

**Regional Adoption Agency incorporating
Leicestershire, Leicester, North
Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire and Rutland
Councils
(to be known as Family Adoption Links)**

Business Case v5.0

31st July 2020

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Background papers

- Memorandum of Understanding (L3R_MoU_v8_composite)
- Status report of L3R regional adoption arrangement Master presented to the project governance board on 24 June 2019
- Evaluation of regional adoption agencies. First report: 2018 to 2019, Ecorys UK

Section 1 Introduction and background

1.1 The vision

1.1.1 In *Children's social care reform: a vision for change* (2016) the government outlined its overarching vision for transforming the quality of children's social care services by 2020¹. In respect of adoption, the government's vision is for an adoption system where²:

- Decisions about placements are always made in children's best interests.
- Service delivery has at its heart innovation and practice excellence.
- Social workers are highly skilled professionals who make high quality, evidence-based decisions and do not tolerate damaging delay for children in their care.
- Matches are made without unnecessary delay.
- Every adoptive family has access to an on-going package of appropriate support with a right to a high quality, specialist assessment of need.
- The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart of national and local policy decision making and delivery of services.

1.1.2 Strategic and political leads for the Family Adoption Links (FAL) partnership³ have committed to regional adoption services which:

- Provide children with the widest range of adopters, who have been supported, informed and prepared to meet the needs of children placed with them
- Ensure all aspects of matching are designed to deliver the best quality outcomes for all children across the RAA with a plan for adoption
- Ensure that the adopter experiences a consistent, high quality and professional service across all aspects of the adopter journey
- Ensure all adopters receive a consistent, high quality, evidence-based assessment
- Ensure all adoptive families are entitled to the same high standard of adoption support irrespective of where they live across the FAL footprint

1 Children's social care reform: a vision for change, January 2016

2 Adoption: a vision for change, March 2016

3 L3R Memorandum of Understanding v8 (signed by L3R lead members)

- Promote strong and effective partnerships between FAL local authorities and VAAs to create services which promote an adopter lead approach and maximize choice for children and adopters.

1.2 Context

1.2.1 The government's Education and Adoption Act (2016) sets out expectations for adoption services through the establishment of regional adoption agencies (RAA). By 2020 every local authority is expected to become part of a RAA and all except six local authorities in England are part of the regional adoption programme. To date (July 2020) 22 regional adoption agencies have been established covering 121 local authorities in England.

1.2.2 DfE has provided the following definition of a regional adoption agency⁴

- **Single line of accountability** – The new body must be in a position to act as a single entity on behalf of the individual authorities.
- **Core functions are transferred** to the RAA – As set out in the policy paper 'Regionalising Adoption' we want RAA's to be responsible for recruitment, matching and support.
- **Pan regional approach** – The new body should have a regional reach as far as its key functions are concerned, particularly on family finding and matching.
- **Recruitment, support and matching** – It is essential that RAA's drive forward the recruitment of new adopters utilising a wider geographical base audience to increase the scope for more matching and ultimately increasing placement opportunities. We believe this will be particularly helpful in assessing adopters for harder to place children.
- Each RAA to appoint a **Head of Service** with line management responsibility for staff in the RAA.
- **Pooled funding** – We want LA's to pool their adoption funding into one RAA funding pot that is managed by the RAA.
- **Partnership with the voluntary sector** – VAAs have an important role to play in the provision of adoption services. We want RAA's to involve them in the design

⁴ Confirmed in email from DfE dated 12 October 2017

and implementation of RAA's and to consider their role in the delivery of services.

1.2.3 FAL local authorities were formally part of the Adoption East Midlands (AEM) partnership (formerly EMRAA). The partnership was funded by DfE since 2015 to establish a regional adoption agency for the region.

1.2.4 In December 2017 the AEM partners agreed to deliver the AEM services in two parts:

- The development of a regional adoption agency for Derbyshire, Derby, Nottinghamshire and Nottingham local authorities (the D2N2 RAA) which meets the DfE requirements of a regional adoption agency, and
- The development of a regional adoption 'arrangement' for Leicestershire, Leicester and Lincolnshire (also acting on behalf of Rutland) local authorities (the FAL regional adoption arrangement) which seeks to deliver the service elements of the DfE requirements of a regional adoption agency.

1.2.5 In January 2020 the L3R board unanimously agreed to the inclusion of North Lincolnshire Council to the RAA 'arrangement' and confirmed that the new partnership would establish itself as a stand-alone RAA apart from AEM. This decision will be formally agreed at the regional project board in September 2020

1.2.6 The partner local authorities have committed to the delivering the following (as set out in the Memorandum of Understanding V8):

- a) Between October 2018 and September 2020, the PGB will establish and deliver key components of the FAL regional adoption arrangement model to include formal collaboration on:
- Development and professional development of permanence teams
 - Regional early tracking of children
 - Early permanence including foster to adopt and concurrent placements
 - Regional matching of children with suitable adoptive families
 - Regional recruitment of adopters
 - Regional assessment and preparation of adopters
 - Establishing a regional pool of adopters for the RAA.

- Shared panels for matching and, potentially, adopter approvals if required
 - Shared learning on effective adoption support including the development of action learning sets and a regional workforce development strategy.
- b) To review adoption activity delivered under the Regional Adoption Arrangement, develop a business case and recommend the future course of action from March 2020. The business case will include, as a minimum, the following options:
- Continue the Regional Adoption Arrangement for a future term (the term to be agreed)
 - Establish a regional adoption agency or join an existing regional adoption agency
 - Disestablish the current partnership.

1.3 Review of the FAL Regional Adoption Arrangement

Three service level agreements (SLAs) were established under the Memorandum of Understanding. A report⁵ was provided to the project governance board on 24 June 2019 setting out work achieved and exceptions to the work plan as detailed in the SLAs. The paragraphs below summarise these achievements and exceptions.

1.3.1 SLA 1 - responsibilities of each partner and the lead/coordinating local authority for children for whom adoption is the plan for permanence (lead LA's – Leicestershire and Leicester City). The majority of activity under this SLA is progressing to target with the following exceptions:

- Training for staff on the new proformas for child permanence reports and assessments of match and support required.
- Determine the location of the home finding role (either in the permanence team or the adoption team)
- Align adoption allowances across FAL LA's.

1.3.2 SLA 2 - responsibilities of each partner and the lead/ coordinating local authority for adopters (lead LA's – Lincolnshire and Leicester City). The majority of activity under this SLA is progressing to target with the following exceptions:

- Set up of the SharePoint tracker was delayed until June 2019 which has resulted in poor quality data on cases and performance across the FAL partnership. In

⁵ Status report of FAL regional adoption arrangement Master

addition, the management of the database requires dedicated administration which has not yet been identified in all cases.

Note: an agreed data set and performance reporting cycle has now been agreed

- Further work is required on aligning arrangements for Inter-Country Adoptions and Non-Agency adoptions.

1.3.3 SLA 3 - responsibilities of each partner and the lead/ coordinating local authority for the adopter pool (lead LA's – Leicestershire). The majority of activity under this SLA is progressing to target with the following exceptions:

- Work on shared panels has been delayed pending an evaluation of post Covid requirements
- The delay has impacted on opportunities to target recruitment of adopters to meet the needs of specific children.

The business case was endorsed by the by the partner Local Authority (LA), including North Lincolnshire, on the 30th January 2020 with the recommendation that a final business case was passed to the executive within each LA to be formally accepted. Alongside this, an Interagency Agreement is being developed setting out the specific terms, governance and accountabilities of the partnership arrangement in relation to the services within scope.

1.4 Funding the future development of the FAL regional adoption services

1.4.1 The Department for Education has committed grants totalling up to £125K to develop the final business case for FAL adoption services by September 2020. In addition, FAL local authorities have committed a further £40K to support the development of future regional adoption services. The combined funding covers the cost of delivering the following outputs:

April to September 2020

- Confirmation of delivery model and arrangements for operational delivery
- Agreement of budget and funding formula
- Development of Analysis of adoption resources across FAL
- Framework for FAL regional adoption arrangement performance management
- Finance and performance data baseline in place for sign-off

The RAA for Leicestershire, Leicester, North Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire and Rutland councils

- RAA named and Rebranding completed
- Final Business case drafted

Section 2 Reasons for change

2.1 The national picture

- 2.1.1 It is the stated intent of government that all local authority adoption services will be regionalised by 2020. Currently all but 6 local authorities in England are part of the regionalisation programme sponsored by DfE and, to date, 22 RAA's have been established covering 121 local authorities in England.
- 2.1.2 Aside from the legislative requirements, there may be a benefit for local authorities to share services in order to maintain leverage in the national adoption market – as RAA's become established, smaller players may be disadvantaged in recruiting potential adopters and/ or finding the right families for children in their care.
- 2.1.3 There is already evidence of change in the national adoption landscape. Voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) are facing significant challenges, resulting from both the termination of the centrally provided Inter-Agency Fund (to fund placements for harder to place children) and a decreasing reliance on VAAs as RAA's build their own pool of adopters from within the region.

2.2 Inefficiencies

- 2.2.1 RAA's offer an opportunity to improve economies of scale and reduce fragmentation of the system – in England there were 180 agencies recruiting and matching adopters for 5000 children per year and by April to December 2014 78 local authorities reported recruiting fewer than 20 adopters⁶. The government takes the view that this fragmentation “reduces the scope for broader, strategic planning, as well as specialisation, innovation and investment”.
- 2.2.2 The five-year average for 2014-19⁷ was 148 children per year adopted across the FAL footprint.

⁶ Regionalising adoption, June 2015, DfE

⁷ Local authority tables: children looked after in England including adoption 2017 to 2018

2.3 Children in care for whom adoption is the plan for permanence

2.3.1 As of 2018-2019 across the FAL local authorities, an average of 14%⁸ children who cease to be looked after by the local authority go on to be matched with an adoptive family (18% for Leicestershire, 16% for Leicester, 10% for North Lincolnshire, 17% for Lincolnshire and 9% for Rutland) compared to the national average of 15%. Just under 400 children were adopted across FAL in the period 2014-17, a drop of 13% from the period 2013-16⁹.

2.4 Delays in matching children

2.4.1 At national level the time taken between a child entering care and being placed with a family for adoption (Adoption Scorecard indicator A1) was 18 months in the three-year period 2015-18. For the same period, 44% of children had been waiting longer than 14 months for a match¹⁰. A study¹¹ into the adoption of older children found that delay reduces children's life chances and raises the costs to local authorities for such children in the future.

2.4.2 For the three-year period 2015-18, the average number of days between children entering care and moving in with its adoptive family¹² (for children who have been adopted) ranged from 361 in Rutland to 438 in Leicester City compared to a national average of 486 days.

2.4.3 FAL performance on timeliness between 2014 and 2017 is very good¹³. For the average time between a child entering care to moving in with their adoptive family, FAL is ranked 3rd in the country. For average time between receiving court authority for a placement and the decision on a match, FAL is ranked 1st in the country.

2.5 Recruitment and finding placements for children

2.5.1 The latest Adoption Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB) data as at March 2019 shows the number of families approved for adoption has decreased 1% from

8 Local authority tables: children looked after in England including adoption 2017 to 2018

9 Evaluation of regional adoption agencies. First report: 2018 to 2019. Figures 2.1 (p 26)

10 Adoption scorecards and underlying data: year ending March 2018

11 Selwyn, J.; Wijedasa, D.; Meakings, S. (2004) *Beyond the Adoption Order: challenges, interventions and adoption disruptions*

12 Adoption scorecards and underlying data: year ending March 2018

13 Evaluation of regional adoption agencies. First report: 2018 to 2019. Figures 2.2 (p 28) and 2.3 (p 29)

2017/18. However, the ASGLB has indicated a concern that the ‘adopter gap’ is now growing, leading to a potential insufficiency of adoptive families. The government intends for RAA's to be able to recruit over a wider geographical area in order to increase the choice of adopters available to meet the needs of children who need families. The greater economies of scale should also enable RAA's to develop specialist techniques for recruiting families for the specific needs of children who are (or are likely to be) placed for adoption.

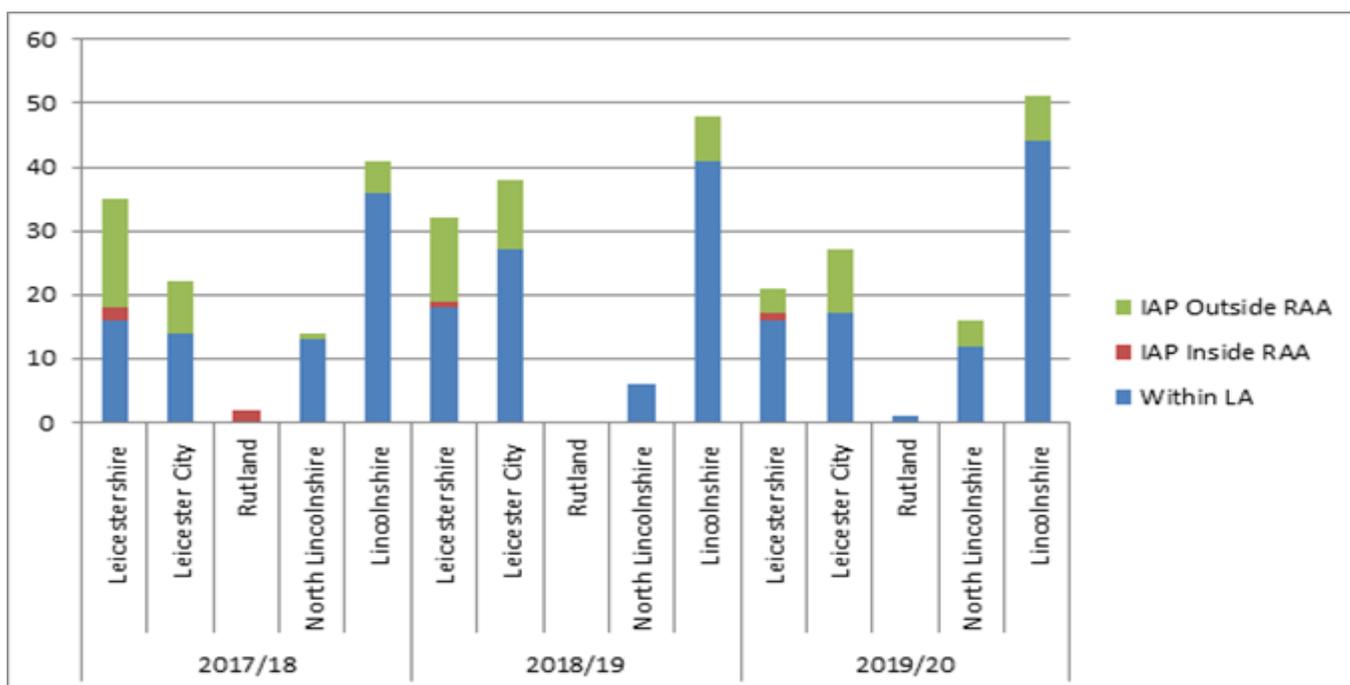
2.5.2 Each external agency placement comes at a cost to the local authority (£31,620 per VAA/RAA placement in 2019 - 20). The inter-agency placement fund is no longer available to fund ‘harder to place’ placements thereby requiring local authorities to meet these costs. The RAA provides an opportunity to place more children with RAA adopters and fewer with external providers.

2.5.3 Partner LA's have provided data on placement sources for children between 2017 and 2020.

Number of Children Placed For Adoption (RAA / VAA / LA Provision)

What this shows

The number of children placed with their prospective adoptive family during the period, **by Agency type**.



		Within LA	IAP Inside RAA	IAP Outside RAA	Total
2017/18	Leicestershire	16	2	17	35
	Leicester City	14	0	8	22
	Rutland	0	2	0	2
	North Lincolnshire	13	0	1	14
	Lincolnshire	36	0	5	41
2018/19	Leicestershire	18	1	13	32
	Leicester City	27	0	11	38
	Rutland	0	0	0	0
	North Lincolnshire	6	0	0	6
	Lincolnshire	41	0	7	48
2019/20	Leicestershire	16	1	4	21
	Leicester City	17	0	10	27
	Rutland	1	0	0	1
	North Lincolnshire	12	0	4	16
	Lincolnshire	44	0	7	51

2.5.4 It is of note that only 6 of a total of 354 children were placed with RAA partners over the 3-year period.

2.6 Adoption support

2.6.1 Adoption support services are provided by the NHS, local authorities and a wide range of independent providers. A review of the use of the Adoption Support Fund (government funding to respond to the needs of some families for therapeutic support) found that there are gaps in service across the country and a scarcity of services across the piece. Spot purchasing of interventions from the independent sector limits their ability to develop and expand. Joint commissioning by the local

authority partners in the RAA should, through pooled funds, enable block contracts to be offered which respond to local need and gaps in provision.

- 2.6.2 The RAA provides an opportunity to clarify the adoption support offer from the RAA (ensuring that services are evidence-based) and the 'ask' from external providers thereby ensuring a resilient in-house adoption support service, setting the parameters for commissioning adoption support services and reducing market uncertainty for external providers.

2.7 Adoption allowances

- 2.7.1 These budgets are not included in the pooled funds for the RAA so, at this stage, individual local authorities will continue to assess need and award funds to support the children for whom it has acted as a corporate parent.
- 2.7.2 Work will be required to align the criteria for access to adoption allowances across FAL and to set common rates at which they are paid, primarily to ensure that adopters have equitable access to the funds across the FAL footprint.

2.8 Ofsted ratings

- 2.8.1 Currently, the five local authorities have Ofsted ratings for adoption of 'outstanding' (Lincolnshire 2019, North Lincolnshire 2017), 'good' (Leicester 2017) and 'requires improvement' (Leicestershire 2019 and Rutland 2017). However, it must be noted that despite Leicestershire being rated as 'requires improvement' in the recent September 2019 inspection, the same report rated the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers as being 'good'.

Section 3 Services in scope and the service offer

3.1 Who would RAA provide services for?

3.1.1 An RAA would do the following:

- Provide all children from Leicestershire, Leicester, North Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire and Rutland with an adoptive family that meets their needs, either from the RAA pool of adopters or through inter-agency arrangements with other regional adoption agencies or voluntary adoption agencies
- Ensure that those involved in adoption receive the information, support and advice that they need to understand their adoption journey
- Ensure that RAA families are well prepared, enabled and supported to care for the children with plans for adoption support.

3.1.2 Meet the minimum requirements as set out by DfE and areas of shared work as agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding, namely recruitment and preparation of adopters, matching of children with adoptive families and post adoption support.

3.1.3 Responsibility for children for whom adoption is the plan for permanence will remain with the local authority.

3.1.4 The proposed service specification for the FAL regional adoption agency is set out in section 3.2 below.

3.2 Services in scope for an RAA and the responsibilities of local authority partners

3.2.1 Responsibilities of local authorities and the FAL RAA for children for whom adoption is the plan for permanence.

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
Case responsibility for the child	The local authority will retain case management responsibility for the child until the making of the Adoption Order.	FAL RAA will provide specialist advice and support to assist LA staff and in promoting best practice.

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
	<p>The local authority will be responsible for all statutory functions including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory Visits • Management and supervision of contact between child and birth family members. • Supervision, administration and finance of foster placements and communication with foster carers (including Fostering for Adoption placements). 	
<p>Early identification of children requiring adoption</p>	<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 FAL RAA, providing full and timely information.</p>	<p>FAL RAA will take on a family finding role for each child identified as possibly requiring adoption. Staff from FAL RAA will be involved in identifying children for early placement.</p> <p>Representatives of FAL RAA will, where possible, attend meetings in each local authority (such as legal gateway meetings, looked after review meetings, care planning meetings etc) to understand the needs of the children who may require adoption and, where appropriate, to begin to identify suitable adopters at an early stage.</p>
<p>Early Placement</p>	<p>Where appropriate, the local authority will make available a Fostering for Adoption service for children who may benefit from the possibility of early placement with potential adopters (placements will depend on the availability of appropriate carers).</p>	<p>Where appropriate, and in agreement with the local authority, FAL RAA will make available a Concurrent Planning Service for children who may benefit from the possibility of early placement with potential adopters. (Placements will depend on the availability of appropriate</p>

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
	<p>The LA will retain the responsibility for supporting foster carers.</p>	<p>carers)</p>
<p>Twin Tracking of the children requiring adoption</p>	<p>The local authority will actively track the progress of children in care proceedings or looked after under section 20 (Children Act 1989) so that an up-to-date knowledge of their potential need for an adoption placement is maintained.</p>	<p>FAL RAA will also track all children who may require a plan for adoption or for whom initial information indicates that adoption may be required</p>
<p>Pre-placement Reports</p>	<p>The LA will be responsible for the completion and cost of all reports pertaining to the child’s plan for adoption prior to an adoption placement being made including the Child Permanence Report.</p>	<p>FAL RAA will provide support and challenge to help ensure that Child Permanence Reports are of a consistent high quality across partnership LA's.</p> <p>FAL RAA will be responsible, at the earliest opportunity, for any subsequent profile of the children in identifying early matching considerations. This will include taking into account information and advice from adoption support services on the potential needs of the child/children once placed, and potential requirements for future support.</p>
<p>Pre-adoption support assessments</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.</p>	<p>FAL RAA will provide additional information and advice on the placement needs of the child and the likely need for post adoption support services.</p> <p>FAL RAA and the LA will work closely and collaboratively to ensure that the needs of the child can be met, and that planned support is flexible and sustainable.</p>
<p>Medical Information</p>	<p>The Local Authority will be responsible for obtaining all required medical information in respect of children who are being</p>	<p>FAL RAA will give specific consideration to medical information in the identification of a possible match.</p>

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
	considered for adoption.	
Should Be Placed for Adoption (SHOBPA) decision	The Agency Decision Maker in each LA will be responsible for the 'Should be placed for adoption' decision.	FAL RAA will support the Should Be Placed for Adoption decision making process as requested, particularly in the provision of information to support pre-placement reports.
Family Finding Process	The LA will work closely with FAL RAA and will provide all the information required to enable the family finding process.	<p>FAL RAA will co-ordinate the tracking/family finding process in consultation with the local authority.</p> <p>FAL RAA will aim to identify a potential adoptive match for a child prior to the conclusion of Care Proceedings.</p>
Communication during the family finding process	<p>It will be the responsibility of the LA to keep the Child Permanence Reports updated and to inform FAL RAA of any changes in the child's development or circumstances (e.g. change of placement).</p> <p>The LA worker will consider any reports relating to the proposed adopter and make timely decisions about the initial suitability of any adopters and provide constructive feedback where adopters are not considered a suitable match.</p>	<p>FAL RAA will keep the LA regularly updated about progress on family finding.</p> <p>FAL RAA will provide support and challenge around the effective and timely matching of children.</p>
'Hard to Place'	<p>The LA is responsible for identifying at the earliest opportunity where a child may be 'hard to place' (criteria to be set out)</p> <p>The LA will gather the relevant information, assess and forward to FAL RAA as soon as possible.</p>	<p>FAL RAA will either provide or commission a service for HTP children which maximises the potential for achieving a suitable placement.</p> <p>This may involve some or all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased publicity – DVD, Photos, etc • Press and Digital Media advertising • Profile the child at specific events • Attempt to recruit carers specifically for

SERVICE AREA	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
		<p>the child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide additional training and preparation for potential carers • Advise on or assist with additional preparation work with the child.
<p>Preparation of the child and Life Story</p>	<p>The LA will be responsible for preparing the child for an adoptive placement.</p> <p>The LA permanence team will be responsible for the preparation of the child’s Life Story Book within the required timescales.</p> <p>The LA will be responsible for producing the Later Life Letter.</p>	<p>FAL RAA will provide support and challenge to the LA on life story work as required.</p> <p>FAL RAA will provide a template for the Life Story work, advice and training to LA social workers as required.</p>
<p>Linking and Matching</p>	<p>The LA, by agreement, will meet the costs of introductions between children and carers, e.g. settling in equipment such as car seats and stair gates.</p> <p>The decision for an appropriate match for the child/children remains with the LA.</p> <p>The LA is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Child Permanence Reports • Delegation of Parental Responsibility report • The Adoption Placement Report as it relates to the child. 	<p>FAL RAA will be responsible for completing the Adoption Placement Report, apart from the section on the child.</p> <p>FAL RAA will organise and administer the Matching Panel.</p>
<p>Matching decisions</p>	<p>The Agency Decision Makers (ADM) of the child’s local authority will complete the matching decision.</p>	<p>FAL RAA will support the process with information as required, including Panel Minutes from the adopter approval.</p>
<p>Adoption allowances</p>	<p>Adoption allowances will be determined, reviewed and paid for by each LA.</p>	<p>FAL RAA will assist in the assessments for Adoption Allowances.</p>

3.2.2 Responsibilities of local authorities and the FAL RAA for adopters

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
Recruitment of adopters		FAL RAA will be responsible for recruiting adopters appropriate to the needs of children waiting in each LA. Marketing information will reflect the fact that FAL RAA is delivering the service on behalf of partner LA's.
Enquiries	The LA will signpost any enquiries from potential adopters to FAL RAA. 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 FAL RAA.	FAL RAA will provide a centralised enquiry process for the region to meet all statutory requirements. FAL RAA will provide written information to potential adopters and will hold a programme of information events. FAL RAA may at times signpost adopters to other agencies where they are not appropriate to the needs of the children which FAL RAA has waiting.
Stage One	The LA's will provide all information required for statutory checks of potential adopters resident in the LA at no cost to the RAA.	FAL RAA will undertake all Stage one functions from within the LA bases.
Stage Two		FAL RAA will undertake all Stage Two functions from within the LA bases.
PARs		FAL RAA will complete the Prospective Adopters Report
Approvals	The Agency Decision Makers for each LA will provide an ADM for adopter approvals	FAL RAA will service the coordination of Adoption Panels.
Post-approval support and training		FAL RAA will provide post approval support and training to approved adopters.

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
Inter-country adoptions/non-agency adoptions	The LA will be responsible for managing inter-country and non-agency adoptions.	

3.2.3 Responsibilities of local authorities and the FAL RAA for adoption support

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
Pre-adoption support assessments at the point of the Should Be Placed for Adoption decision	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.	FAL RAA will provide additional information and advice on how the placement needs of the child will be met and the likely need for post adoption support services. FAL RAA and the LA will work closely and collaboratively to ensure that the needs of the child can be met, and that planned support is flexible and sustainable.
Post adoption support assessments	The LA will signpost all referrals for support from adoptive families to FAL RAA. 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, whilst simultaneously notifying FAL RAA of any referral involving an adopted child. The LA will meet the costs of adoption support where child in need/ child at the edge of care thresholds are met.	FAL RAA will conduct post adoption support assessments for all relevant children/families in the first 3 years of the placement or at the request of a partner LA (at any time in during the adoptive placement), for example alongside a joint assessment for a child in need.
Universal and Targeted adoption support		FAL RAA will provide universal and targeted adoption support services as set out in the assessment for the first 3 years of placement for all relevant families.

	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY	RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY
Specialist adoption support	The LA will consider funding requests for post adoption specialist support services including where Adoption Support Funds are subject to the Fair Access Limit.	FAL RAA will undertake adoption support fund assessments and applications. FAL RAA will commission specialist adoption support services funded by the LA.
Out-of-hours services	All adopters will have access to the LA's Emergency Duty Team out of core hours.	FAL RAA will negotiate out of hours support for specific families where necessary subject to agreed LA funding.
Contact with birth families	Direct contact requirements and management will remain with the LA	FAL RAA will manage Letterbox contact between adopted children and birth families from within the local LA base.
Adoption allowances	Adoption allowances will be paid for by each LA after undertaking the appropriate assessment and the LA will review these in line with regulations.	
Schedule 2 access to birth records	The LA's will assist FAL RAA in schedule 2 access to birth records as requested.	FAL RAA will manage schedule 2 access to birth records provision and the provision of birth records counselling.
Support to birth parents	The LA's will provide or commission therapeutic support to birth parents	
Access to Adopter's records	The relevant LA will provide information /files to the RAA for historic cases	FAL RAA will manage access to adopter's records for cases which it has managed.
Intermediary Services	Each LA will determine whether it wishes to commission Intermediary Services for an adopted person or relatives of an adopted person seeking information and contact.	FAL RAA will provide a sign-posting service to people seeking intermediary services.

3.3 Structures in scope

3.3.1 The expectation is that the service would provide for:

- Clear governance and funding arrangements

- Clear leadership and a single accountable officer responsible for delivering the service, accountable for its quality, responsible for relationship management within the partnership and the representative of the partnership with external bodies
- A central hub for management and administration functions
- An agile workforce able to work across the geographical footprint of the service using LA adoption staff
- Close working with the social work permanence teams in each local authority
- Child and adopter centred planning
- Teams with a broad range of skill sets which can respond to families' changing needs over time – ability to flex the service to meet needs of children, adopters and families.

3.3.2 A inter agency agreement will set out clear governance and funding arrangements. The service specification will set out the service standards and performance requirements of both the RAA and partner local authorities.

3.4 Staff in scope

3.4.1 All staff working in the RAA services identified in section 3.2 would be considered in scope, including associated administration support and managers.

3.5 Locations in scope

3.5.1 The RAA would require an office for the central management and administration functions of the RAA. It is likely that the current locations in Leicestershire, Leicester, North Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire would continue to provide local adoption services including for the identification of children for whom adoption is the plan for permanence, the recruitment and support of adopters and adoption support provision.

Note : This will be subject Covid-19 recovery plans and post Covid arrangements to facilitate the remote working of staff

3.6 Systems in scope

- 3.6.1 Work will be required to identify the case management system most appropriate to the business of the RAA and ICT infrastructure and hardware required. This will, at present, be the current systems in operation within each LA supplemented by a region wide framework for performance management.
- 3.6.2 Practice, processes and protocols – work on the alignment of practice, process and protocols across the FAL local authorities has made good progress and will continue under the Service Level Agreements between the FAL local authorities.

Section 4 The delivery model for FAL RAA and governance arrangements

4.1 Options appraisal for a delivery model for the RAA

4.1.1 Four potential delivery models have been considered:

- Do nothing - continue with the current regional adoption arrangement as set out in the memorandum of understanding¹⁴.
- LA Hosted (centralised or hub and spoke)¹⁵: the majority of services and responsibilities are shifted from the LA to the RAA. Staff are TUPE'd or seconded in the host LA but typically work flexibly across the RAA footprint and maintain links with their original LA. All but one of current live RAA's use this delivery model.
- Local Authority Trading Company (LATC)/ Joint Venture: the RAA is established as a separate trading company with staff TUPE'd into the new organisation. Each LA has a shared and equal responsibility for the RAA. One of the current live LA's uses this delivery model – Adopt West.
- A partnership model based on the governance arrangements for many Youth Offending Teams¹⁶. The RAA would pool adoption resources but maintaining staff within the LA where they currently work and establishing a small centralised team funded by partner LA's.

Option 4 – the partnership model is the preferred delivery model for the Family Adoption Links RAA. A detailed consideration of each option is set out below.

4.2 Option 1 - Do nothing: continue with the current regional adoption arrangement

4.2.1 Meeting the need

- Continue with the current FAL regional adoption arrangement as set out in the service level agreements as part of the Memorandum of Understanding between

¹⁴ FAL Memorandum of Understanding v8

¹⁵ Evaluation of regional adoption agencies. First report: 2018 to 2019 (p31)

¹⁶ Modern Youth Offending Partnerships; Guidance of effective youth offending team governance in England 2013. 'Historically, the pooled budget, which combines the contributions of the partners into a single pot, has proven to be the most popular solution to establishing the budget of the YOT and this should be overseen by the YOT manager on behalf of the partnership' (p7).

Leicestershire, Leicester, Lincolnshire and Rutland councils without committing to joining a formal RAA. North Lincolnshire Council would become signatory to the MoU.

- This option is unlikely to meet the expectation of DfE that all local authorities should develop and become part of an RAA model by 2020. The government's RAA programme would seem to be universal in take up (As of July 2020 there are 121 LA's in 22 RAA's representing 76% of LA's in England). Legislation is in place to direct the adoption services of LA's deemed not in the programme.
- Further confirmation was received in the form of the letter sent by the DfE on 06.09.2019 reiterating the government's commitment to develop a national system of RAA's by 2020.

4.2.2 Outputs

- An adoption service that is unchanged from its current form.

4.2.3 Benefits

- Mitigation of the risk that major reorganisation of adoption services in the region may have an impact on service delivery to children and adoptive families in the short term.
- Avoiding major change which could potentially have an adverse impact on staff and the proposed changes to current 'ways of working' increasing the risk that the RAA may not retain its existing experienced and qualified adoption team workforce.
- The LA is able to maintain complete control of their adoption service.

4.2.4 Outline Costs and Income

- Contributions of each LA based on previous net costs.
- No setup costs.

4.2.5 Timescale for completion

- None attached to this option.

4.2.6 Risks

- Failure to join a formal RAA may result in central government directing how adoption services will be delivered.
- There is a potential leadership vacuum in this model which risks impacting on effective service delivery and performance across the region.
- Not joining the RAA and instead remaining as a stand-alone service will mean competing in the recruitment of adoptive families with all of the new surrounding regional adoption agencies, who are likely to have gained a competitive advantage from becoming larger regional agencies. This may harm our ability to recruit adoptive families, which would necessitate the need to purchase more inter-agency placements not less, creating additional budget pressures.
- Not joining an RAA at this stage after a long period of development work partly funded by the Department for Education will likely cause reputational damage to the RAA LA's.

4.3 Option 2 – LA Hosted (centralised or hub and spoke)

4.3.1 Meeting the need

- To make the hosted model operate effectively the FAL partners must delegate their adoption services functions to the Host Authority pursuant to Sections 9EA and 9EB of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Arrangements for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012. Each Cabinet of the Constituent Authorities must therefore make a resolution that its Adoption Functions be delegated to the nominated host.
- Once implemented the hosted solution creates an RAA under one management structure. This structure has the required governance to focus both on the immediate operation and performance of the single service, whilst acknowledging the need to determine the most appropriate strategies for future development and improvement of adoption services.
- To create a single structure and employer a hosted model operates by transferring staff from all the other LA's under TUPE to the host LA. This then ensures a consistent way of operating, processes, policies and practice to

optimise performance. This also ensures any interface with the RAA by Children's social workers or Voluntary Agencies or indeed health and education see a consistent response.

- Another key element of this model is transfer of the RAA pooled budget from the partner LA's to the host. In most cases the budget has been set on an average of the previous financial years net cost to each Local Authority, with a view to annual review of the model in line with performance management.
- Within this model two different forms of operating have emerged these being the "centralised" and "hub and spoke" model. The rationale for a centralised model is to support the development of a 'one' RAA identity. RAA's using the centralised model were concerned that a 'hub and spoke' model might lead to staff in the spokes feeling distanced from the hubs.
- RAA's which fall under the 'hub and spoke' model felt that geographical area was the main driver for how they arranged their services in that the spokes helped to cover a wider geographical area. Within these RAA's, there was typically a main 'hub' office, and several other 'spoke' offices elsewhere. The spokes will typically offer the outward-facing services, including adoption preparation and approval and adoption support services. Meanwhile, the hub will usually house the back-office functions and internal services including marketing, recruitment, panel administration, commissioning of services and finances.

4.3.2 Outputs

- Staff TUPE'd/seconded into the host LA.
- Formation of a "one" RAA identity.
- Appointment of a lead authority to host the RAA.
- Central hub: Coordinating functions from across the partnership. Delivering functions which operate on a regional footprint (scope can differ, e.g. marketing, cooperation with voluntary sector, transformation, change, development).
- Local hubs (most likely in every participating LA, but other configurations are also possible): Delivers adoption services that are not centralised in the hub.

4.3.3 Benefits

- An opportunity to reduce costs and deliver efficiency savings.
- Integration of the four Local Authority adoption services into one service will ensure a consistent way of operating including processes, policies and practice.
- A best practice model employed by the vast majority of RAA's.
- Highly likely to achieve approval from the DfE and be subject to much less scrutiny.
- Integration of the four local authority adoption services into one service offers the opportunity to reduce delays for children and improve overall performance.
- LA hosted model ensures responsibility still stays within the LA's.
- Emerging evidence suggests that smaller unitary authorities are likely to see the greatest benefit from accessing a larger pool of adopters.

4.3.4 Outline Costs and Income

- Contributions of each LA based on previous net costs.
- Performance based contributions.
- Setup costs relating to this option.

4.3.5 Timescale for completion

- Learning from established RAA's suggests that a minimum of 10 months would be required to establish a hosted service.

4.3.6 Risks

- Loss of control as the other partners must delegate their adoption services functions to the host and unlikely to receive the necessary endorsement from LA executives.
- 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.
- 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.

- Changes to the current way of working could lead to the risk that FAL may find it challenging to retain its existing experienced and qualified adoption team workforce. Furthermore, the TUPE process will take considerable time to implement from initial staff consultation right the way through to implementation.
- External funding - 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.
- Voluntary Adoption Agency Involvement - The local authority hosted model may reduce the benefit of the VAA involvement in service design and practice improvement.

4.4 Option 3 – Joint Venture between LA's to form a joint Local Authority Trading Company (LATC)

4.4.1 Meeting the need

- LA's set up a separate trading company, where each LA has a shared and equal responsibility for the RAA. The trading company would be a separate legal entity which can operate in its own name and with the benefit of establishing its own identity. In this model it's the local authorities only who are the owner of the corporate structure which operates as the RAA and is therefore a local authority trading company and subject to greater financial control than a company which is not part of a local authority.
- This joint venture between the participating authorities will create a new entity which offers a neutral platform which affords all participating authorities equal status within the arrangements and avoids the perception of control which the required role of a "lead authority" can create although maintaining local authority control.

4.4.2 Outputs

- A separate organisation. LA's own the organisation and appoint all board directors.
- Most commonly a company limited by shares or guarantee, but could also be a Community Interest Company (CIC) and/or charity.
- Staff TUPE'd into the LATC.
- Formation of a "one" RAA identity.
- The ability to trade beyond local authority boundaries to both public and private organisations.

4.4.3 Benefits

- The LA's jointly own the company creating a partnership approach in which there is equal accountability.
- An opportunity to setup a new identity and brand distinct from the LA's.
- This model of business is not new to LA's, many of have their own Companies to assist with their business opportunities.

4.4.4 Outline Costs and Income

- Contributions of each LA based on previous net costs.
- Performance based contributions.
- Higher setup costs relating to this option.

4.4.5 Timescale

- A more complex transition of governance and therefore will take longer to set up than other options.

4.4.6 Risks

- Set up and additional costs to ensure compliance as a business, which will be significantly over and above the current budget available to the services in each of the local authorities.
- There would be a need to set the company up separately as a registered Adoption Agency. This would incur more costs and require additional Ofsted registration.

- This model is more bureaucratic than others and exposes the RAA to a level of greater risk.

4.5 Option 4 – Partnership (YOS) Model

4.5.1 Meeting the need

- A key DfE criterion for the achievement of an RAA is a pooled budget. The most obvious comparison to draw is that of the Youth Offending Service (YOS). Regional YOS partnerships were formed under similar legislative circumstances in order to promote service integration and efficiency savings.
- YOS partnership approach has been in operation for over 10 years delivering greater efficiency as the result of a collective effort by all partners. Promoted as model of sustaining success, a pooled budget that combines the contributions of the partners into a single pot has proven to be the most popular solution to establishing a YOS budget. This is then overseen by the YOS manager on behalf of the partnership. Overall strategic direction and budget oversight is provided by a YOS management board.
- A Regional partnership model (as opposed to a separate legal entity or delivery vehicle) is a collaborative partnership arrangement which is delivered through a joint service delivery model across the local authorities which make up the RAA.
- The structure of this model is characterised as a hub and spoke model. For those services to be provided through the central RAA "hub", a nominated authority will act as a host authority. For services provided in a "spoke", staff will continue to be employed by the authority they are currently employed with.
- This option minimises the requirement for staff to TUPE into a new arrangement but means that the constituent local authorities may need to carry out internal restructures to achieve the arrangements. Some posts will be newly created and require a recruitment (for example, a Head of RAA post) by the RAA host authority.
- As well documented a key DfE criteria for achievement of a RAA is a pooled budget. The host authority will host and manage the pooled budget

arrangements on behalf of the RAA. Transactions between the authorities will be minimised to avoid bureaucracy.

- This operating model fixes partner contributions for an initial two years with a review following the first year of operation. This is to provide some level of certainty for the new arrangements as they are established, but also to ensure that the authorities themselves are insulated from any financial shock as a result of the arrangements.

4.5.2 Outputs

- Has been used as a delivery model previously employed by various LA Youth Justice Services (under Section 37 of the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998), in relation to the principles of multi-agency teams, integrated working and governance.
- One effective pool of children and adopters will be established.
- Alignment of practice and joined up delivery structures, systems, processes and practice to enable workforce from all the participating Local Authorities to work together.
- Staff remain in the employ of their current local authority.
- Central hub: matrix management of staff by head of RAA and local authority line manager and coordinating functions from across the partnership. Delivering functions which operate on a regional footprint (scope can differ, e.g. marketing, cooperation with voluntary sector, transformation, change, development).
- Local hubs (most likely in every participating LA, but other configurations are also possible): Delivers adoption services that are not centralised in the hub. Operates within individual LA's and form part of their wider children and families system.

4.5.3 Benefits

- Most likely to meet both the expectations of the DFE and to meet the requirements of political and strategic leads in FAL partners.
- The YOS model has been tried and tested over many years.
- Maintains the independence of each local authority whilst operating on a regional footprint.

- As there is no need for staff transfer (TUPE or secondment), easier to accept by staff.
- Limited technical implementation challenges (e.g. pensions, procurement) and therefore reduced implementation time and cost.
- Model is less risk for the host LA (in this model one LA hosts a central hub, not the whole service).
- Allows focus on “function” before “form” (e.g. North Midlands – ambition to expand scope beyond adoption, including fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardianship).

4.5.4 Outline Costs and Income

- Contributions of each LA based on previous net costs.
- Partners will need to fund central costs.

4.5.5 Timescale for completion

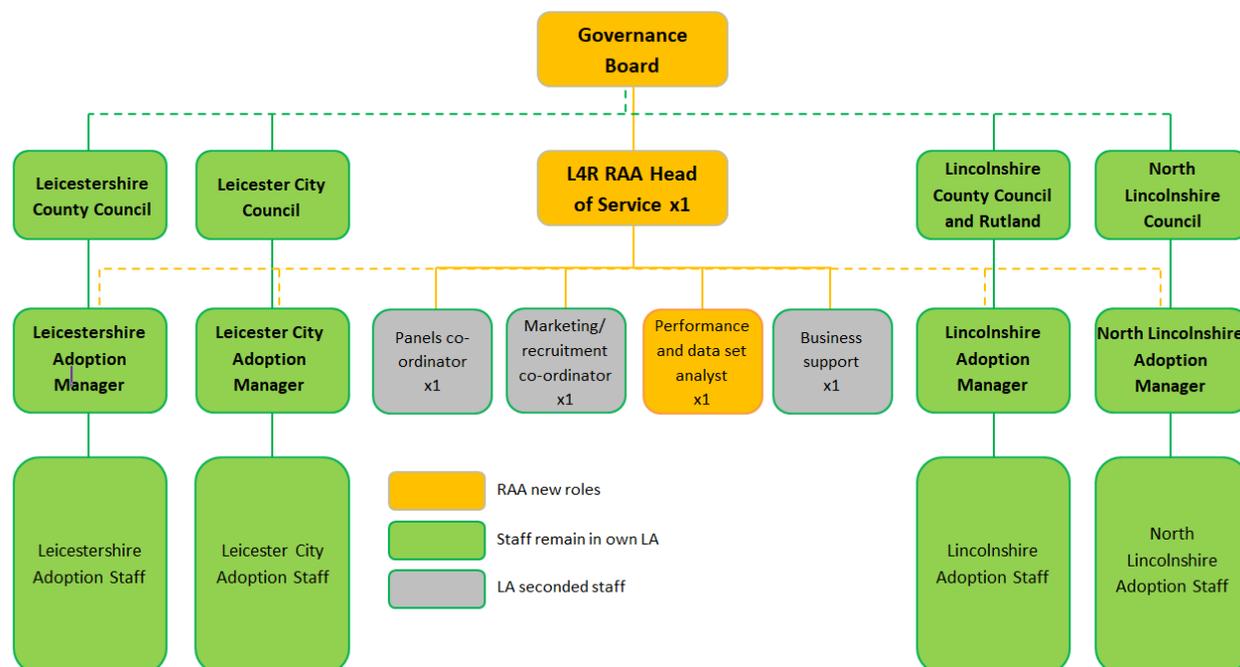
- Quicker to establish than other options.
- This arrangement will be reviewed after two years of operation to assess its effectiveness and retains the option of moving to a more integrated model such as a hosted TUPE arrangement. While this review will occur after 2 years of operation throughout those first two years the RAA board will continuously monitor performance as part of its oversight duties.

4.5.6 Risks

- As an ‘unorthodox’ model, could be subject to more scrutiny from DfE.
- Could be viewed as less sustainable, exposed to political changes within LA's.
- Potential barriers to innovation due to no new organisation to drive it.

Section 5 Skills and staff

The proposed structure and staffing establishment for FAL RAA is set out below.



The head of the service is a newly established post and is jointly funded by partner local authorities along with the data analyst post. Central functions across the partners will be supported by a small team coordinating key functions within the RAA. This budget along with travel and support cost for the wider central team will be £140,000 pa. The proposed four additional central office staff will be directly managed by the head of service. Support staff (apart from the data analyst) will be seconded into the new structure from partner LA's (maintaining their existing terms and conditions) as a contribution in kind. As the central hub will service each partner across the same range of functions it is proposed that Leicestershire, Leicester City, Lincolnshire (including Rutland) and North Lincolnshire will each contribute 25% of the central team costs from existing staff budgets.

Section 6 Systems

6.1 Context

6.1.1 An FAL RAA will require systems which allow for efficient and effective case management of the adopter journey and post adoption support. Learning from established RAA's suggests that a variety of approaches have been successful with most RAA's opting for shared case management system. These have been used where staff are TUPE'd or seconded into the host organisation. The level of disruption created by the preparation for, and transition to the new system is significant with a number of RAA's identifying it as the primary source of service disruption for the first year of operation. The preferred partnership model gives the RAA the potential to create an effective performance and accountability framework while retaining current case management systems. The onset of Covid-19 has accelerated the transition to remote working reducing reliance on physical office bases.

6.1.2 RAA, LA and central office staff will need the following functionality.

- Case management system for the adopter journey in all four FAL local authorities and access for key central staff including Head of Service.
- Access to aggregated performance data from all partners.
- Ability to make conference calls.
- Access to different LA sites for central office staff.
- Remote working functionality for RAA staff.
- Electronic calendar accessible by others.

6.2 Connectivity across the four local authorities

6.2.1 An FAL RAA central office staff working from local bases will rely on the ability to use Wi-Fi in order to access the case management system, emails, telephony and other relevant applications.

6.3 Functionality

6.3.1 FAL RAA will require case recording and tracking which are able to:

- Manage the entire adopter process from initial enquiry, through assessment and training to the placement of children and post placement support.
- Manage recruitment of adopters.
- View and find both 'in house' and external placements via adopter profiles.
- Produce a range of reports for the RAA as a whole and for each participating local authority and commissioned service in respect of practice and performance, sufficiency of placements and tracking of individual children and families.
- Compile statutory returns for the RAA and partner local authorities.
- Enable collaborative working to assist authorised organisations in creating profiles for children needing adoptive placements.
- Provide a web-based service to enable effective agile working.

6.4 Case management systems (CMS) – options appraisal

6.4.1 The current CMSs in use for adoption activity are:

- Leicestershire: **Mosaic**
- Leicester: **Liquid Logic**
- Lincolnshire/Rutland: **Mosaic**
- North Lincolnshire: **Care First**.

6.4.2 The options considered:

1. Use one of the FAL LA's CMS (e.g. the LA which is hosting the central office).
2. Commission a bespoke CMS – Social Care Network's CHARMS adoption system, the market leader, is considered in the appraisal.
3. Maintain current CMS approach supported by a performance reporting framework.

6.4.3 Option 1 - Use one of the FAL LA's CMS (e.g. the LA which is hosting the central office) is discounted on the basis that only central office staff (and staff within the LA hosting the central office) will have a view of the overall activity of the RAA.

Experience of established RAA's suggests that there are significant data governance barriers to opening up children's services case management systems to staff not directly employed by the LA which 'owns' the system.

- 6.4.4 Option 2 - Commission a bespoke CMS – for example Social Care Network's CHARMS adoption system. This would require that for all current and historical case records would require audit to ensure all information was fully and accurately recorded. Evidence shows that the migration of data from one system to another can often generate additional workload which disrupts service delivery following the launch of the service.
- 6.4.5 Option 3 - continue to record cases on the four CMS for each FAL. LA Partners rely on systems outside the core CMS to provide key aspects of service provision; eg all LA's within the partnership use Linkmaker (a national child and adopter database) as their main tool to access placements between LA's. It is proposed that Linkmaker will replace the current SharePoint system currently used to manage the regional pool of adopters and children. Partners across the RAA generate performance information for all aspects of the child and adopter journey and this can be aggregated to provide RAA wide performance data. This option provides for effective case and performance management within the RAA minimising disruption and ICT costs.

Option 3 is the preferred option.

Section 7 Funding the RAA

The DfE requires that all RAA's operate from a pooled budget.

In the partnership model for FAL RAA the pooled budget comprises:

- An actual pooled budget. The funds represented by the actual pool are transferred to the local authority hosting the central office to support staff and activity across the regional footprint. Such activity includes new central office costs (salaries, expenses, case management system), the co-ordination of marketing and adopter recruitment, the co-ordination of panels across the region and the commissioning of external services (typically for post adoption support). As in the YOS model, the actual pooled budget is managed by the head of service.

- A virtual pooled budget. The funds represented by the virtual pool are held and managed within each partner local authority, but the resources are committed to the RAA for its exclusive use.

This model provides assurance on meeting the central offices costs via the actual pooled budget but enables each local authority to maintain significant control over their contribution to the virtual pooled budget. Such a model would also enable a partner to withdraw from the RAA should performance fall below an acceptable level.

The combined adoption budget for the FAL partners for 2018-19 is c£2,400,000¹⁷ adjusted to accommodate general rises in staffing costs. Determining an accurate picture of current adoption budgets is challenging since coding for adoption costs varies across local authorities.

The actual pooled budget required by FAL for *new* central office costs is £140,000 per annum and it is proposed that Leicestershire, Leicester and North Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire (with Rutland) each contribute a quarter of these costs per year, i.e. £35,000.

It is proposed that the contribution to the virtual pooled budget is the sum of each LA's adoption budget (primarily represented by staff costs) adjusted to take account of the contribution to the actual pooled fund. In this way, LA's can mitigate against the RAA costing more than current adoption services.

The contributions to the actual and virtual pooled funds will be established for a period of two years and reviewed in the first year of RAA operation to refine the costing once the RAA is operational.

¹⁷ 190822_FAL collated finance return

Section 8 Expected benefits

8.1 Emerging benefits from established RAA's

8.1.1 The first RAA evaluation report¹⁸ acknowledges that it is too early to empirically assess the extent to which RAA's have improved on the delivery of adoption services and outcomes for children. However, the report does identify the following emerging outcomes for some or all of the case study RAA's:

- A larger adopter pool – created by sharing resources and better targeted recruitment activities.
- Speedier and more effective matching of children with adoptive families.
- Opportunities to reassess approaches to adoption support, address gaps and to develop a more comprehensive training package for adoptive parents.
- Improved collaboration between RAA's, LA's and other agencies in some RAA's.

8.1.2 Several RAA's identified that the new head of service role had provided an opportunity for stronger leadership to support the achievement of the intended outcomes.

8.1.3 The report noted that cost efficiencies and economies of scale had not yet materialised but that RAA's anticipate these over the longer-term.

Eight key deliverables¹⁹

A meeting of lead members and East Midlands directors of children's services in 2016 identified the key deliverables required from the establishment of an RAA in the region. Each of these deliverables is explored below.

8.2 Improved outcomes for children and not lose child focus

8.2.1 **Tracking of children** for whom adoption may be the plan for permanence. The establishment of permanence teams within each of the FAL local authorities provides a standard model which will inform the RAA on the potential needs of the child early in the planning process and enable improved targeted recruitment of adoptive

¹⁸ Evaluation of regional adoption agencies. First report: 2018 to 2019

¹⁹ Eight key deliverables set out by the East Midlands DCSs at their meeting of 2 September 2016

families. The partnership model proposed ensures that adoption staff can work closely with children's social workers within the proposed local hubs.

8.2.2 A **shared pool of adopters** for FAL will provide a greater number of adoptive families able to meet a range of children's needs and, potentially, enable earlier matching of children. Between 2017-20²⁰ approximately 350 children were placed for adoption across FAL. Figures provided indicate 25% of children from across the region were placed with adopters from outside the local authority and, of note; only 6 children (1.5%) of these children were placed with an FAL partner. Reducing reliance on inter-agency placements will enable the placement of a greater proportion of children within the RAA geographical footprint and thereby more timely and appropriate *local* adoption support.

8.2.3 The regional adoption agency provides opportunities to establish a clear offer for **adoption support** based on the demand for universal and targeted support across the region. The adoption support offer has been significantly reliant on the provision of funding via the Adoption Support Fund in recent years. The RAA is likely to assist in improving the consistency and sustainability through economies of scale and a regional strategic approach to the commissioning of therapeutic support. Current RAA's believe that the RAA had helped, or would help, to widen their service offer²¹.

8.3 Clarity on journey of the child and the transition/hand over points

8.3.1 The scope of the RAA and the responsibilities retained by local authorities are set out in section 3.2. Work continues on the business processes, protocols and practice for the RAA and will form part of the service improvement plan once the partnership is launched.

8.4 Sufficient central funding for set up costs

8.4.1 The DfE previously has committed £900k to EMRAA for the development of a regional adoption agency. The DfE have committed up to £125k for the final stage of

²⁰ Local authority tables: children looked after in England including adoption 2017 to 2018

²¹ Evaluation of regional adoption agencies. First report: 2018 to 2019 (p10)

development and each partner local authority (except Rutland) has committed a further £10,000.

8.5 Must not cost more than current delivery and deliver efficiencies

- 8.5.1 All FAL partners have a commitment to delivering the RAA within existing LA adoption budgets. The proposed RAA budget for FAL for 2020-21 will be set within current adoption spend for local authorities. The partnership approach minimises spend on reconfiguration of services and systems allowing the RAA to be supported with a small central staff team.
- 8.5.2 The removal of inter-agency placements from the pooled budget eliminates a significant area of financial risk for the RAA.
- 8.5.3 A key target for the RAA will be to deliver more placements from within the FAL pool of adopters with the aim of delivering 85% of placements in house by 2022-23 and to maintain levels of adoption placements sold to external adoption agencies. This will reduce costs for the FAL partnership and assist in offsetting the expected rise in cost of inter-agency placements.
- 8.5.4 Earlier, appropriate, placement of children is likely to reduce spend on looked after children budgets.
- 8.5.5 There may be opportunities to realise economies of scale in relation to adoption panels in the future.
- 8.5.6 Access to the Adoption Support Fund will be subject to review at the end of 2020 - 21. The FAL RAA is likely to assist in sustaining (or improving) adoption support provision through economies of scale and joint commissioning of therapeutic support.

8.6 No negative unintended consequences in relation to other services

- 8.6.1 FAL has been developing close collaboration for adoption services since 2018 as set out in the Memorandum of Understanding and attendant Service Level Agreements. Plans and progress are scrutinised by strategic leads from each authority. The adoption of the partnership model will minimise any disruption to the relationship with other services.

8.7 Measuring impact and outcomes

- 8.7.1 A detailed performance management/quality assurance framework will be developed for consideration by the FAL project governance board.
- 8.7.2 A set of performance indicators has been agreed and will provide the baseline for monitoring both the output (volumes of activity) and the performance of the RAA leading up to the launch and provide the basis for operational performance reporting once the RAA is live.

Section 9 Critical path for strategic and executive approvals

	Milestone	Completed by	Who
9.1.1	Outline business case including <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential RAA delivery model options• Partnership• Benefits	January 2020	LA strategic leads
9.1.2	Selection of a recommended option	August 2020	Executive Councillor
9.1.3	Executive approval for final business case	September 2020	LA executive

Document Control Information

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Change Forecast:	Establishment of a regional adoption agency (FAL RAA) for Leicestershire, Leicester, North Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire and Rutland councils		
Circulation List:	FAL project manager		

Change History			
Version	Date	Section	Summary of Changes
1.1	22.08.19	5.4.1	Revised figures for staff in scope
1.1	22.08.19	6.1.1	Revised figures for staff in scope
1.1	22.08.19	7.1.1	Revised figures for RAA budget for 2018-19 and new table for budget lines
1.1	22.08.19	7.2	Revised indicative unit costs for FAL local authorities
1.2	23.08.19	7.3	Revised explanation of pooled budgets
1.2	23.08.19	2.5	FAL Performance Table updated (Awaiting data to fully complete)
1.3	28.08.19	4.3.6,4.5.6	Risks regarding interagency fees
1.3	29.09.19	4.7	MoU changed to contract, detail add on the strategic governance board, Updated performance table, recommended option more detail added
1.4	23.10.19	4.5	Governance detail expanded and YOT background
1.4	23.10.19	4.5	Detail on budget arrangements
1.4	23.10.19	6.4	Case management systems added
1.4	23.10.19	5.1	New governance chart added
1.4	23.10.19	7.3	Expanded on the options for a pooled budget
1.5	31.10.19	8.2	Preliminary findings on the performance of RAA's
2.0	4.11.19	Title	Order of LA's in title of FAL changed to reflect DfE title throughout the document
2.0	4.11.19	Contents	Contents page on title page
2.0	4.11.19	Recs	Recommendations collated following contents page
2.0	4.11.19	Doc control	Placed as appendix to the business case
2.0	4.11.19	Background papers	Added – evaluation of RAA's: first report
2.0	4.11.19	1.4.1	New delivery model establishment date changed to July 2020
2.0	4.11.19	2.3.1	Addition of final sentence
2.0	4.11.19	2.4.3	Addition of information on timeliness performance for FAL
2.0	4.11.19	2.5.3	Table replaced with chart showing Leicestershire and Lincolnshire data only (Leicester data not sufficiently robust)
2.0	4.11.19	2.5.4	Commentary on interagency placement data
2.0	4.11.19	2.5.5	Commentary on interagency placement data and removal of commentary on accuracy of Leicester data
2.0	4.11.19	2.8	Inclusion of section on Ofsted ratings and commentary
2.0	4.11.19	3	Inclusion of recommendation
2.0	4.11.19	4	Change of title to section, inclusion of recommendation, significant re-ordering of text in section
2.0	4.11.19	4.5.3	Addition of two benefits

2.0	4.11.19	5	Inclusion of recommendations
2.0	4.11.19	5.1	Renewed organogram to reflect full time roles and secondments
2.0	4.11.19	5.2	Refresh of table on indicative central office staff costs
2.0	4.11.19	5.3	Editing of section
2.0	4.11.19	5.5.1	Addition of phrase re not exceeding current costs
2.0	4.11.19	6	Inclusion of recommendation and general editing
2.0	4.11.19	6.4.4	Addition of commentary on barriers to using LA CMS
2.0	4.11.19	7	Inclusion of recommendation and significant re-ordering and editing of text
2.0	4.11.19	7.6.1	Refresh on table for central office costs
2.0	4.11.19	8	Re-ordering and editing of text
2.0	4.11.19	8.2.2	Inclusion of data for interagency placements
2.0	4.11.19	8.5.1 - 6	Editing to reflect data currently available
2.0	4.11.19	9	Inclusion of recommendation
2.0	4.11.19	9.1.1	Change of date for deadline
2.1	12.11.19	1.2.1	Updated to reflect the October 2019 RAA status
2.1	12.11.19	4.2.1	Reference the DfE letter dated 06.09.19
2.1	12.11.19	4.5.6	Removal of risks
2.1	12.11.19	2.8.1	Reference the Leicestershire September 2019 ILAC Inspection
2.1	13.11.19	7.6.1	Further explanation of the new funding required to run the RAA
2.1	30.1.20		Agreed at RAA PGB
5.0	17.7.20	All	Updated to reflect the July 2020 RAA status