

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF A REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY (RAA)**

### **Report of the Chief Officer (Children's Services)**

*Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect*

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Cabinet;

1. Approves the recommendation for establishing a Regional Adoption Agency (Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency), hosted by Devon County Council
2. Approves the acceptance of the statutory and legal functions relating to adoption services as set out in [paragraph 7] of this Report, delegated by Somerset County Council, Plymouth City Council, and Torbay Council to Devon County Council as the host local authority.
3. Authorises the Chief Officer (Children's Services), the County Treasurer, and County Solicitor to finalise and agree the proposed Inter Authority Agreement and any other appropriate legal and financial agreements with Somerset County Council, Plymouth City Council, and Torbay Council in order for the proposed services set out within this report to be provided by the Regional Adoption Agency.
4. Agrees to the transfer of staff under TUPE regulations to Devon County Council and authorises the Chief Officer (Children's Services) and the head of HR to complete all necessary actions that are required to support the delivery of the adoption services by the Regional Adoption Agency.
5. Notes that an annual report on the performance of the Regional Adoption Agency will be provided to the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills and the Children's Scrutiny Committee.

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report requests approval to enable the transition from four separate local authority adoption services to a single Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) hosted by Devon County Council with effect from October 2018.
- 1.2 Devon County Council, Somerset County Council, Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council are proposing to address the Government's requirement for adoption agencies to be consolidated into a single Regional Adoption Agency by forming the Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency.
- 1.3 This activity is driven by new legislation – the *Education and Adoption Act 2016* which advised authorities to join together to form Regional Adoption Agencies. The Act gives the Secretary of State powers to direct authorities to do so in the future.

## **2. The National Context**

- 2.1 In June 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) published '[Regionalising Adoption](#)' and asked all adoption agencies in England to consider how to work much more closely together on a regional basis. [The Adoption and Children Act 2002 makes provision for authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to join together to form Regional Adoption Agencies \(RAA\)](#).
- 2.2 The Section 15 of the [Education and Adoption Act 2016](#) gives the Secretary of State a new power to direct one or more named local authorities to make arrangements for any or all of their adoption functions to be carried out on their behalf by one of the local authorities named, or by another agency.
- 2.3 The Government's view is that structural change will improve the process for children and adopters. The DfE expects the Regional Adoption Agency programme to deliver consistently good and innovative adoption practice that ensures improved life chances for children.
- 2.4 Alongside the Regional Adoption Agency agenda, the national challenges facing the sector outlined through analysis by the National Adoption Leadership board are:
  - Since September 2013, the number of decisions for adoption has almost halved because of the impact of recent court cases.
  - The number of Placement Orders granted has also declined nationally.
  - Workforce development and close work between the Regional Adoption Agencies, the children's social care teams, and Local Family Justice Boards will be key to addressing this issue, and to the success of Regional Adoption Agencies.

## **3. The Regional context**

- 3.1 The [Adopt South West](#) co-operative regional adoption partnership was launched in April 2015. The adoption agencies in the Adopt South West partnership were Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council, Somerset County Council, Barnardo's and Families for Children. The scope of the Adopt South West partnership has been the co-operation and co-delivery in marketing and recruitment of adopters and the running of information days and training events for adopters to develop the support available for adopters and improve the matching of children. All other adoption services remained within the discrete organisations.

## **4. Performance**

- 4.1 Across the Adopt South West region, between 2012 and 2017, there has been a 43% increase in the number of looked after children to 2,692 and a 31% increase in the number of adoptions; however, in line with national trends the number of adoptions over the past 3 years are declining, this is evidenced in Table 1 below that depicts the number of Children approved for placement and the number of Adopters approved over the past 3 years.

Table 1:

Data for the Region	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Children needing placements	165	139	150	140
Adopters approved	126	127	104	74

- 4.2 Over the past 3 years the number of Looked after Children has continued to increase whilst the number of Looked after Children adopted has reduced by 4.13% returning to levels seen in 2013/14 from a peak in 2014/15. This is in line with government expectations that no more than 10% of Looked After Children be adopted, with the majority supported to remain in the birth family environment.

**Table 2: Looked After Children adopted**

	2015	2016	2017	% LAC adopted 3yr Variance
<b>Plymouth</b>	10.13%	5.98%	7.30%	-2.83%
<b>Devon</b>	8.57%	3.72%	4.85%	-3.72%
<b>Somerset</b>	11.22%	6.99%	4.67%	-6.55%
<b>Torbay</b>	6.56%	7.50%	3.58%	-2.98%
<b>Total</b>	9.26%	5.59%	5.13%	-4.13%

- 4.3 Statistically the region overall is performing better than 3 years ago and this trend will look to be continued.
- 4.4 Similar trends in statistical performance are being seen across the partners in the Adopt South West Region, however one of the key issues for the development of a RAA is the current differential in adoption performance across the Local Authorities with varying grades in Ofsted Inspection; Torbay, and Plymouth 'Require Improvement' whilst Somerset and Devon are 'Good'. The Voluntary Adoption Agencies in the region perform well and will remain an important partner of the RAA.
- 4.5 It is clear there is a need to secure best practice and outcomes and share this across the region, whilst guarding against any deterioration in performance for individual agencies. This is a key outcome for the RAA.

## 5. Options considered

- 5.1 Adopt South West is one of 19 such groups funded to achieve a Regional Adoption Agency, and one of the early decisions required was which delivery model to select. The DfE proscribed four possible options for a delivery model for a Regional Adoption Agency and provided a national scoring system as a tool to aid discussions, the purpose of which was to examine the desirability, feasibility and viability of each option.

DfE Prescribed Options:

1. A Local Authority single host, on behalf of several Local Authorities e.g. Aspire, Dorset hosts services for three Local Authorities.
2. Joint Venture between Local Authorities; a new public sector owned Local Authority Trading Co. e.g. Achieving for Children, Kingston and Richmond's Children's Services
3. A new Voluntary Adoption Agency; possibly a Joint Venture with flexibility for public & third sector ownership, e.g. Entrust Schools Service in Staffordshire.
4. Existing Voluntary Adoption Agency; Local Authorities involved commission an existing Voluntary Adoption Agency to deliver the RAA, e.g. Coram.

## 6. Recommended option

- 6.1 The six partners in the Adopt South West adoption agency partnership scored the benefits of each option against an agreed set of assessment criteria. This was completed by the Regional Adoption Agency project governance group, consisting of the Local Authorities Director/ Heads of Service, Executives of Families for Children and Barnardo's Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Chaired by the Director of Children's Services from Somerset.
- 6.2 Following consideration of each possible model, the preference was for Option 1: A Local Authority single host on behalf of several Local Authorities. Section five of this report and appendix one of the full business case (attached as **Appendix 1** to this report) detail the options analysis.
- 6.3 There has been consideration of this arrangement as an interim step to considering Option 2 further, however this has been further reflected upon drawing on others' experience and DfE learning from the broader National RAA Programme in the autumn of 2017 and is not recommended to be progressed.
- 6.4 The clear benefit of the Local Authority Hosted model identified would be to achieve the integration of the four Local Authority adoption services into one service, providing a best practice model that maintains and develops the current relationship with Voluntary agencies established in the delivery of the Adopt South West partnership.
- 6.5 Further to this, it was proposed that Devon County Council host the Regional Agency Adoption as Devon;
  - Operates an adoption service rated Good;
  - Has successfully innovated in many areas (e.g. foster to adopt, young people's engagement);
  - Has the capacity to deliver given the size of the agency and the Local Authority;
  - Has the experience of developing other services that Devon hosts for the region;
  - Is centrally placed geographically.
- 6.6 The development of the RAA will not absolve each Local Authority of its statutory responsibilities but will allow for certain functions to be delegated to Devon as the host authority. Devon will then become responsible for the performance of those functions, on behalf of the partner Local Authorities, subject to the governance arrangements set out later in this document.
- 6.7 By becoming the 'host' Devon allows for all relevant functions and resources of each Local Authority to be transferred to it as host in 2018 and is responsible

for ensuring effective arrangement for, and the transfer of, services to the RAA within the expected timescales as set out to the Department for Education.

## **7. Delegated functions**

- 7.1 In summary after the required agreements are in place, the host becomes responsible for;
- Providing leadership for all adoption services across the RAA
  - Recruitment, assessment and training of adopters
  - Post Adoption support for all children within the designated boundaries.
  - Oversight of Adoption Support Fund applications
  - Family finding and matching child with adopter
  - Agency Decision Maker for the adopters
  - Adoption support for any child that moves out the RAA area, for a period of 3 years.
  - Quality assurance framework for adoption
  - Accountability for the adoption service aspect of a Local Authority Ofsted inspection framework.
- 7.2 The details of the functions being delegated to Devon by the other three authorities will be recorded in the Inter Authority Agreement.
- 7.3 For the full list of responsibilities transferring, please refer to **Appendix 3**.

## **8. Vision for the Devon County Council hosted Regional Adoption Agency**

- 8.1 The stated vision agreed by the partner authorities for the RAA to achieve improved outcomes for children and families is to:
- Create a system where children are matched with the most suitable adopter as quickly as possible.
  - Achieve sufficient scale of Adopter recruitment to provide a pool of adopters, well prepared and well matched to the needs of children waiting.
  - Offer sufficient, high quality adoption support services; effective short-term interventions, sign posting and enabling access to appropriate support
- 8.2 This will be achieved with a value for money service, that:
- encourages innovation in practice;
  - actively listens to and learns from children, adopters and staff to develop and improve the services provided;
  - draws on the best practice across the region and make this the standard; and
  - delivers consistently across the region.
- 8.3 The RAA will create a system where recruitment takes place at a sufficient scale to provide a pool of 'adoption ready' adopters that are well matched to the needs of children waiting; that is large enough so that children are matched with the most suitable adopter as quickly as possible and that offers an adoption support service that is of a high quality.

## **9. Outcomes**

9.1 The key outcomes set for the RAA reflect DfE intentions for the Regional Adoption Agencies programme, national performance standards as well by what a successful adoption service looks like as told by partners, children and adopters-

- Improved life chances for children
- Developing services with Adopters to achieve better outcomes for Children
- Reduced delays for children and adopters throughout the Adoption journey
- Taking what we do best and making it consistent across the region;
- Taking opportunities for innovative practice across the spectrum
- A cost-effective service for all Local Authorities
- Improved practice and support, regardless of the permanence option
- Improved support for Adopters, Birth Parents and their families
- Place children with families more effectively and with minimal disruption
- The RAA will work together with Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Adopters and Parents to improve practice

9.2 The achievement of these outcomes for children and adults affected by adoption will see benefits for each Local Authority. There will be benefits reflected in LAC performance and budgets and there will be a clear link to the Early Permanence agenda and strategies.

9.3 Ofsted will not inspect the RAA as an entity but as the provider of services to the Local Authority being inspected.

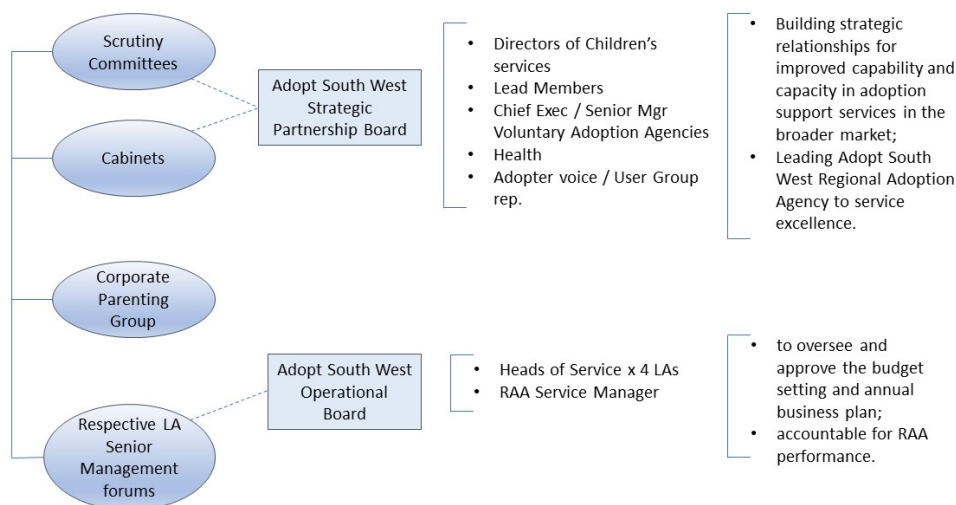
## **10. Success measures**

10.1 The RAA will target improved performance in areas that will reflect the vision and outcomes described for the RAA at national and local level. The planned process of building RAA data from the ground up will ensure robustness of data provided for national reporting purposes. Key performance indicators have been agreed. These will be reported nationally.

10.2 Each service area has a clear target set for Year 1 and a method of measurement identified and agreed. A further target is to improve the collection of key data to improve reporting across the service supporting managers in early identification of success or of areas for rapid improvement focus.

## **11. RAA governance**

11.1 The Governance of the RAA will be arranged to ensure strategic roles for the Voluntary agencies, Local Authority Lead Members, Health and other partners and User Group representation, whilst also reflecting the operational oversight required by the host and partner authorities, through a Board structure. A summary is provided below.



## 12. Financial considerations

- 12.1 Pages 12 to 15 of the full business case (see **Appendix 2**) set out the planned budget, which is built on a principle of 'no additional adoption revenue budget cost to any Local Authority or the Host'. Set up costs and corporate overheads falling to Devon as the host have been factored in. Risk sharing mechanisms have been agreed and will be included in the Inter-Authority Agreement.

Table 3 below sets out the headline figures.

**Table 3: Funding model**

Authority	Revised budget based on a weighted formula approach	Proportion of New Budget
Devon	£1,695,361	36.33%
Plymouth	£1,027,168	22.01%
Somerset	£1,138,707	24.40%
Torbay	£805,030	17.26%
	<b>£4,666,266</b>	

- 12.2 The proposed funding has been produced by reflecting the budgets for 18/19 as 50% of the formula, the remaining 50% consists of weighting 4 key activity criteria [3 years historic trend information]. Inter Agency Fees are included as a weighted criterion to better reflect Authority budget pressures

### Criteria

- LAC 9 and under [a nationally published statistic]
- ADM decisions [a nationally published statistic]
- Adoption Support instances [locally recorded statistic]
- Inter Agency Fees [locally recorded statistic]

**Weighted Criteria** - The breakdown of the criteria weightings is outlined below (table 4):

**Table 4: Funding apportionment under the agreed formula**

Total Budget	4,666,263	Budget Weighting 50%	Activity Weighting 50%				Revised budget based on a weighted formula approach
		100%	30%	30%	15%	25%	
	18/19 Budget (Exc Overheads)	18/19 Budget	Children in care 9 & under in year	Number of ADM decisions in year	Adoption Support - open cases	Inter Agency "Other" Exp 3 Year Avg	
Devon	1,746,450	853,757	234,952	261,498	139,010	206,144	1,695,361
Plymouth	1,073,190	524,632	154,450	168,966	62,869	116,251	1,027,168
Somerset	1,113,604	544,389	185,661	189,054	121,546	98,057	1,138,707
Torbay	839,421	410,353	124,875	80,423	26,545	162,830	805,026
	<b>4,772,664</b>	<b>2,333,131</b>	<b>699,938</b>	<b>699,941</b>	<b>349,970</b>	<b>583,282</b>	<b>4,666,262</b>

### 13. Environmental Impact Conditions

- 13.1 There are no specific environmental related issues arising from the report, key findings and proposed actions for the coming year.

### 14. Equality Considerations

- 14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and attached as **Appendix 4**.

### 15. Risk Management Considerations

- 15.1 Potential risks have been considered and appropriate mitigations put in place (**Appendix 5**)

Jo Olsson, Chief Officer (Children's Services)

**Electoral Divisions:** All

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor James McInnes  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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## Appendix 1

### Option Appraisal 2016 - Summary of Regional Adoption Agency Model

<b>Assessment Criteria Options were assessed against whether the option for the delivery vehicle for the RAA can -</b>					
	<b>1. Hosted by a single Local Authority on behalf of a number of Local Authorities</b>	<b>2. Joint Venture between Local Authorities – a new public sector owned entity</b>	<b>3. Creation of a new Voluntary Adoption Agency</b>	<b>4 Outsourcing to an existing Voluntary Adoption Agency</b>	<b>5 No action</b>
	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
Improve outcomes for children in all areas of Adopt South West region whether rural, urban, more affluent or deprived	420	420	310	250	80
Maximise opportunities for practice improvement across the area so that Adopt South West becomes a centre of excellence and Ofsted scores improve across the region	380	390	340	260	60
Improves adopter support	400	370	290	300	120
Creates an RAA that can deliver placements for harder to place priority children i.e. aged over 4, bme, siblings, disabled children	140	135	100	100	30
Facilitates an adequate level of partnership and control for the local authorities to manage risk to Local Authorities	105	70	55	45	45
Facilitates Voluntary Adoption Agency involvement	70	50	115	135	20
Facilitates recruitment and retention of skilled staff	130	120	85	85	45
Minimises service disruption in the transition period	140	65	55	55	55
Minimise risks (e.g. challenge, additional VAT costs for example)	140	95	55	55	40
Delivers value for money	135	105	85	90	30
Is an organisation willing to deliver this option or is there a market already?	95	70	40	80	45
Facilitates data and record sharing, with the potential to deliver IT compatibility	125	95	75	70	10
Has affordable set up costs	145	85	75	95	50
Financially sustainable in the longer term	520	330	160	190	130
Facilitates access to sources of funding such as grants, social finance or other fundraising possibilities, and income from matching with children from beyond the area	80	120	95	95	35
Potential to realise economies of scale and deliver cost effectiveness	130	125	70	120	25
Develops an RAA that can adapt to change	100	100	85	70	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3255</b>	<b>2745</b>	<b>2090</b>	<b>2095</b>	<b>830</b>

## RAA Budget (*Extract from Business Case*)

### 8.1 2018/19 position

The current position regarding budgets for Adoption Services across the Local Authorities is provided to illustrate the scale of costs involved in the Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency proposal.

**Table 7: Combined budgets 2018/19**

<b>Budget heading</b>	<b>2018/19 LA Budgets £</b>
Staffing costs	£3,407,767
Other staffing related costs	£347,650
Other Non Staffing Related Costs	£429,047
Inter-Agency Fees (net)	£588,200
	<b>£4,772,664</b>

Note: There are current budget pressures that have also been reflected appropriately in the preparation of the Regional Adoption Agency budget, see table 11.

### 8.2 Budget for Adopt South West RAA from 2018

The Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency budget is produced based on a principle of 'no additional Adoption revenue budget cost to any Local Authority or the Host', for example with inflation and staff pay awards addressed through delivery of efficiencies.

The proposed budget for the RAA operation has been defined reflecting the planned operating model and staffing structure, also recognising corporate overheads not normally applied in the Adoption budgets but now exposed and attributed to Devon as the RAA Host that include but are not constrained to-

- HR support services for staff; local authorities will transfer budget to the host e.g. additional Payroll activity, Pensions overheads, related to the staff transfer
- Training and professional development of staff
- IT, the requirement of Devon equipment for all transferred staff; set up and training and ongoing costs associated to furnishing laptops/Desktop/ Phones and for staff to be able to access Devon's network from other Local Authority premises.
- Estates, any addition/ change to infrastructure e.g. work stations, for Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency staff to operate effectively from other Local Authority premises.
- Finance support for Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency operation
- Legal support for Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency operation, assumed minimal as this largely fall on the local authorities as it does now
- Insurance for Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency operation; assumes Devon will not incur any additional costs for insurance and can absorb the costs within current arrangements
- Pension liabilities, future pension cost liabilities transfer to Devon as the Host of Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency as staff are TUPE'd over, any past deficit liabilities will remain with the Local Authorities

There are also one off set up costs, primarily IT and Estates related. The budget plus set up costs are subject to the agreed funding formula.

The costs of running a Devon hosted Regional Adoption Agency includes budget for the 2018/2019 financial year, and a projection for 2019/2020 using estimated inflation indicators, based on the standard approach taken by all four Local Authorities in setting their budgets. As with any service area the Medium Term Financial Plan will be provided with a 5-year horizon.

There are also clearly stated intentions of the Regional Adoption Agency reflected in the budget:

- Staffing adjustments to reflect efficiencies of a single service and the service strategies and intentions; estimated 2% pay award included in 2018/19 and 2019/20.
- Acknowledging that overheads previously “below” the line become exposed in a hosted model and corresponding efficiencies within each authority may not be easily realised
- Inter agency fees and a target reduction [6 cases] to reflect improved working between the constituent Authorities
- Support post adoption orders will be short term interventions, sign posting and supporting access to services.
- Contracts- estimated; some efficiencies may be achieved by going out as 4 authorities in the RAA, but this has not been assumed as market rates for 18/19 are not known and may negate efficiencies.
- Improvement to Adoption Panel operations supporting more timely adoptions

**Table 8: Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency budget**

<b>Regional Adoption Agency</b>		<b>DRAFT BUDGET</b>	
<b>Budget heading</b>	<b>2018/19 LA Budgets (excl overheads) £</b>	<b>2018/19 Draft RAA Budget (incl overheads) £</b>	<b>Change £</b>
Staffing costs	£3,561,467	£3,145,900	(£415,567)
Other staffing related costs	£264,003	£217,063	(£46,940)
Other Non Staffing Related Costs	£358,994	£358,994	£0
Inter-Agency Fees (net)	£588,200	£601,815	£13,615
Additional Adoption Panel Costs	£0	£89,338	£89,338
New Overheads	£0	£253,154	£253,154
	<b>£4,772,664</b>	<b>£4,666,263</b>	<b>(£106,401)</b>

This excludes:

- Set up costs impacting 2018/19 only; relating primarily to IT devices, a Case Management system accessed from any partner office, reporting requirements and basic transition costs such as removals - estimated £90,000-£120,000.

Project costs to October 2018 are separately funded by the Department for Education grant

### **8.3 Funding model**

The learning from other Regional Adoption Agencies has been collated by the DfE and identifies that a simple approach is best, to agree and allocate a % contribution per Authority model.

The proposed funding has been produced by reflecting the budgets for 18/19 as 50% of the formula, the remaining 50% consists of weighting 4 key activity criteria [3 years historic trend information]. Inter Agency Fees are included as a weighted criterion to better reflect Authority budget pressures

Criteria

- LAC 9 and under [a nationally published statistic]
- ADM decisions [a nationally published statistic]
- Adoption Support instances [locally recorded statistic]

- Inter Agency Fees [locally recorded statistic]

**Weighted Criteria** - The breakdown of the criteria weightings is outlined below:

**Table 9: Funding apportionment under the agreed formula**

Total Budget	4,666,263	Budget Weighting 50%	Activity Weighting 50%				Revised budget based on a weighted formula approach
		2,333,132	699,938	699,941	349,969	583,283	
		100%	30%	30%	15%	25%	
	18/19 Budget (Exc Overheads)	18/19 Budget	Children in care 9 & under in year	Number of ADM decisions in year	Adoption Support - open cases	Inter Agency "Other" Exp 3 Year Avg	
Devon	1,746,450	853,757	234,952	261,498	139,010	206,144	1,695,361
Plymouth	1,073,190	524,632	154,450	168,966	62,869	116,251	1,027,168
Somerset	1,113,604	544,389	185,661	189,054	121,546	98,057	1,138,707
Torbay	839,421	410,353	124,875	80,423	26,545	162,830	805,026
	<b>4,772,664</b>	<b>2,333,131</b>	<b>699,938</b>	<b>699,941</b>	<b>349,970</b>	<b>583,282</b>	<b>4,666,262</b>

**Resulting model-** The formula applied to the RAA 2018/19 budget results in the following apportionment of full year funding to each of the Authorities [rounding issue]

**Table 10: Funding model**

Authority	Revised budget based on a weighted formula approach	Proportion of New Budget
Devon	£1,695,361	36.33%
Plymouth	£1,027,168	22.01%
Somerset	£1,138,707	24.40%
Torbay	£805,030	17.26%
	<b>£4,666,266</b>	

The challenge of estimating demand sees the need for regular reporting of the budget position and of budget arrangements as outlined in the Inter Authority Agreement.

#### 8.4 Risk sharing

The challenge of estimating demand also means risk sharing mechanisms are required, with clear triggers to action, to address the potential for surplus, or shortfall, in the budget.

The funding model proposed includes mechanisms to address the following instances:

- budget overspend or underspend
- significant variation in activity/ demand/ funding because of Local Authority initiatives/ strategies or Government policy/ direction
- any initial redundancy cost; future redundancy costs

The risk sharing will be applied using the core budget funding model outlined in 8.3 above. This arrangement will be recorded in the Inter Authority Agreement to be approved before the RAA goes live.

As part of the business planning process for the Regional Adoption Agency the funding arrangement is proposed to be regularly reviewed and the mechanisms for changes to funding will be built into the Inter Authority Agreement partnership within the funding model.

## 8.5 Summary of Financial arrangements

### Comparison to 18/19 planned budget

The aim was to provide the RAA at 'no additional spend to each authority including to Devon as the Host'. This is challenging with overheads normally 'below the line' being exposed and the cost of equipping staff to operate as one service, achieve required access to children's records across the LA's and to operate effectively out of each other's offices.

There is also the pay award and incremental 'point' increases in staff pay to address. The staffing aspect has been addressed through assumed efficiencies.

The position for each individual Authority budget in 2018/19 and the overall RAA outcome is illustrated below:

**Table 11:**

	<b>budget based on a weighted formula</b>	<b>£ value change to 18/19 Budget</b>	<b>%age change to 18/19 Budget</b>	<b>Pressure</b>	<b>change to 18/19 Budget plus</b>	<b>%age change to budget plus pressure</b>	<b>Proportion of New Budget</b>
Devon	1,695,361	(51,089)	-2.93%	0	(51,089)	-2.93%	36.33%
Plymouth	1,027,168	(46,022)	-4.29%	0	(46,022)	-4.29%	22.01%
Somerset	1,138,707	25,103	2.25%	61,080	(35,977)	-3.23%	24.40%
Torbay	805,026	(34,395)	-4.10%	0	(34,395)	-4.10%	17.26%
	<b>4,666,262</b>	<b>(106,402)</b>		<b>61,080</b>	<b>(167,482)</b>		

The proposed RAA budget including overheads in the first full year of operation sees an overall reduction on 2018/19 planned budget, excluding overheads, of £ 167,482 this illustrates that in a full year the set-up costs estimated at £90,000 - 120,000 can be met.

However, with the RAA live date falling on the half year, yet set up costs required in full, there is the potential of a short fall of £6,000 to a maximum of £36,000, a minimal % of the overall budget involved. The risk is deemed low as it can be mitigated either by one, or more likely a mix of, the following:

- in year under spend April – October 2018- all LAs are carrying vacancies in Adoption
- deferring some IT capital cost to 2019/20 under agreement by Devon
- there is also opportunity in commissioning [new contracts not let until April 2019]
- a worst case RAA staff budget has been set, using an assumed maximum salary point in each role, by October the actual staff cost will be known following the TUPE process
- vacancies, likely to emerge following the TUPE process.

The final re-refresh of the financial picture approaching Octobers live date, used to inform the Inter Authority Agreement approval, will finalise these arrangements.

**FUNCTIONS/ RESPONSIBILITY MATRIX****THE CHILD**

<b>SERVICE AREA</b>	<b>RETAINED FUNCTIONS/ RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY</b>	<b>DELEGATED FUNCTIONS/ RESPONSIBILITIES TO DCC (acting as host of the interim RAA)</b>
<b>Case Responsibility</b>	<p>The local authority will retain case management responsibility for the child until the making of the Adoption Order</p> <p>The local authority will be responsible for all statutory functions including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statutory Visits and Reviews</li> <li>• Management and supervision of contact between child and family members.</li> <li>• Administration and finance of foster placements and communication with foster carers who care for children under Fostering for Adoption arrangements.</li> </ul>	<p>The RAA will provide specialist advice and support to assist LA staff to fully understand the adoption process, influencing and promoting best practice</p> <p>The RAA will provide the supervision to foster carer's caring for a child under Fostering for Adoption arrangements.</p>
<b>Early identification of children requiring adoption</b>	<p>The local authority is responsible for identifying, at the earliest possible stage, the children who may require adoption and making them and their needs known to the RAA, providing relevant and timely information.</p> <p>Birth parents to be referred to the Birth Parent support service at an early stage.</p> <p>Future potential contact arrangements to be considered at an early stage</p>	<p>The RAA will designate a Family Finder to each child identified as possibly requiring adoption to liaise with children's social workers</p> <p>The RAA aims to develop working practises with each LA to ensure involvement in care planning to assist with the earliest identification.</p> <p>Making sure siblings placed with other adopters are considered by the LA.</p> <p>Staff from the RAA will be involved in identifying children for early permanence placement.</p>
<b>Communication during the family finding process</b>	<p>It will be the responsibility of the LA to keep the Child Permanence Report updated and to inform the family finder of any changes in the child's development or circumstances (e.g. change of placement).</p>	<p>The RAA will keep the LA regularly updated about progress on family finding.</p>
<b>Early Placement</b>	<p>The LA will arrange the Administration and finance of fostering for adoption placements and communication with foster carers who care for children under Fostering for Adoption arrangements as necessary.</p>	<p>Where appropriate, and in agreement with the local authority, the RAA will make available an Early Permanence Placement (EPP) e.g. a Fostering for Adoption Service for children who may benefit from the possibility of early placement with potential adopters.</p>

SERVICE AREA	RETAINED FUNCTIONS/ RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	DELEGATED FUNCTIONS/ RESPONSIBILITIES TO DCC (acting as host of the interim RAA)
	<p>The LA Social Worker will understand the statutory responsibilities i.e. visits / reviews to the child whilst the child is in Early Permanence Placement</p> <p>The LA will be responsible for financial allowances for Early Permanence Placement carers.</p>	<p>If there are no RAA Fostering for Adoption placements available, the RAA has a responsibility to search for a placement outside of the RAA.</p> <p>The RAA will support these carers whilst caring for these children in an Early Permanence Placement</p>
<b>Multitracking of children requiring adoption</b>	<p>The local authority will track the progress of children in care proceedings or looked after under section 20 (Children Act 1989) to maintain an up-to-date knowledge of their potential need for an adoption placement</p>	<p>The RAA will also actively track all children for whom initial information indicates that adoption may be a likely plan</p>
<b>Pre-placement Reports</b>	<p>The LA will be responsible for the completion and cost of all reports prior to an adoption placement being made including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Placement Reports</li> <li>• QA reports</li> <li>• Sibling Assessments</li> <li>• Support Plans</li> </ul> <p>LA responsible for completing the profiles of the child once an ADM decision is made</p> <p>The LA will liaise with the RAA before the final Care plan is completed and the Adoption Support plan to agree the plan specifically around birth family and sibling contact and ongoing support for the child/ren and Adopters.</p> <p>Final Care plans are to be completed by the LA but the RAA to be consulted on any support needs / contact arrangements post order.</p>	<p>The RAA can advise on and support the completion of the Child Placement Report and early profile of the child. The RAA will provide support and challenge to help ensure that the CPR's are of a consistent high quality across the partnership.</p> <p>The RAA will provide additional information and advice on the placement needs of the child and the likely need for post adoption support services, including financial support</p> <p>RAA to endorse Support plans and final care plans specifically around future contact and support needs to the LA on final care plans</p>
	<p>The local authority will be responsible for assessing the child's needs in respect of a future placement and in ensuring that any required financial support for a future adoptive placement is available prior to the Adoption Order</p>	<p>It will be necessary for the RAA and LA to work closely and collaboratively to ensure that the needs of the child can be met and that training support is sustainable. The training will be provided by the Panel Advisor to child Care Social workers to continuously improve practice.</p>
<b>Medical Information</b>	<p>The Local Authority will be responsible for obtaining all required medical information in respect of children who are being considered for adoption and will meet with prospective adopters to ensure they are fully aware of the child's future medical needs as appropriate.</p>	<p>The RAA adoption co-ordinator / social workers will support the Prospective Adopters to attend appointments to fully understand the Childs needs.</p>

SERVICE AREA	RETAINED FUNCTIONS/ RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	DELEGATED FUNCTIONS/ RESPONSIBILITIES TO DCC (acting as host of the interim RAA)
	The LA will be responsible for organising for the prospective adopters to have a consultation by phone / face to face prior to Adoption Panel to discuss the Child's current and future needs.	
<b>Decision that adoption should be the child's plan</b>	<p>The Agency Decision Maker in each LA will be responsible for the 'Should be placed for adoption' decision.</p> <p>The LA will undertake a regular review of this decision and associated plans and keep the family finder in the RAA informed of any changes.</p> <p>LA to refer children with a possible plan of being relinquished to the RAA at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>The LA with advice from the RAA will refer birth family members to independent birth family support at the earliest opportunity.</p>	<p>The RAA will support the decision-making process as requested, particularly in the provision of Professional Advice to the LA's ADM.</p> <p>The RAA will provide an adoption panel for relinquished children's plans to be heard.</p> <p>Panel Advisor to provide panel minutes to the LA ADM.</p> <p>Independent birth family support is the responsibility of the RAA.</p>
<b>'Hard to Place'/Priority Children</b>	<p>The LA is responsible for identifying at the earliest opportunity where a child is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aged four or over</li> <li>• From a BME heritage</li> <li>• Part of a sibling group of two or more</li> <li>• Has uncertainty about their development</li> <li>• Has a disability or medical condition</li> <li>• Sibling matches for new-born</li> </ul> <p>The LA will gather the relevant information, assess and forward to the RAA as soon as possible.</p> <p>LA to contribute to the learning to explore how children can be placed in permanent placements.</p>	<p>RAA to track all children and all possible options explored, documented and shared with the LA.</p> <p>The RAA will either provide a service for Priority children which may involve some or all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased publicity – DVD, Photos etc.</li> <li>• Profile the child at specific events</li> <li>• Press and digital media advertising</li> <li>• Attempt to recruit Adopters specifically for the child</li> <li>• Provide additional training and preparation for potential Adopters</li> <li>• Advise on or assist with additional preparation work with the child.</li> </ul> <p>RAA to contribute to the learning to explore how children can be placed in permanent placements.</p>
<b>Preparation of the child</b>	<p>The LA will be responsible for preparing the child for an adoptive placement.</p> <p>The LA will be responsible for the preparation of the child's Life story Book/ work. This often needs to start early in the child's looked after career and will contain information to which the LA has immediate access.</p>	<p>The RAA will provide advice and guidance &amp; potentially training to the LA in the preparation of the child, particularly in respect of the future placement.</p> <p>The RAA will provide advice regarding completing a life story work/ later life letter.</p>

SERVICE AREA	RETAINED FUNCTIONS/ RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	DELEGATED FUNCTIONS/ RESPONSIBILITIES TO DCC (acting as host of the interim RAA)
	The LA will be responsible for producing the Later life letter	The RAA will provide advice and written guidance
<b>Linking and Matching</b>	The LA, by agreement, will meet the costs of introductions between children and Adopters.	The RAA will take lead responsibility for all aspects of the linking and matching process, but will always involve the LA in the decision-making process.  The RAA will chair linking/ matching meetings as part of the process.
	The LA is responsible for updating of the Child Permanence Report, Delegation of Parental Responsibility report and the Adoption Placement Report, the section on the Child.	The RAA will be responsible for completing the Adoption Placement Report, apart from the section on the child.  The RAA will organise the Matching Panel
		The RAA will chair and organise life appreciation days for children over 3 years old.
<b>MATCHING DECISIONS</b>	The Agency Decision Maker in each LA will be responsible for the Matching decision for the child.	The RAA will support the process with information as required, including Panel Minutes and administrative support including letters regarding the decision.
<b>PLACEMENT</b>	The Local Authority is responsible for Placing the child/ren with prospective adopters.  The LA will commission the Letterbox function from the RAA.	The RAA will offer support and advice to the LA  The RAA will support the LA when a child is placed.  The RAA to work closely with the LA pre-order and can offer independent support to birth family.  The RAA will set up the Letterbox pre-adoption order and will be responsible for managing this day to day post order.
<b>Adoption Support Fund</b>	LA to work closely with the RAA to provide the information to complete the ASF application for families/children who don't meet the criteria for CAMHS services. .	RAA to submit the ASF application for families/children who don't meet the criteria for CAMHS services on behalf of the LA.  RAA will provide the administration and contracting support to implement the operation of ASF funding.
<b>ADOPTION ALLOWANCES</b>	Allowances / One off payments will be paid by the LA - e.g. vehicles for larger sibling groups, Adoption / Child Arrangement Orders	The RAA will complete assessments and will review these every 2 years and forward the assessments to the LA to consider.

SERVICE AREA	RETAINED FUNCTIONS/ RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	DELEGATED FUNCTIONS/ RESPONSIBILITIES TO DCC (acting as host of the interim RAA)
<b>Applications to the DfE Interagency Fund (for hard to place children)</b>	LA to work closely with the RAA to provide the information to complete the ASF application for families/children who don't meet the criteria for CAMHS services. .	The RAA will make the application to the fund where relevant

## ADOPTER RECRUITMENT

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
<b>RECRUITMENT OF ADOPTERS</b>	<p>The LA will signpost any enquiries from potential adopters to the RAA.</p> <p>The LA will ensure that information relevant to potential adopters is included in its own marketing materials and on its website, clearly signposting potential adopters to the website of the RAA.</p>	<p>The RAA will signpost fostering enquiries to the LA.</p> <p>The RAA will be responsible for recruiting adopters appropriate to the needs of children waiting in each LA.</p> <p>Marketing information will reflect the fact that the RAA is delivering the service on behalf of partnering LAs. This information will be provided on the website or prospective applicants can email or telephone and speak with a worker for further information.</p>
<b>Enquiries</b>		<p>The RAA will provide a centralised enquiry process for the region to meet all statutory requirements. Adopters can enquire via telephone / email / or by completing a Registration of Interest form.</p> <p>The RAA will provide written information to potential adopters and will hold information events.</p> <p>The RAA may at times signpost potential adopters to other agencies/ return to Fostering in LA's if they are unlikely to be able to meet the needs of the children needing placement.</p>
<b>Stage One</b>	The LAs will provide all information required for statutory checks of potential adopters resident in the LA.	The RAA will undertake all Stage one functions
<b>Stage Two</b>		The RAA will undertake all Stage Two functions
		The RAA will complete the Prospective Adopters Report (PAR)
<b>Approvals</b>		<p>The RAA will manage the Adoption Panel.</p> <p>The RAA Agency Decision Maker will be responsible for all approvals</p>

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
<b>POST APPROVAL SUPPORT AND TRAINING</b>		The RAA will provide post approval support and training to approved adopters

## POST ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
<b>ADOPTION SUPPORT ASSESSMENTS/ PLANS &amp; SERVICES</b>	<p>The LA will consider funding requests for adoption support services which are not included in the core offer e.g. Therapeutic support.</p> <p>Match Funding – Pre 3 years of adoption order – LA responsible for match funding.</p> <p>Respite / Short term breaks – if this service is required the case will need to be open and family supported by the LA.</p>	<p>The RAA will undertake assessments of adoption support needs.</p> <p>The RAA's core offer will provide general adoption support services: newsletter, social events for children and young people; social/training events for adoptive parents; advice and signposting for adoptive families; independent support and advice to birth relatives; post box services etc</p> <p>The RAA will undertake applications to the Adoption Support Fund for children and commission services agreed by ASF for families/children who don't meet the criteria for CAMHS services.</p> <p>.</p> <p>Match funding – post 3 years of adoption order – RAA responsible for Match funding.</p>
	<p>The LA will signpost requests from adoptive families for adoption order support to the RAA. Alongside needs directly related to adoption, a family may have needs best met by services within the LA e.g. CIN services. The LA will be responsible for providing these services</p> <p>Where a safeguarding referral is made to the LA the LA will conduct any appropriate section 47 enquiry and will allocate an LA social worker where thresholds are met, but will notify the RAA of any referral involving an adopted child.</p> <p>If adopted child/young person accommodated, LA will be responsible for social work support to child/family.</p>	<p>The RAA will undertake the assessment of adoption support needs of the child and family and produce an adoption support plan. The RAA will liaise with LA to agree which services will be provided by RAA and which by LA for families whose needs are complex.</p> <p>Where appropriate, the RAA will offer support to the adoptive family during any section 47 enquiry if the case is open to the RAA.</p> <p>RAA will complete any specific work needed e.g. Life Story work or application to ASF for therapeutic support for families/children who don't meet the criteria for CAMHS services.</p>

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
<b>Out-of-hours services</b>	All adopters will have access to the LA's Emergency Duty Team out of core hours.	
<b>Indirect/ Letterbox contact</b>		The RAA / commissioned service will post/Letterbox contact between adopted children and birth families. This commissioned service will carry out ongoing assessments to consider whether contact is in the best interest of the child.
<b>Supervised &amp; Sibling Direct Contact</b>	Cost of arrangements agreed in the pre- adoption support plan e.g. travel & accommodation expenses will remain with the LA.	Responsibility for arranging / supervising Direct Contact requirements will transfer to the RAA / commissioned service
<b>ADOPTION ALLOWANCES</b>	Adoption allowances will be paid for by the LA	RAA to undertake appropriate assessment
<b>ADOPTION SUPPORT FUND</b>		The RAA will be responsible for undertaking all funding applications to the Adoption Support Fund and all contracting arrangements Existing contracting resources to transfer to the RAA
<b>ACCESS TO CHILDREN'S ADOPTION CASE RECORDS</b>	LA to store historic children's adoption case records. For RAA adoptions the LA will have access to records if the case becomes open to them as a CIN / LAC / Safeguarding.	RAA to store and hold new files Existing record keeping resources to transfer to RAA
<b>BIRTH RECORDS COUNSELLING</b>	Existing budget to transfer to the RAA	RAA will be responsible for delivery of counselling.
<b>INDEPENDENT SUPPORT TO BIRTH PARENTS</b>	Existing budget to transfer to the RAA	RAA will be responsible for delivery of support.
<b>ACCESS TO ADOPTERS RECORDS</b>	LA to signpost Adoptees to the RAA where appropriate	RAA to store and hold new files
<b>STEP PARENT ADOPTION ASSESSMENT</b>	LA to sign post adopters to the RAA	RAA to be responsible for assessments

## SERVICE USER ENGAGEMENT

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
<b>Adopters</b>		The RAA / commissioned agency will engage with adopters, individually and in groups, with the aim of improving the services available
<b>Adoptees</b>		The RAA / commissioned agency will engage with adoptees, individually and in groups, with the aim of improving the services available

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
<b>Birth parents</b>		THE RAA / commissioned service will engage with and birth parents individually and in groups with the aim of improving the services available
<b>Special Guardians</b>	Initial assessment, placement, the support plan and payments and allowances are the responsibility of the LA including contact arrangements and the cost of any supervised contact.	The RAA has no responsibilities in support of Special Guardians

## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT & INSPECTION -

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
<b>Data provision</b>	Each LA will need to provide specified key data to the RAA on performance. Each LA is responsible for the ALB Child return	RAA is responsible for production of ALB Adopter return
<b>Data analysis</b>		The RAA will produce a 3-monthly report to each LA on performance against an agreed set of indicators
<b>OFSTED</b>	The future role of OFSTED in adoption is currently under review and future requirements are currently unclear.	
<b>Freedom of Information applications</b>	The LA / RAA will cooperate within the timescales to enable information to be made available to the applicant	The LA / RAA will cooperate within the timescales to enable information to be made available to the applicant

## MISCELLANEOUS SERVICES

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
<b>STATEMENT OF PURPOSE</b>		The RAA will provide take responsibility for updating this for the functions that have been delegated to the RAA.  The RAA will take responsibility for completing each LA statement of purpose regarding the functions left with the LA, in consultation with the LA.
<b>REGISTERED MANAGER</b>		The RAA will provide a registered manager for their adoption functions.
<b>ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICE ADVISOR</b>		The RAA will undertake the role of Adoption Services Advisor for each LA.

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
<b>CHILDREN'S GUIDE FOR ADOPTION</b>	Each LA has a responsibility for this	The RAA could provide advice and guidance
<b>ANNUAL SERVICE REPORT</b>		RAA to complete an annual public facing service report
<b>CHILDREN'S GUIDE FOR ADOPTION SUPPORT</b>		The RAA will update the Children's guide for adoption support
<b>STEP PARENTS/RELATIVES WHO WISH TO ADOPT (NON-AGENCY ADOPTIONS)</b>		RAA to be responsible for providing this service – this service will be commissioned out.
<b>INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTION</b>		RAA will provide this service; it will commission advice and information on inter-country adoption from a specialist agency. Service users will have to meet cost of assessment and approval process in the commissioned agency
<b>ADOPTION PANELS</b>	The three larger LA's to provide a social work representative to sit on panel twice a month and the smaller LA once a month.	The RAA will provide adoption panels across the region and will appoint Independent panel chairs and retain a central list and will provide training and support for panel members.  The adoption panel will provide a quality assurance report for the partnership on a 6-monthly basis
<b>TRAINING FOR LA staff</b>		The RAA can provide training for social workers regarding the adoption process/ writing of CPR's/APR'S/Support plans and preparing for Adoption Panel
<b>ADOPTEE COUNSELLING</b>		The RAA will signpost applicants to independent services and will not provide an intermediary service.
<b>DISRUPTIONS</b>	LA to contribute to the disruption process	RAA to undertake the disruption process.  Panel Chairs and other professionals will be invited to contribute to this process.
<b>ALLEGATIONS</b>	LA is responsible for initiating this process prior to the Adoption order being granted. The RAA will contribute to this process.	RAA is responsible for initiating this process post the Adoption order being granted. The LA will contribute to this process if necessary.

# Impact Assessment

Version 2016

<b>Assessment of:</b>	<b>Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency</b>
<b>Service:</b>	<b>Children's Services</b>
<b>Head of Service:</b>	Jo Olsson
<b>Date of sign off by Head Of Service/version:</b>	V1
<b>Assessment carried out by (incl. job title):</b>	Darryl Freeman, Head of Children's Social Care

## Section 1 - Background

Description:	<p>Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency is a development of adoption agencies in response to the <a href="#">Education and Adoption Act 2016 which advised authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to join together to form Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA)</a>. Devon County Council, as part of the Adopt South West partnership, is one of 19 groupings of local authorities and voluntary sector adoption agencies working on the regionalisation agenda nationally. The regional grouping also includes Plymouth, Torbay and Somerset.</p>
Reason for change/review and options appraisal:	<p>In June 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) published '<a href="#">Regionalising Adoption</a>' and asked all adoption agencies in England to consider how to work much more closely together on a regional basis. This was enacted as the <a href="#">Education and Adoption Act 2016</a>. The Act gives the Secretary of State a new power to direct one or more named local authorities to make arrangements for any or all of their adoption functions to be carried out on their behalf by one of the local authorities named, or by another agency.</p> <p>The Government's view is that structural change will improve the process for children and adopters leading to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improved numbers of children being adopted</li> <li>• an improved experience for adopters and improved timeliness overall</li> <li>• to deliver consistently good and innovative adoption practice that ensures improved life chances for children.</li> </ul> <p>The Department for Education describes 4 models for delivery of a Regional Adoption Agency.</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A Local Authority single host, on behalf of a number of Local Authorities; e.g. Aspire, a Dorset hosted service for three Local Authorities.</li> <li>2. Joint Venture between Local Authorities; a new public sector owned Local Authority Trading Company. e.g. Achieving for Children, Kingston and Richmond's Children's Services</li> <li>3. A new Voluntary Adoption Agency; possibly a Joint Venture with flexibility for public &amp; third sector ownership e.g. Entrust Schools Service in Staffordshire.</li> <li>4. Existing Voluntary Adoption Agency; where Local Authorities commission an existing Voluntary Adoption Agency to deliver the Regional Adoption Agency e.g. Coram.</li> </ol> <p>Nationally, all agencies used a scoring system as a tool to aid discussions, the purpose of which was to examine the desirability, feasibility and viability of each option. Following consideration of each possible model by the Local Authorities Directors/ Heads of Service and Executives from Families for Children and Barnardo's the preferred option was identified as a 'Single Local Authority Hosting the Regional Adoption Agency on behalf of a number of Local Authorities'.</p> <p>The clear benefit identified is to achieve the integration of the four Local Authority adoption services into one best practice model, whilst maintaining the current partnership with Voluntary agencies which had been established in the delivery of the previous Adopt South West partnership.</p> <p>Further to this, it was proposed that Devon host the Regional Adoption Agency. It was recognised that Devon County Council -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operates the highest graded Local Authority adoption service (Good);</li> <li>• Has successfully innovated in a number of areas (e.g. fostering for adoption, young people's engagement);</li> <li>• Has the capacity to deliver given the size of the agency and the Local Authority;</li> <li>• Has the experience of developing other services that Devon hosts for the region;</li> <li>• Is centrally placed geographically.</li> </ul>
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## Section 2 - Key impacts and recommendations

Social/equality impacts:	<p>The Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency will deliver improved outcomes for children and families -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a system where children are matched with the most suitable adopter as quickly as possible.</li> <li>• Improve the scale of Adopter recruitment to provide a broader pool of adopters, well prepared and well matched to the needs of children waiting and;</li> <li>• Offers sufficient, high quality adoption support services</li> </ul>
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	This will be achieved by employing best practice, improving processes and practice quality and by encouraging innovation. Better shared resources across the region will also improve cost effectiveness with the potential to invest further in service developments.
Environmental impacts:	There are no negative environmental impacts envisaged, staff will continue to travel to meet with children and potential adopters in the course of their work, they will operate out of offices across the 4 Local Authorities as they do now. The workforce will continue to work with technology that minimises the need to travel where possible.
Economic impacts:	Better shared resources across the region will improve cost effectiveness with the potential to invest further in development of services. There is a wish to increase the volume and type of services available to better support families post adoption, these may be secured from the market and this would see a need for growth and development of new capabilities by the service providers and may offer opportunities for jobs in the area.
Other impacts (partner agencies, services, DCC policies, possible 'unintended consequences'):	<p>The introduction of the Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency involves Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council, Somerset County Council and Voluntary Adoption agencies and other adoption service providers across the area.</p> <p>There will be changes to improve and standardised practice across the region with themed participation groups across the region with Adopters and Parents to improve practice of the Regional Adoption Agency.</p> <p>The system will be reviewed to ensure children can be placed with families more effectively and with minimal disruption. Support to adopters and their families will be improved, for example there will also be changes to the paperwork required for court decisions, to help people applying to one, or at times more, courts for decisions, as currently the paperwork has to be changed to meet each Local Authority and Court's requirements. This will also make it easier for the staff supporting the adopters.</p> <p>There will be "joint adoption panels" across the area to bring more consistency to the preparation required of staff and Adopters for decisions and align the terms such as payment for those acting on adoption panels across the area.</p> <p>There will be no Adopt South West specific impact on existing Devon County Council Policies, this does not preclude changes that may be required to meet National Policy relating to Regional Adoption Agencies.</p>
How will impacts and actions be monitored?	A set of objectives has been agreed and the mechanism to collect the required information to regularly report on performance will be put in place. These will support the existing national statutory reporting required from all Adoption Services in England. Ofsted currently inspects Adoption Services and a new framework is being developed for inspection of Regional Adoption Agencies.

### Section 3 - Profile and views of stakeholders and people directly affected

People affected:	<p>Birth families of a child/ children who have been adopted.</p> <p>Children with an adoption placement order in Devon, Somerset, Torbay and Plymouth and those people wishing to adopt a child from the area.</p> <p>Local Authority Members and Chief Officers responsible for Children's Services and accountable to the Ofsted inspection regime and national achievement required by the Department for Education.</p> <p>Staff in Adoption Services in the 4 Local Authorities, Adoption Panel Chairs and Members.</p>
Diversity profile and needs assessment of affected people:	<p>Adopters are considered regardless of age, gender, disabilities, race, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion/belief</p> <p>Children considered for adoption are aged up to maximum age of 18 when the adoption order is made.</p>
Other stakeholders:	<p>Families of those people who have adopted a child/ children.</p> <p>Providers of support to adopters and Birth families.</p> <p>Partner agencies e.g. Health, Education</p>
Consultation process:	<p>There were dedicated adopter engagement sessions early in the journey and the adopters' first priority is to ensure adequate support is available throughout the whole adoption process and beyond. They also prioritise improving support on offer and awareness of adoption in schools and CAMHS services and would like to be recognised as experts on the needs of their children. Adopters also mentioned getting rid of the postcode lottery across the region because of funding variations, and ensuring the RAA adds value, rather than an additional layer of bureaucracy.</p> <p>Similarly, staff have and continue to be engaged with many events held. They have welcomed the opportunity to be involved in the plans for the development of an RAA. Staff from the Local Authorities and the two Voluntary Adoption Agencies are working together to design the service improvements and for example this has seen the approval for Joint Panels introduced during Q4 2017 ahead of the formal launch of the Regional Adoption Agency.</p> <p>The staff priorities are to have respect for the child and their adopter at forefront of the redesign of process and consideration of new/ different support services. The key benefit is the ease of looking for best match for children and adopters across the region together and keeping more solutions local. Early permanence and joint working with child care social workers across the region will bring improved outcomes for the child and families and they are keen to work on breaking down any barriers to this whilst designing the Regional Adoption Agency way of working and protocols.</p> <p>The Adoption Panel chairs hope that the shift to a Regional Adoption Agency will lead to better outcomes for children and higher quality services, they welcome the opportunity to work together and focus on what works well.</p>

	Local Authority Members have also been engaged across the authorities
Research and information used:	<p>Adopt South West is following the single Local Authority Hosting model for a Regional Adoption Agency. The required Inter Authority Agreement is informed by legal, financial, practice and commissioning representatives from each Local Authority. The Regional Adoption Agency Service has been specified based on the expertise and experience of all the Local Authority partners and informed by the key involvement the Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Families for Children and Barnardo's. The best practice available from across the area is to be adopted, and adapted through further innovations, to deliver a consistent high quality adoption support service.</p> <p>As a national programme there has been support provided by the Department for Education and their nominated advisors, Deloitte. There are shared learning forums in place for all 19 Regional Adoption Agency development teams to share and learn from one another.</p> <p>Each Local Authority responds to the Children and Social Work act and this is carried through into the ethos, practice and approach to improvement in development of the Regional Adoption Agency. A further reference employed is the Children and Family Bill 2013 – this sets out regulations around Fostering for Adoption and the principle of every child should be considered for fostering for adoption if Adoption is a permanence option is central to the Regional Adoption Agency practice. The family finders role is key in working in partnership with the Local Authority Child Care Social work staff for identification of these children at the earliest point possible and to provide guidance to the Local Authority around the potential of Foster for Adoption placements.</p> <p>All practice reviews are guided by the adoption minimum standards and the adoption regulations 2005 ensuring the Regional Adoption Agency will continue to meet statutory guidelines.</p>

## Background Analysis

This section describes how relevant questions and issues have been explored

## Section 4a - Social Impacts

Characteristics	<p><b>In what way are you eliminating or reducing the potential for direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or disadvantage? Are there any reasonable and proportionate, unavoidable negative consequences?</b></p> <p><b>In what way are you advancing equality (meeting needs, encouraging participation, making adjustments for disabled people, 'closing gaps').</b></p> <p><b>In what way are you fostering good relations between groups (tackling prejudice and promoting understanding), if relevant?</b></p>
<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption</p> <p><b>Children Act 1989</b> Sets out many of the duties, powers and responsibilities local authorities hold in respect of their looked after children and care leavers. In 2015 new regulations relating to the Children Act came in to force. Among other things, these regulations set out arrangements for local authorities considering ceasing to look after a child. <a href="#">View the Children Act 1989</a></p> <p><b>Children (Leaving Care) 2000</b> Sets out duties local authorities have to support young people leaving care from 16 to 21 years of age. <a href="#">View the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000</a></p> <p><b>Adoption and Children Act 2002</b> Updated the legal framework for domestic and inter-country adoption, and places a duty on local authorities to maintain an adoption service and provide adoption support services. <a href="#">View the Adoption and Children Act 2002</a></p> <p><b>Children and Adoption Act 2006</b> Gives courts more flexible powers to facilitate child contact and enforce contact orders when separated parents are in dispute. <a href="#">View the Children and Adoption Act 2006</a></p> <p><b>Children and Young Persons Act 2008</b> Legislates for the recommendations in the Department for Education and Skill's 2007 Care Matters white paper to provide high quality care and services for children in care. <a href="#">View the Children and Young Persons Act 2008</a> <a href="#">Download the Care Matters white paper (PDF)</a></p>	

#### Children and Families Act 2014

Encourages 'fostering for adoption' which allows approved adopters to foster children while they wait for court approval to adopt. Introduces a 26 week time limit for the courts to decide whether or not a child should be taken into care. In some cases, this limit may be extended by eight weeks. Introduces 'staying put' arrangements which allow children in care to stay with their foster families until the age of 21 years. This is provided that both the young person and the foster family are happy to do so.

#### [View the Children and Families Act 2014](#)

All residents (include generic equality provisions):

The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption

An Adopter does not have to be a British citizen to adopt a child, but:

- An Adopter must have a fixed and permanent home in the UK, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man
- An Adopter must have lived in the UK for at least 1 year before you begin the application process

An Adopter will not be allowed to adopt if you, or an adult member of your family, have a criminal caution or conviction for offences against children or certain sexual offences against adults but, with the exception of these specified offences, a criminal record will not necessarily rule you out.

Smoking will not necessarily rule you out from adopting. Consideration will be given to this and to all health- and lifestyle-related issues, and the agency will want to know of any specific health risks to you or to the children who may be placed in your care.

There is no single national policy on smoking, but all agencies will apply some restrictions. According to national medical advice children under five and those with particular medical conditions should not be placed in smoking households. You will usually need to be smoke-free for at least six months before adoption from these groups can be considered.

To adopt a step child an Adopter must tell your local council at least 3 months before applying to a court for an adoption order. Also the child must also have lived with both of you for at least 6 months.

If you disagree with an adoption agency's decision, you can either:

- challenge their decision by writing to them
- apply to the [Independent Review Mechanism](#), which will look into your case

**Staffing** of the RAA will be achieved through TUPE transfer of Somerset County, Plymouth City & Torbay Councils staff to Devon County Council which along with existing DCC staff will complete the workforce. Although the majority of the workforce is largely mobile all require an office base, there will be staff that may be required to use different offices as their work base, this will

	<p>be determined through the TUPE consultation process and this impact will be managed through existing HR policies in each Local Authority.</p>
Age:	<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption.</p> <p>An Adopter may be able to adopt a child if you're aged 21 or over (there's no upper age limit)</p> <p>An Adopter's own family- having children of your own (of any age) will certainly not exclude you from adopting, whether they are living at home with you or have grown up. Consideration will, however, be given to the age gap between your own children and the age of the child(ren) you wish to adopt and the position of each child within the family in accordance with the child(ren)s' needs.</p> <p><b>Staffing-</b> there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy</p>
Disability (incl. sensory, mobility, mental health, learning disability, ill health) and carers of disabled people:	<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption</p> <p>Being disabled should not automatically exclude anyone from becoming an adopter and it is widely recognised that disabled people can often provide a very loving home for a child.</p> <p>Disability is only one of the many issues that will be considered by an adoption agency so adopters should not rule themselves out before they have had a conversation with their agency of choice. Even if an adopter believes that they might need some additional assistance to adopt a young person, social services may be able to provide this support.</p> <p>It is recognised that the life experiences of disabled people can give them a unique insight into the lives of children in care, who often have a sense of themselves as 'different' or who may also have a disability. Living alongside disability in the context of positive relationships can teach children the importance of inclusivity and how to value difference.</p> <p>The Medical Adviser will assess the information provided through a medical on a disabled applicant and an assessing social worker will also explore with you any potential impact this may have on parenting and how these would be managed. Similarly, if you have had treatment for a serious illness, the agency will seek full information from your GP and will want to establish the impact of the illness and future prognosis and their Medical Adviser may want to contact your hospital consultant for further details before being able to make a recommendation. If there is a significant risk that you may not be able to care for a child throughout their dependent years, the Medical Adviser will seek further information and advise the Adoption Agency accordingly.</p> <p>As well as existing health conditions, an agency will want to discuss lifestyle issues such as weight, smoking and alcohol consumption. These issues are not barriers to adoption but they could present health risks in the future. If you have resolved any</p>

	<p>problems with such issues in the past, the agency may consider that you have shown strength and motivation to deal with problems which would enhance your application.</p> <p><b>Staffing-</b> there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy</p>
Culture and ethnicity: nationality/national origin, skin colour, religion and belief:	<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption.</p> <p>You can be matched with a child with whom you do not share the same ethnicity, provided you can meet the most important of the child's identified needs. All families should be able to get support to help their adopted child to understand and appreciate the important cultural, religious or linguistic values of their birth community.</p> <p><b>Staffing-</b> there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy</p>
Sex, gender and gender identity (including men, women, non-binary and transgender people), and pregnancy and maternity (including women's right to breastfeed).	<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption.</p> <p>The Adoption and Children Act 2002 gave unmarried couples, including same sex couples, the right to adopt, and this became law in December 2005. If you are a same sex couple you don't need to be in a Civil Partnership or married to adopt, you will need to show that you are living together in an enduring relationship.</p> <p>Single adopters are also welcome whatever their sexual orientation.</p> <p>An adopter should not experience discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. All agencies are committed to equal treatment of all potential adopters and in fact may positively welcome applications from LGBT adopters.</p> <p><b>Staffing-</b> there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy</p>
Sexual orientation and marriage/civil partnership:	<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption.</p> <p>An adopter may be able to adopt if</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• single</li> <li>• married</li> <li>• in a civil partnership</li> <li>• an unmarried couple (same sex and opposite sex)</li> <li>• the partner of the child's parent</li> </ul> <p><b>Staffing-</b> there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy</p>
Other socio-economic factors such as families, carers, single people/couples, low income,	<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption.</p> <p>An adopter may be able to adopt whether you are a homeowner or living in rented accommodation.</p>

vulnerability, education, reading/writing skills, 'digital exclusion' and rural isolation.	<p>An adopter's financial circumstances and employment status will always be considered as part of an adoption assessment, but low income, being unemployed or employed do not automatically rule them out. An adopter can be an adoptive parent while on benefits. The agency will want to discuss how the responsibility of caring for a child would be managed. Some agencies want a child to have their own bedroom but this is not a requirement and in some circumstances sharing can be considered. The adopter's local authority may provide support, especially for adopters of sibling groups or of children with a disability or special need of some kind. An adopter would also be encouraged to look into what benefits they may be entitled to. A number of other allowances are available for children with disabilities.</p> <p>Adoption Agencies need to be sure that any pets that you own do not pose a threat to children's health or safety. Also, some children may suffer from allergies which would prevent placement with some pets. A report from a vet may be requested.</p> <p><b>Staffing-</b> there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy.</p>
Human rights considerations:	None

## Section 4b - Environmental impacts

	Describe any actual or potential negative consequences. (Consider how to mitigate against these).	Describe any actual or potential neutral or positive outcomes.(Consider how to improve as far as possible).
Reduce waste, and send less waste to landfill:	n/a	n/a
Conserve and enhance biodiversity (the variety of living species):	n/a	n/a
Safeguard the distinctive characteristics, features and special qualities of Devon's landscape:	n/a	n/a
Conserve and enhance the quality and character of our built environment and public spaces:	n/a	n/a
Conserve and enhance Devon's cultural and historic heritage:	n/a	n/a

Minimise greenhouse gas emissions:	n/a	n/a
Minimise pollution (including air, land, water, light and noise):	n/a	n/a
Contribute to reducing water consumption:	n/a	n/a
Ensure resilience to the future effects of climate change (warmer, wetter winters; drier, hotter summers; more intense storms; and rising sea level):	n/a	n/a
Other (please state below):	n/a	n/a

### Section 4c - Economic impacts

	<b>Describe any actual or potential negative consequences. (Consider how to mitigate against these).</b>	<b>Describe any actual or potential neutral or positive outcomes. (Consider how to improve as far as possible).</b>
Impact on knowledge and skills:	Although bringing together 4 Local Authority Services to operate as a DCC hosted single Service the location of demand and distribution of staff will still be across the existing local authority boundaries. It is therefore unlikely there will be either a positive or negative impact on knowledge and skills within Devon.	
Impact on employment levels:	Although bringing together 4 Local Authority Services to operate as a DCC hosted single Service the location of demand and distribution of staff will still be across the existing local authority boundaries. It is therefore unlikely there will be either a positive or negative impact on employment levels within Devon.	
Impact on local business:	Although bringing together 4 Local Authority Services to operate as a DCC hosted single Service the location of demand and distribution of staff will still be across the existing local authority boundaries. It is therefore unlikely there will be either a positive or negative impact on local business within Devon.	

### Section 4d -Combined Impacts

Linkages or conflicts between social, environmental and economic impacts:	n/a
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### Section 5 - 'Social Value' of planned commissioned/procured services:

How will the economic, social and environmental well-being of the relevant area be improved through	Presently each Local Authority has contracts for services with the Adoption support services provider market but not necessarily for the same services. These contracts will be aligned so that all 4 Authorities procure the
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what is being proposed? And how, in conducting the process of procurement, might that improvement be secured?	same services, this sees an opportunity for existing providers to review the scope and scale of their service offer and may see these businesses grow. There may also be new businesses created through interest in the opportunities these contracts afford.
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## Risks and mitigation

The key risks to Devon as host, to Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay as those delegating adoption functions, together with the mitigation activity are outlined below:

Ref	Risk description	Mitigation
1	PACE OF CHANGE AND INNOVATION: The Local Authority Hosted model may not offer the same opportunities for pace of innovation and change if the adoption agencies are still subject to Local Authority control, because of the complexity of sign off processes in large organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Devon as the Host Local Authority will have appropriate functions and decisions delegated by the Local Authorities under the Inter Authority Agreement.</li> <li>As work is progressed to standardise best practice a focus on opportunity for innovation is paramount; similarly, when considering best delivery mechanism for services innovation is a key consideration</li> <li>Appropriate and effective Governance arrangements</li> </ul>
2	EXTERNAL FUNDING: The Local Authority Hosted model may not offer the same opportunities to attract additional external funding that setting up an independent sector social enterprise would offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risk share agreement to include a mechanism for addressing any reduction in funding streams;</li> <li>Through Commissioning of services from Voluntary Adoption Agencies that do access external funding the RAA can benefit from innovation and improvement of services in the wider market</li> </ul>
3	PERFORMANCE: Opting for a Local Authority hosted model may detract from better performers, rather than improving the poorer performers. This may impact the Host seeing a decline and the partner Local Authorities not seeing required improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate Staff employment arrangements;</li> <li>Comprehensive change management will be undertaken to ensure all staff are engaged fully and committed to improving practice and outcomes for families and children.</li> </ul>
4	RESPONSIBILITIES: Devon will become accountable for statutory duties post adoption order. This may impact on reputation, or potentially attract a financial cost, for example if there are legal costs related to a complaint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear Governance and effective Inter Authority Agreement e.g. delegation and financial arrangements.</li> <li>Ultimate responsibility for performance and inspection remains with the Childs Local Authority in the same way an authority retains responsibility for commissioned services.</li> </ul>
5	VOLUNTARY ADOPTION AGENCY INVOLVEMENT: The Local Authority hosted model may reduce the benefit of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies involvement in service design and practice improvement. Voluntary Adoption Agency involvement in Regional Adoption Agencies such as Adopt South West is a requirement by DfE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The governance arrangement ensures continued strategic partnership between the Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies;</li> <li>Voluntary Adoption Agencies continue to be fully included in the development of design &amp; practice;</li> </ul>

Ref	Risk description	Mitigation
6	COST: Devon as the Host of the RAA will attract additional costs e.g. corporate service functions such as IT and HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding Model has appropriate mechanisms so the Host does not wholly bear additional cost and</li> <li>appropriate mechanisms to manage financial risks agreed by all authorities</li> </ul>
7	COST: Local Authorities may see increase in cost of service	
8	COST: The cost of a second development to the final model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide capacity in the structure and governance to lead the work;</li> <li>Budget holders within governance to enable direction for resources required without further cost.</li> <li>Agreement at outset that any surplus achieved will be pooled for future development</li> </ul>
9	STAFFING: Devon as Host Local Authority may see vacancies arise as staff employment arrangements are completed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership and commitment demonstrated in each Local Authority to the “single service” concept and strategy to staff to reduce likelihood of resignations</li> <li>Early quantification of risk through robust HR processes; scope actual staffing requirement for the Regional Adoption agency; address any gap with intensive recruitment campaign</li> </ul>
10	STAFFING: Local Authorities may see staff leaving their adoption services in anticipation of changes to their work bases and practice;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early decision on Staff employment arrangements so staff are aware of the position;</li> <li>Communication of the benefit of a “single” service for children and families and what this means for staff;</li> <li>Transparent and timely consultation to inform working arrangement e.g. teams, locations, work base;</li> </ul>
11	OFSTED; Local Authorities may see the change as untimely if Ofsted inspections are due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Robust leadership and change management to establish a clear time table, raise staff awareness of what will change and when and the expectation of them in the interim</li> <li>The DfE Regional Adoption Agency group and Ofsted are in discussion on the new reporting regime requirements and are using early Regional Adoption Agencies as a learning opportunity; both are aware of the risk any change programme poses to staff and authority performance</li> </ul>