

## **Appendix 1**

### **West Pennine Regional Adoption Agency**

#### **Additional information**

##### **1. Key findings so far**

- 1.1 It is essential that the new model retains close links with child care SW teams to support care planning and gather intelligence re children needing permanence through adoption.
- 1.2 It is envisaged that working together regionally will allow for sharing of best practice across all partners, and increase consistency in what we offer.
- 1.3 In order to be responsive to service user needs, the model should be geographically spread around the region for assessment, training, adoption support and work with birth parents and children.
- 1.4 Although there are clear distinct areas of functionality in adoption, it is important these don't become too separate and operate in silo. For example, a theme of good care planning and adoption support should run through every aspect in the child's journey.
- 1.5 There is variance in terms of relationships with health/CAMHS that need to be addressed.
- 1.6 There are a variety of different ICT systems in place, and any new models will need to take into account how this will be managed.
- 1.7 The consultation found that branding is crucial moving forward. A clear branding strategy needs to be in place.

##### **2. Design Principles**

The Project Board has agreed a set of principles which will inform the design of the new Regionalised Adoption Agency:

1. We will be innovative and creative in our approach and be open minded to new ways of working, and potential growth. We will be open to debate and discussion around this.
2. The RAA will provide a consistent, high quality service across the region, which is responsive, flexible and accessible to service user needs.
3. We will make design decisions based on the best, evidence based outcomes for children and families, and ensure our work does not become detached from the care planning process.
4. We will ensure we have appropriate infrastructure to support the RAA (eg IT, administration, etc).
5. The RAA will be accountable to all RAA members in a fair and appropriate way.
6. Our staff will be skilled, experts in their field, supported and engaged.
7. We will involve service users and staff in the design phase, and continue to seek feedback and challenge after implementation.
8. We will minimise disruption to service users and staff during the period of change.

### 3. Recommendations around Model

3.1 Decisions around the model were split into 2:

- Legal model – where the governance sits, who employs the staff etc
- Delivery/operational model – how the service is delivered

4.2 The legal model was broken into the following options:

1. Do nothing
2. Work in partnership
3. LA hosted
4. JV (LA owned)
5. Create new Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA)
6. Add to an existing VAA

3.2 From the outset the VAA Board members raised concern around their capacity to provide all services on behalf of the LAs, due to the scale and size of the operations, and the complexity of taking on the responsibilities if they should be delegated or abdicated by LAs. Additionally, the VAAs have existing strong brands and identities, to fit their overall missions, option 5 would risk this, as they would become subsumed into a new model.

3.3 For the remaining options, criteria questions were developed with the board to facilitate decision making. The board also took into account findings from HR and legal workshops, and experiences each partner had from other shared service projects.

3.4 A final discussion between board members led to an agreement that a **Local Authority hosted model** was the most appropriate recommendation initially, with the flexibility to develop the model further post implementation (to be reviewed at the end of the financial year). Further to that, interested LAs were asked to complete an Expression of Interest if they considered that their LA could host the RAA. Following a vote, it was agreed by the Board that Bolton Council were best placed to host the RAA and had an excellent track record in adoption.

3.5 In terms of the delivery/operating model, the discussion has focused on the child's and adopter's journey and how best to provide services in a way that meets their needs. A clear priority from the workshops and Board meetings was to ensure that care planning for children is woven into the RAA's operating model. Concern was expressed that a fully regional service could struggle to maintain links, and provide local services in a way that is accessible for adopters, birth parents and children. In addition, successful adoption process must be embedded within the local safeguarding teams as early as possible, to ensure the best outcomes for children. A fully regionalised model presents some difficulties around this. The option of 'As is +' was not seen as providing the most robust opportunities for improving service delivery.

3.6 The Project Team developed an options paper detailing service delivery under a variety of hub and spoke and tiered models. After reviewing this paper, the Board agreed a flexible hub and spoke model for the most part, with panels being shared by all councils in 2/3 locations. Although this general approach has been agreed by the Board, more detailed service design will take place during the implementation phase, and the agreed model will be finalised by October 2016.

3.7 Work will continue throughout the summer to develop the specification further, as we work through process design. Currently the functions which are in scope are below, with further research needed, particularly around case holding for children post Adoption Order and Special Guardianship Orders.

