscape reveals impending **demographic changes** and the likelihood of older adopters coming forward and with an increase in prospective adopters who are single, gay and from the Asian and Black middle class (Future Foundation, 2015) as well as those who are second time parents or who have health conditions all with expectations of personalised/tailored support and information.

Local authority guidelines, publicity and preparation training may need to **be tailored** so as not to deter people from these groups coming forward as adopters and to potentially increase the pool of available people for harder to place children, thus reducing waiting time.

Implications: Digitally effective and responsive customer service is a pre-requisite for any effective regional agency which can benefit from existing resources.

Moving In and Moving On in Life

*Research reinforces that **Introductions should be phased** so that there is more time to get to know the new family better. (Morgan 2006).* Selwyn et al particularly stressed the need for a managed introduction, with foster carers being the key to a positive experience. Introductions need to be timed for when both adoptive parents and the social worker can be there and extra support provided when they don't go to plan. (Selwyn et al, 2014).

The child being given some **control over decisions** at this time has also been raised. This could be about the decoration of their new bedroom, favourite foods to eat, or toys to bring. (Coram Matching focus group, 2016).

Life story work is the bed rock of successful adoption support and is a clear entitlement for all adoption children. Coram survey and focus group work in 2014 demonstrated that in one third of cases there is no life story book completed and in a further third it is inadequate. Adoption UK surveys consistently point to the need for improvement in this area.

There is a thirst by children for information and communicative openness with clear honest narrative and they also want help with **telling their own story** including to friends (The Adoptables workshops 2015/16) with this resource now in production.

Adopter feedback for the same research, gave a 39% rating of LSB's as terrible or poor and 56% said it had not been explained to them how to use the book. 56% of workers said they rarely or never had time to produce books to a **suitable quality**. (Coram Life story book research 2015).

There is no doubt that the **collection of material** for the book is vital from the point of the child going into care. 71% of children felt it was important to be told more about their lives before they were adopted (Morgan, 2006) or of the importance for fulfilment of standards.

This is however an area where the confidence and **skill of social workers** can be developed. The Coram Life Story training programme (DfE 2015-6) found all places were booked by the end of Month 1. The project expanded and trained 220 social workers and 214 adopters. A waiting list remained at the end of the programme. Whilst 82 workers were trained from VAAs, only 58 social workers were trained from London local authorities indicating a clear priority for the regional agency.

Across all of the available research, one of the crucial issues for children is **contact with birth family** and not just parents, extended family as well. In a film produced by young people, children spoke of their disappointment when contact dates get changed and they long to see their siblings when they have been split up. They want letterbox contact changed; they want to be sure that they will get information about birth families as they worry about them. (Coram and After Adoption: Contact in Adoption).

Implications: *the regional agency will benefit from prioritising the delivery of high quality life story work and from designing in a dynamic role support by and for children.*

Adoption Support

Therapeutic support

Children recognised the **benefits of therapeutic intervention** and this chimes with adopter feedback. In Coram's life story book research, it was named as the most useful means of support by most children.

The need for **early therapeutic support** is clear. Coram's evaluation of its creative therapy service in London reveals a need for support at key transition points for children e.g. 4-5yrs and 10-11yrs in particular. (Coram, Creative Therapy evaluation, 2015).

Some children spoke about the need for adopters to have a ***refresher course in how to deal with challenging behaviour and on how to communicate with them.*** (Coram matching focus group, 2016).

Coram's evaluation of adopter's parent programmes supports this as 71% report **challenging behaviours** and only 19% felt confident as a parent to be able to manage them prior to a programme. (Coram parent programme evaluation 2015).

Regular offerings of **preventive/open access therapeutic parenting groups** is welcomed with a number offered by voluntary adoption agencies at scale including pre-school group (to tackle the stigma mothers who have adopted may feel in generic programmes offered at children's centres), Webster Stratton adapted programme (for aged 4-9yrs) and STOP for the parents of adolescents.

The Selwyn et al research revealed that children who **showed violence as they got older** had generally been showing aggression from a young age and it is therefore vital to take this seriously and provide support pre placement in order to avoid the issues exacerbating in the adoptive placement. (Selwyn et al, 2014).

Adopter feedback to Cornerstone (which is in operation in three London boroughs) also recommends training on this issue which is often hidden due to **shame** (Cornerstone partnership 2015).

Implications: *pro-active offering of therapeutic parenting groups in to the regional agency design and in ways which include non-stigmatised delivery and open access.*

Peer support for adopted children and young people

Half of the children who responded to the Morgan survey didn't want to meet other adopted children as they didn't want to compare themselves to others or because they didn't want to

be different but those children, who are able to *meet with other adopted children*, generally find it helpful. (Morgan 2006).

Adopters saw this as important especially for transracially adopted children (London Regional Adoption Agency focus group, 2016) and those whose children have participated have reported the impact positively (Coram Adoptables).

Family Futures work indicates that with the vast numbers of young people following bloggers and watching You Tube clips, these are both areas that need to be addressed and could be tapped into in terms of adoption support with the appropriate safeguards attached.

The PAC youth council wanted (and now have) access to a **website and online forum** for teen adoptees and they have produced top tips for dealing with a bad day which would be useful for all adopted children (PAC youth council feedback 2015).

Implications: *All children should therefore be offered access to age appropriate peer support with a choice of whether they take up group attendance or prefer other options so that all adopted children can gain support from each other.*

Dealing with School

The need for *more support in School* has been widely reported across most of the available previously quoted research. Advice on how to secure the Pupil Premium to access support for children, has been one of the most popular reasons for adopters with children placed telephoning the First4Adoption advice line. (First4Adoption Impact report 2015).

The issue of **teacher insensitivity** and children being bullied has emerged for children who are open about being adopted. In the Morgan research, 37% children did not tell other children at School they were adopted unless they were a close friend (Morgan, 2006).

Children in Coram's Adoptables support group have fed back that there is a negative stigma around adoption which invites **bullying** and have produced short films on different aspects of the issues.

Adopters have requested an **adopter-School charter** (Cornerstone partnership, 2015) and PAC's youth council has suggested that Adoption should be on the national curriculum (PAC Youth Council feedback 2015).

The Coram Adoptables and Coram Life Education have created a new **teaching resource for Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3** which includes the option for delivery by a peer educator, a young person from The Adoptables. This has been piloted in specific London schools and is available from June for use in all London schools.

For children with intense or specific issues, social work skill in **dealing with school issues** and accessing specific support is essential and has been advanced by PAC and Coram in particular in London.

Children want social workers to *monitor how they are getting on* after they move into their new adoptive placement and to be spoken to alone and for the social worker to check with their School how they are getting on. Some want this person to be separate from the adopter's social worker. (Morgan 2006).

Implications: the regional agency will need to embrace the presenting issues of school experience and can utilise the available resources and groups to define service further.

Access to quality support

4 in 5 adopters adopt through an LA agency and data shows that adopters rate post adoption support as poor with only 35% viewing the social worker as "very helpful" post approval (Literature Review, 2015).

The Selwyn research reveals that 60% adopters don't keep in touch with their agency once they have the Adoption Order.

If adopters are not in touch with their agency, they may have **limited knowledge** of the range of support available to them including the entitlement to assessment and to pupil premium. This is indicated by the feedback from the London regional adopters meeting.

More **proactive tools** need to be used to close this information gap and provide for adopter-led support and information including by consultation with We Are Family and via social media. The voluntary agencies have trained social media champions who may assist.

When asked what might have helped, children who had experienced an adoption breakdown spoke about an **advice line** for them to ring when there are difficulties or when they have queries (Selwyn et al, 2015). The Adoptables and First4Adoption offer a potential platform for this, albeit with the caveat that trained counsellors are required to staff the advice line due to the potentially high level of need that the children will present.

Implications: London region has prioritised consistent support as part of its vision; this will need to embrace pro-active offers of support and advice to achieve much greater levels of access as indicated by the low levels of Adoption Support Fund applications in the capital.

Conclusions

> ➢ Children want to be consulted and heard.
> ➢ Children want one consistent social worker from start to finish who will consult, involve and keep them informed through out the adoption process, as well as to offer emotional support via regular contact.
> ➢ Children want to know why they could not stay at home and to have more detailed information on their new adoptive family.
> ➢ They want changes such as contact arrangements and introductions to the new family to be gradual, based on individual needs and choices rather than a rigid guideline or timescale.
> ➢ They understand the need for and welcome support pre and post placement both for themselves and their adoptive parents.
> ➢ Adopters also want primarily the same things.
> ➢ London has an opportunity to deliver and to work with adopted young people like the Adoptables to co-produce a service which works.

Summary of recommendations:

6. Celebrate adoption for the benefit of adoptive children and families, building a positive climate of support in all contributing agencies.

7. Consult and involve children from start to finish, updating them on progress in the process of adoption and including co-production for the benefit of the RAA.

8. Life story work from the point of entry to care with trained social workers and adopters prepared to adopt (Coram training and F4A tools available)

9. Better reports to adopters in respect of children's backgrounds and needs

10. Involve children in preparation training for adopters (see The Adoptables)

11. Information pack about adoption for children (see Coram BAAF publications)

12. Review of matching approaches including reduction in waiting time for children and adopters, and plan for phased introductions for children

13. Gradual reduction in contact and reviewed in consultation with the child.

14. Consideration of an advice line for children.

15. Offer information on support groups and email resources made by adopted children including those available for the school curriculum (KS2 and 3).

16. Improve consistency of access to specific support for adopters/children with school

17. Better quality assurance and accountability to ensure the above is happening for children across the board.

18. Therapy for children before placement and after.

19. Training for adopters on how to communicate with their children especially as adolescents and refresher parenting programmes on behaviour management.

20. Use of technology to communicate with children, to seek their views and to engage/enhance takes up of services and entitlements by adopters.

21. Consideration of proposals from The Adoptables (see Appendix 2) and approaches for young people to address specific service design questions to inform the development of the RAA.

22. London-wide consideration of the contribution to National Adoption Week in the light of the views of children.

Sandra Latter
Coram Adoption and Social Work Consultant

May 2016

Appendixes:

Appendix 1: Big Adoption Day Infographic - Independent Adoption Agencies of England, 2015.

Appendix 2: The Adoption Process and Regionalisation – Adoptables, May 2016.

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REGIONALISING ADOPTION: ADOPTION PANEL ADVISORS

EVENT SUMMARY: THEMES AND ACTIONS

Date: Wednesday 6 January, 10:00 – 12:00
Venue: London Councils

23. Attendance

In attendance	
Name	**Organisation**
Lisa Garnett (Regionalisation Project Manager)	NEL CSU
Roisin Hegarty	Brent
Hilary Eastham	Triborough
Kathy Maggs	Coram
Eva Lindsay	Merton
Pal Jandu	Camden
Jean Smith	PACT
Florence Mo	Lewisham
Jill Plummer	Hillingdon
Julia Rosewood	Hounslow
Mussarat Gul	Newham
Usha Sharma	Ealing
Maria Ologbosere	Barking
Carrie Wilson	Barking
Paula Lyttle	Wandsworth
John Remfry	Redbridge
Karen Stoodley	Waltham Forest
Henrietta Delalu	Croydon
Justin Simon	West London Consortium

24. Vision and Criteria

Themes
Response to vision document: • Vision is consistent with expectations
Panel areas of impact on achievement of design criteria: • Provide quality assurance • Panels need to be frequent enough (and possible to flexibly convene) to prevent delay to the child's journey. • Joint panels enable consideration of wider permanence options and other quality aspects of care of looked after children. • Train social workers to understand requirements of case and documentation for approval by panel, and joint panel and social worker training.
Requirements to enable achievement of outcomes: • Strong relationships with social work teams to raise risks, act as a critical friend • Accessibility of panels to the workers presenting cases • Knowledge of the child's local authority in relation to local practice • Knowledge of the child's location authority to advise on contact and support plans available. • High quality, well completed documentation needs to be provided.

• Feedback from adopters suggest that it helps if the panel represents the demographic of the family. • Ability to use 'Freedom and Flexibilities'.	

25. Current State - Panels

LA/ VAA	Type	Ind. Advisors	Other Advisors	Covers	Cases/ panel	Panel Freq.
Croydon	Separate		1	1	2 (0.5d)	2/month +urg
Waltham Forest	Joint F&A Not SGO	1 (Int)		1	5	2/month +urg
Redbridge	Joint F&A		1	Coram partner	5-6	2/month +urg
Wandsworth	Joint A&P F separate		1	1	2 (0.5d)	1/month +urg
Barking	Separate		1	1	2-3	1/month
Ealing	Joint A&P	1 (Ext)		1	5	2/month – move to 1/month
Newham	Separate and joint		2	1	6 (0.5d)	Adopt 1/month Joint alt. weeks
Hounslow	Joint A&P, separate F	1 (Int)	1 (fost)	1	2	1/month +urg
Hillingdon	Joint	1 (Int)		1	2 (0.5d)	Alt weeks +urg
Lewisham	A only	1 (Int)		1	2-3 (0.5d)	Alt weeks (no recent urgent)
PACT	Joint A&F		1	1	5	2/month – move to 1/month
Camden	Joint A&P&F Not SGO		1	1	5 (most F or P)	2/month
Merton	Joint A&P&F Not SGO	1 (Int)		1	3-6	1/month +urg
Coram	Joint A&F	1 (Int)		1	3	2/month London 1/month E.Mids
Triborough	Joint A&F Int. forum SGO	1 (Int)		3	5-6	3/month +urg
Brent	Separate Int forum SGO		1	1	2-3 (0.5d)	3/month +urg

26. Options for regionalised models

Themes
Broad management models possible: • No change • Central shared service commissioning body • Sub-regions • Centralised (pan-London) led by new organisation, current LA or VAA.
Points raised in relation to options: • Are private options a possibility? • Considering governments target size for regionalised agency, will these be revised based on trends in numbers of adoptions? • Key is how we address mismatch between adopters and children – the strategy

needs to change with the model – Adopt Berkshire cited as model for new strategy.
- How can quality be maintained at greater scale?
- Funding for strategy and model will need to be permanent. Many improvements made on temporary funds.
- Model should consider other permanency options and be child-led.

27. Benefits and Challenges of Regionalisation for Panels

Themes – focus on Triborough experience
Benefits: • Increased panel frequency • Shared panel costs • Enabled joint panels and allowed dual assessment • Increased pool of adopters to meet child needs.
Challenges: • Project – intensive planning required – timescales may be challenging • Relationships with borough teams impact the ability to provide quality assurance to the process. Difficulties of building relationships with multiple children's service team and ADMs could create inefficiencies and creates a challenge for raising risks and concerns. Distance from teams creating inefficiency in chasing documents. • Complexity of service delivery – practically working with multiple organisations using their different processes even different letterheads for different organisations. Awareness of culture of different local authorities. • System differences –IT and HR systems vary by organisation • Panel team organisation – how to maintain in-panel relationships and consistency across panels (balance between flexibility and consistency), managing panel member reviews • Adoption support - Would there still be differences in support provision?
Other comments: • Where would the responsibility lie? Would ADMs be centralised? • Could pilots (perhaps more advanced regionalisation projects) indicate the best approach? • IRM model could be looked at to understand opportunity and difficulties. • We should learn from experience such as tri-borough.

28. Next steps
- Session to be summarised for inclusion in options development workshop on 15th Jan.
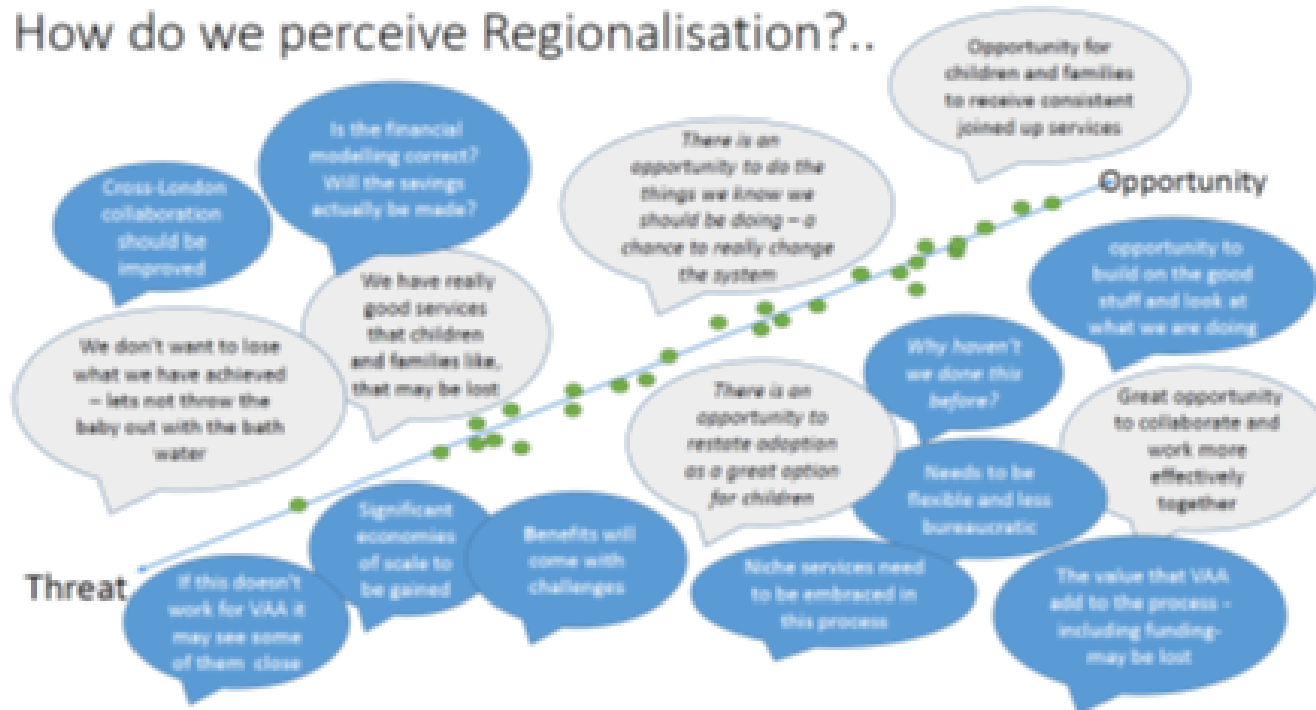- Set up future meeting in couple of months to discuss emerging model

London Adoption
Regionalisation
Options Development
Workshop Summary
January 2016

Perceptions and benefits of regionalisation

Benefits of regionalisation

1. Ability to provide a consistent offer of support across London
2. Improve practice and outcomes across London
3. Create a consistent system
4. Achieve economies of scale

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1. Central point of contact for:
   - Prospective adopters
   - For children
   - Access to prospective adopters
2. Better adoption support
   - Specialised therapeutic support
   - Full spectrum of support
   - Financial packages
3. Integrate adoption with child protection systems

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1. Efficiencies
2. Alignment of processes and better collaboration
3. Post permanency consistency
4. Skilled staff in larger numbers
5. Extend to Special guardianship orders

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1. No post code lottery
2. Integrated services
3. Streamlined services
4. Monitored and researched
5. Collective voice and buying power

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1. Better use of resources through removal of unnecessary duplication
2. Collaboration not Competition
3. Sharing of resources – especially adoption support
4. Consistency of services
5. Influence and insight

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1. Development of the adoption support market
2. Improve parts of the system through specialisation
3. Opportunity for harder to place children to find families
4. Sharing of good practice
5. Improved tracking

Expected outcomes from the adoption journey –
scale of commissioning and delivery

Child journey pre-placement order

Outcome	Commissioning scale	How to deliver
Efficient and effective permanency planning in each LA	Local	Locally
Life story work begins and follows the child's journey until AO or SGO in place	Local and sub-regional	Multiple providers delivering locally with social workers
Every child will have a draft adoption support plan in place	Regional	Multiple providers delivering locally with social workers
Every child is identified with adopters at point of placement order	Regional and national	Local delivery with regional overview
Consistent legal advice leading to standardised court timescales	Regional	Regional and centralised
Greater number of children in potential permanent placement at time of entering care – concurrency. F&A	(Sub) Regional	Local delivery but drawing from a central pool

Additional comments:
See the journey as a local one, but with regional commissioning opportunities. Highlighted the need for consistency in court requirements and timelines. A regional service might create a stronger voice to seek more consistent court practice. There is a need in this area of the journey to consider the legal responsibility of LA for child.

Child journey from placement order to adoption order

Outcome	Commissioning scale	How to deliver	Comments
Regular family finding meetings	Regional and sub-regional		Without interagency fee being a consideration
Family finding is widened and more varied	Regional and national	Consistent and efficient practice in matching visits to meet needs of child	
Consistency and high standard that is robust within court processes	Regional		How to manage placements outside of region?
Improved and more engagement with birth families	Regional		
Birth family access to independent advice and advocacy – better contact, meet adopters, permission	Regional		
Children's profile of high standard	Regional	Centralised in one location	
Adoption as an option considered and planned for as early as possible	Locally with regional standards		
Matching panels at the point of need for the child	Sub-regional	Consistent quality assurance – redesign/ review panel function	

Adopter journey – Marketing, recruitment and assessment

Outcome	Commissioning scale	How to deliver
Delivery of accessible services regardless of locality	Regional	- Sub-regional prep groups, foundation days, info meetings
One brand for London – professional personal service	Regional	
A competent, consistent, informed, expert, professional response to adopter enquiries	Regional	- Professional, centralised social work adoption service from first point of contact
Consistent panel system and strong QA, feasible timeliness	Regional	Sub-regional including for VAAs
Consistent delivery model of assessment	Regional	
Central assessment team to consistent standards, methods and expectations	Regional	
Post-adoption services commissioned but included and promised in branding	- Centralised clinical governance for therapeutic support - Bespoke commissioning for special situations (e.g. disability	- One London allowance offer - London-wide out of hours support service for adopters

Adopter journey – Training and support

Outcome	Commissioning scale	How to deliver
	Comment: You either do it or you don't! Sub-regions continue postcode lottery.	
Linking prospective adopters together	Sub-regional	Local in all locations and driven by adopters
Central brain	Regional	Central in one location
Real children seen earlier	Regional	Multiple providers co-ordinated centrally
Specialist training on need of specific children	Regional	Multiple providers co-ordinated centrally
Adopter and adoptee –led training	Sub-regional	Local delivery in all locations
Improved communication Insight to action	Regional – everywhere	Centralised in one location and fed outwards
Dual approval – domestic and intercountry	Regional	Multiple providers, co-ordinated centrally

Adoption support (group 1)

Outcome	Commissioning scale	How to deliver	Comments
Integrated and accessible therapeutic life story work delivered to excellent professional standards from the point the child enters the care system	All commissioned centrally (regional)	**In general** Tier 1 - in the home or locally Tier 2 - in the home or locally Tier 3 - regional or sub-regional Solid long-term contractual arrangements with a variety of post-adoption support advisors Complementary joined-up services between providers so no gaps.	Recognition of the impact of: - Child assessments - Adoption assessments - Matching - Preparation All on adoption support Importance of a permanence focus Could equally apply to SBOs
Better assessments of children – levels			
Recognition of lifelong needs and long term planning for families			
Cohesive and extensive availability of post-adoption support across London			
Tiered approach that includes a universal offer			
Ensure that we offer some post-adoption support that is not overly professionalised but is relevant to the child.			
Healthy relationship based on non-blaming culture with a focus on support and learning			
Equal post-adoption support available to all adoptive families in London			
The agency responds to learning in order that innovation, creativity and improvements inform service development			
The agency monitors outcomes in order to develop an evidence base			
Adoption support model linked with safeguarding service within LAs			

Adoption support (group 2)

Outcome	Commissioning scale	How to deliver
We will ensure prospective adopters are encouraged to access the training they need across London once they are approved	Commissioned centrally (regional)	Delivered either: Locally – e.g. parent support Sub-regionally Centrally – high cost, low incidence support
We will ensure access to post-adoption support for all types of permanency solutions.		
We will use the collective strength of the regionalised service to access appropriate health and education support.		
We will improve access to post-adoption support by removing the boundaries in terms of geography and timescales.		
We will reduce the postcode lottery for adopters making and clear and transparent approach for post-adoption support in London.		

Option Assessment Criteria

Desirability Criteria – defined in vision statement

	Desirabiltiy Criteria (defined in vision statement)	What does this mean
1	Child-centred, focused on achieving the best outcomes for all London's children in need of an adoptive placement.	Impact on key outcomes for the child, including • Timeliness • Match success • Satisfaction with support • Long term outcomes
2	Pan-London solution ensuring sufficient number of children and reducing any "postcode lottery" of provision across the capital and improving support for adopters.	Variation in the achievement of above outcomes across the region
3	Regional focus on capacity and sufficiency ensuring equality of provision.	Impact on the match of adopters to children
4	Effective and high quality delivery of all statutory duties in relation to adoption and adoption support across London, utilising "Freedoms and Flexibilities" available to local authorities enshrined in amendments to the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.	Impact on capability or capacity to deliver statutory duties
5	Creates an ability to work flexibly around a new London offer.	Ability to manage variation in demand for adoption v SGO and other permanence arrangements through the workforce
6	Encompasses aspects of other permanency options into the future.	Extent to which model would be suitable for SGOs, fostering and other permanence arrangements
7	Commits to close collaboration between all stakeholders.	Partnership working
8	Considers the options for pooling resources and sharing responsibilities, including the legal functions currently performed by individual boroughs.	Considers possibility of funding or responsibility sharing
9	Maintains and builds a clear relationship with London boroughs who remain responsible for the journey of the child.	Maintains clear communication with LAs and in particular, child social work teams
10	Works closely with VAA partners.	Extent of VAA involvement in the new model
11	A cost efficient and effective delivery approach enabling local authorities to deliver significant cost savings in adoption services whilst maintain high quality provision to children and families.	Impact on cost per adoption Efficiency of delivery of processes relating to the adopter and child journeys
12	The majority of funding for the regionalised model will go towards direct work to increase stable, secure, adoptive families for London's children.	Impact on proportion of cost spent on direct service delivery

Desirability criteria – discussed/ identified in workshop

Category	Desirability criteria discussion points in workshop	Emerging Criteria
Speed	- Speeds up the process	See previous list
Scale	- Economies of scale	See previous list
Choice	- Retaining choice for adopters - Must allow for different services fitting different models	Retains choice of appropriate services for adopters
Culture	- Cultural shift should not be underestimated - Shared culture, aim and purpose - Model that allows strong leadership	Considers the development of the organisational culture with strong leadership and clear values
General outcomes comments	- Improves outcomes discussed through more reach, resource, availability and flexibility - Improved outcomes for children	See previous list and outcomes delivery slides

Feasibility criteria – identified in the workshop

Category	Discussion points	Emerging Criteria
Staff	- Staff transfer will turn into staff applying - Fewer redundancies preferable - Implication for performance - Harmonise T&Cs for staff over time - Terms and conditions honoured - How do you avoid staff leaving	Staff terms and conditions can be easily managed
Permanency	- Potential to undertake private adoptions - Maintain link between permanency planning in LA processes - Employ permanency workers to remain in each borough	Maintains clear links to permanency planning in local authority processes
Pensions	- Staff pension, salary, location - Pensions and the challenge of an older workforce in LAs - LA pensions to be maintained	Enables staff to retain local authority pension scheme
Information and systems	- IT systems need to talk to one another - Diverse solutions to IT systems - Data collection and FOI function required	Changes required to enable IT system connectivity are possible within financial and timescale constraints
Procurement	- Flexibility and financial competition of agencies - Penalty clauses in existing contracts	Impact on procurement risk
Regulation	- Ofsted to catch up with the RAA	Model can be successfully assessed as required by Ofsted
Ownership	- LA ownership - Care planning decisions stay in LA	LA have stake in ownership of RAA
Stability	- Sustainable model that will not be lost - Retaining expertise, knowledge and growing skills - Maintain and develop workforce	Maintains and develops the knowledge and skills of the workforce

- Bringing staff along by giving them a positive vision
- Effective change management process needed
- Opportunity to shape voluntary market for children's needs and interests