BUSINESS CASE

Draft Version 0.4

December 2019

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is proposed that a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) is created through combining the adoption services for the three authorities of London Borough of Bexley, Kent County Council & Medway. These agencies wish to build on the success of their existing services to improve performance in meeting the needs of children who require permanence through adoption, by bringing together the best practice from each authority within the RAA.

The RAA plans to 'Go Live' from October 2020, with a phased implementation from 1st April 2020. This phased approach will commence with a "soft launch" comprising of the budgets transferring to the RAA for 2020/21, the implementation plan will provide full details of the work programme up to 'go live'. This structured approach to implementation will ensure there is sufficient time to address harmonisation of practice, post adoption support and wider commissioning arrangements alongside ensuring development of an effective culture and structure to achieve the agreed outcomes.

Initially, the region had been pursuing a local authority hosted model in which staff would be TUPE transferred and budgets pooled under Kent as the lead authority. However, subsequent detailed discussions with the regional executive board and the Department for Education have led to a revised proposal. Many other regional agencies that are in development are now proposing partnership models which aim to achieve improved adoption performance without the need for physically transferring staff under TUPE or secondment.

The Bexley, Kent & Medway RAA are now formally proposing a partnership model that requires no physical transfer of staff but operates under a robust governance structure where each local authority will delegate to the Head of the Regional Adoption Agency, responsibilities for finance and staffing matters to ensure the effective operation of the partnership and our adoption practice. This preferred model is subject to legal agreement.

This model requires trust between the partners and will rely on the agreement that a key list of functions is delegated to the RAA Head of Service. The delegations of responsibility and operating practices of the RAA will be documented in a partnership agreement that will be a signed, legal document

This way of working will mean:

- No TUPE or secondment of staff
- Pooling of budgets and a clear structure in which the RAA Head of service has final accountability for budgets and staffing across the region
- Practices will be aligned, over time, through co-design with staff at every level of the business
- Where functions do need to be led by one Local Authority on behalf of the others, this will be identified and agreed by the Executive Board.

Partnership agreement implications

The defining characteristic of the RAA model will be the partnership agreement and the inherent delegations that each authority will be signing up to through the partnership. Although, the RAA will operate through this partnership arrangement, the RAA will be an entity its own right and the delegations of functions will allow the RAA to be single service.

The request is for the finer detail and ultimate sign off the partnership agreement to be delegated to the Director for Children's services, in collaboration with local finance, HR and legal colleagues. However, the key, high level delegations are listed below:

The RAA Head of service will have full delegated authority to:

- Oversee and manage the RAA budget on behalf of the three local authorities
- Recruit to vacant posts across the RAA. In particular, the RAA HOS will have the ability to recruit to new / different types of post, not necessarily replacing like for like, but recruiting staff to roles that best fit the needs and demands of the service at that point in time. This flexibility of moving and changing resources will be key to the RAA succeeding.
- Manage and escalate delays within the existing structures of each partner local authority
- Oversee all adoption staff across all three partner authorities and will hold the ultimate management responsibility for those staff

The Bexley, Kent & Medway RAA will aim to place itself at the forefront of adoption services nationally through provision of the highest quality service and innovative approaches. The region will also be

committed to collaborative adoption arrangements that will mean the best interests of children and their adoptive families are secured and kept at the forefront of decision-making. Ultimately, the RAA will mean that we will have even better chances to place children for adoption across the region.

This document describes how establishing a single agency will allow the three authorities to provide cohesive, efficient and effective use of resources and development of practice to the benefit of children, adopters and others who gain from adoption services. It proposes that, they will work in the spirit of partnership and collaboration and each local authority is equally accountable for the performance and delivery of the service. There is likely to a need for one local authority to host key functions e.g. IT. The Executive Board will agree such decisions. The cost of development to be funded by the Department for Education, with ongoing costs met by the partnership. This document also sets out how the RAA will work with its partners to deliver Adoption Services.

In March 2016, the government announced changes to the delivery of adoption services setting a very clear direction that all local authorities' adoption services must be delivered on a regionalised basis by 2020. This followed a range of national policy changes since 2012, including the 2015 'Regionalising Adoption' paper by the DfE that sought improvements in adoption performance. Following the general election in June 2017, the Minister of State for Children and Families reaffirmed commitment to this policy. In March 2018, the DfE commenced the legislation that allows them to direct a local authority into a RAA if there is no progress being made.

The premise of regionalisation is to:

- Promote early permanence planning across the region.
- Improve the timeliness of children's adoption journeys and reduce the length of time children wait to be adopted
- Improve post-adoption support services to families who have adopted children from care
- Reduce the number of agencies that provide adoption services thereby improving efficiency & effectiveness.

The most recent correspondence from the DFE to all local authorities nationally, has clarified the minimum operating criteria for an RAA as the following:

- A single line of accountability for all functions which sit within the RAA, including but not limited to:
  - o All aspects of adopter recruitment, approval and preparation
  - o Providing expert advice on available matches
  - o Providing and / or commissioning adoption support functions

- Reporting into robust governance arrangements, with the right level of leadership and underpinning partnership and risk sharing agreements.
  - o A Head of Service for the RAA
  - o Pooled funding into a single budget to cover:
    - ▪ Staffing
    - ▪ Recruitment
    - ▪ Matching
    - ▪ Support
    - ▪ Staff training

- Core functions of recruitment matching, and support are transferred to the RAA

- Pan-regional approaches to embedding best practice

- A system-wide approach to meeting the needs of children and families through engagement with:

  - o Other adoption agencies
  - o VAA's
  - o Adoption support providers
  - o Health services
  - o Judiciary
  - o Schools

The Bexley, Kent & Medway RAA intend to use the Department for Education criteria, above to guide the outline scope and delivery of the model. For the Bexley, Kent & Medway RAA this will mean:

- One Head of Service, to be recruited prior to the implementation date to lead the detailed design and ultimately, the delivery of the new service
- A partnership board which will hold the delivery of regional adoption services to account, underpinned by a robust risk sharing and partnership agreement
- A single budget which will be managed by the Head of Service for the RAA.
- The RAA will deliver all the core functions of adoption across the region and will commit to pan-regional approaches to formulating and embedding best practice
- A collaborative approach and model will engage and consult with wider stakeholders to achieve the best possible service

The implementation of the new Bexley, Kent & Medway RAA follows on from substantial cross local authority work, which until now has been delivered through consortium arrangements. The project has the benefit of being able to access previous learning from those RAAs across the country that are already live. The Bexley, Kent & Medway RAA will build upon the previous positive practice established within the consortium. There is a recognition that adoption services are already operating very well across the region. So, the model will ensure, in the worst-case scenario, that services are not disrupted and continue to deliver, at least in line with current performance.

During 2019, and prior to formal agreement of this business case work has begun to develop a service delivery model and engage staff in co-production of the model which enable Bexley, Kent & Medway to move towards regionalisation in specific areas where it makes sense to do so. Beginning in October, more detailed planning work has also been underway to support the successful implementation of the RAA. This work will continue with the three partner authorities with transition and implementation planning.

This business case is founded on several key assumptions:

- This is an equal partnership
- There is one Head of Service who is responsible for the management of all the staff assigned to the RAA
- Consistency of adoption practices and processes will be sought and service delivery the same across all three local authority areas, within an agreed period.
- All agencies have the resources available to actively lead on and participate in agreed work streams and achieve the deliverables within agreed timescales set out in the plan;
- The RAA will work in partnership with the Children's social work teams in all partner authorities to ensure early permanence planning
- RAA staff will remain an employee of their current local authority but each partner authority will delegate the ultimate management responsibility for those staff to the Head of Service for the RAA. Kent County Council will employ the post holder
- The RAA will be delivered from office bases in all three locality areas. This will ensure continuity of provision as far as possible; close working relationships with children's social workers and easy access for local communities to a service within their community.
- Staff will retain employed in their local base
- All RAA workers will also be expected to work across all the three local bases if the needs / demands of the service require it
- The model will be built on existing budgets and FTE numbers and as such will ensure there are no redundancies.
- There will be opportunities for cross-speciality working. This could be on a rotational basis or another method.
- The RAA will have teams providing specialist functions: post adoption support, recruitment and family finding.

Service delivery model

The RAA is committed to designing services capable of improving outcomes for children for whom the plan is adoption through:
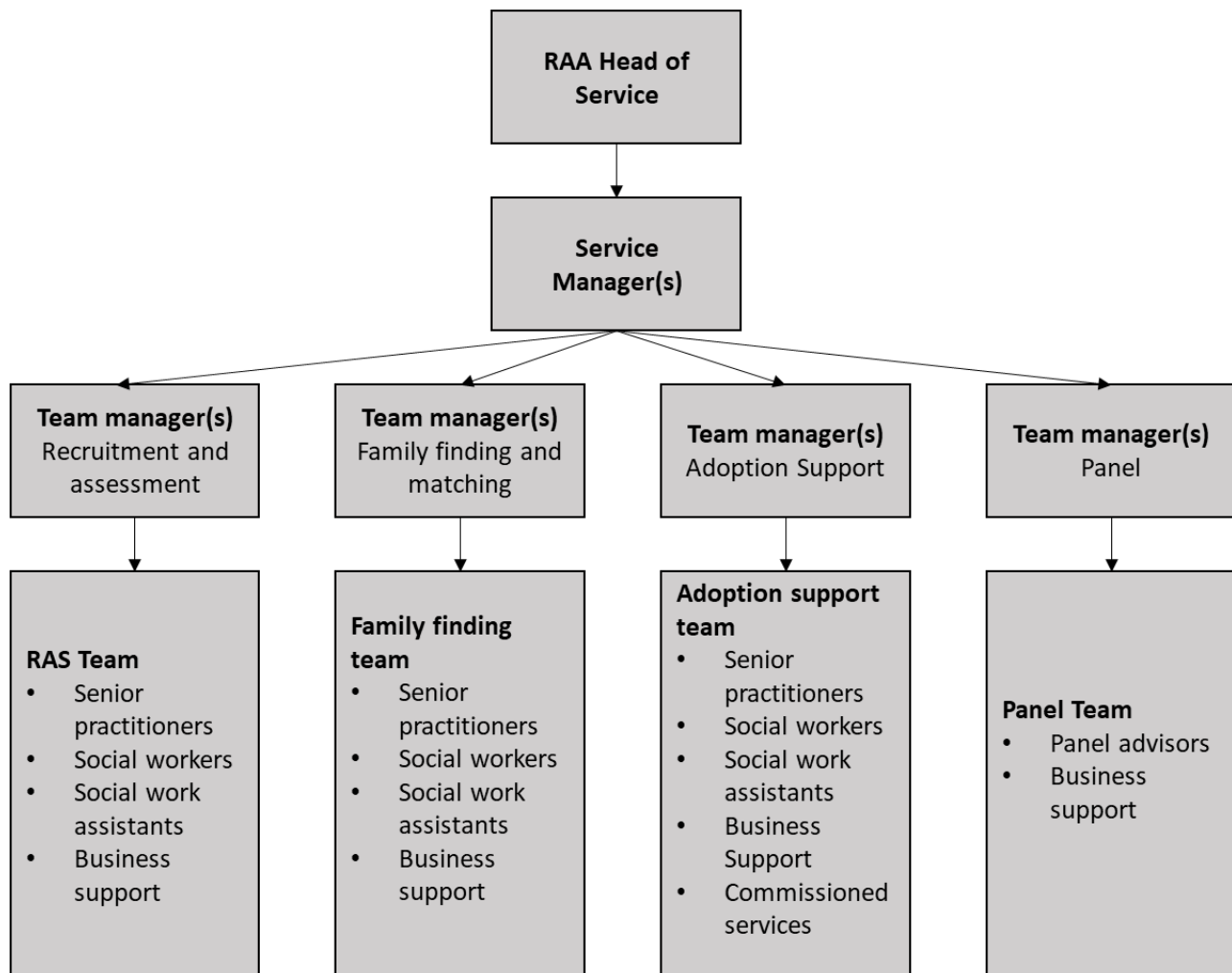
- Securing good and timely adoptive placements for children to avoid delay and unnecessary time spent in care

- Placing more children in an early permanence placement to avoid unnecessary moves
- Compliance with timescales set for adopter assessments and fast track when appropriate
- Produce good quality adopter assessments
- Recognising the impact of early trauma and life experiences for children and providing support to them and their adoptive families to ensure permanence and improve their life chances

Proposed service delivery model

The proposed service delivery is based on an evidence base of what works in Adoption and on initial consultation the Heads of Service for adoption in all 3 LA's. Below is an outline structure for the RAA. This model is flexible and subject to change and will be informed by consultation with adoption staff from all 3 LA's through a series of workshops between October 2019 and March 2020. The model is also subject to the agreement of the RAA finances.

- One Head of Service
- Service Manager(s)
- 4 thematic team areas; Recruitment and assessment, family finding and matching, adoption support and panels made up of:
  - Advanced practitioners
  - Senior social workers
  - Social workers
  - Social work assistants
  - Specialist practitioners
  - Administration support
- Each team will be managed by a Team Manager and there may be more than one team within a thematic area.

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                        │  RAA Head of    │
                        │    Service      │
                        └────────┬────────┘
                                 │
                        ┌────────┴────────┐
                        │    Service      │
                        │   Manager(s)    │
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Team manager(s) Recruitment and assessment	**Team manager(s)** Family finding and matching	**Team manager(s)** Adoption Support	**Team manager(s)** Panel
RAS Team • Senior practitioners • Social workers • Social work assistants • Business support	**Family finding team** • Senior practitioners • Social workers • Social work assistants • Business support	**Adoption support team** • Senior practitioners • Social workers • Social work assistants • Business Support • Commissioned services	**Panel Team** • Panel advisors • Business support

2. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

2.1 Purpose of this document

This document sets out the case for creating a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) through combining the adoption services for three local authority areas. It describes how establishing a single agency will allow the three authorities to provide a cohesive, efficient and effective use of resources and promote the development of practice to the benefit of children, adopters and others who gain from adoption services.

2.2 Work undertaken to date and proposed methodology going forwards

Through the development of this business case a number of priority areas have emerged, Taking forward these smaller projects over the last few months has helped develop and iterate the thinking, both making the case for regional working, but also creating a sense of momentum, moving to regional working where it makes sense to do so more quickly.

Methodology for service development

The service development plan aims to model a service capable of delivering the best possible outcomes for children and adoptive families. In order to achieve this the methodology includes:

- Co-production with front line adoption staff who know and understand the challenges in their services
- The voice of adopters and adopted young people who know what support they need and what works for them
- Consultation with key partners and stakeholders; especially those who influence outcomes such as the judiciary
- An understanding of current research and evidence-based practice
- An understanding of current performance: locally and nationally
- Development of a learning culture of support and challenge

Progress to date

The service delivery model has been developed in collaboration with the service leads in each authority. The service leads know their services well: all have been honest in appraisal of their service and open to change in service delivery. All service leads have agreed in broad terms the outcomes, principles and evolutionary model of service delivery as detailed in the body of the business case.

Service leads identified key staff for several task and finish groups, the purpose of which has been to undertake the detailed design of the RAA model. The service delivery model in this document has been produced in consultation service leads and front-line staff from each of the adoption services.

Initial consultation has been undertaken with adopter voice representatives

The Head of Service is also progressing discussions with several stakeholders who provide a service to each existing adoption service; Panel Chairs; Virtual School Heads and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's).

In depth analysis of current performance across all Local Authorities has been completed. This will provide the means of identification of best practice within the region and areas where improvements can be made

2.3 Current performance

The latest published adoption performance data (2015-2018) highlights that the Bexley, Kent & Medway region exceeded the national average in relation to the three key, time-based indicators that are used to measure adoption service performance:

- **A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days)**

All three local authorities performed better than the national average in relation this this key performance indicator with Bexley and Kent performing significantly better than the national average

- **A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)**

Again, all three local authorities performed better than the national average of 201 days

- **A3: Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)**

The latest unpublished performance data (18-19) suggests that performance continues to significantly exceed national averages in both Bexley and Kent in relation to all the above indicators. In Medway, however, timescales have increased against the A1, A2 and A3 indictors.

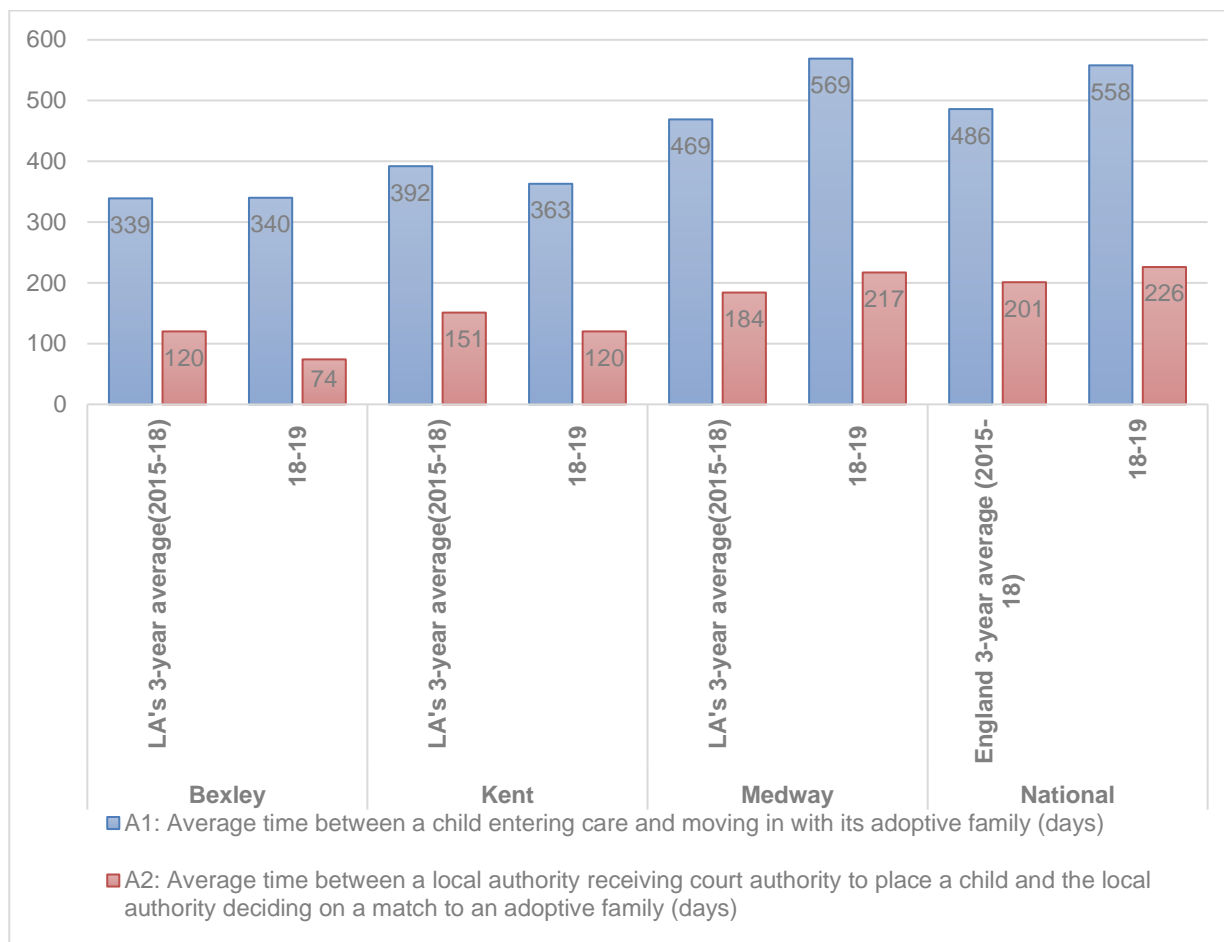|		A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days) **DfE Target 425 days**	A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days) **DfE Target 121 days**	A3: Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)
Medway	LA's 3-year average (2015-18)	469	184	75 (51%)
	18-19 Average	569	217	8 (37%)
Bexley	LA's 3-year average (2015-18)	339	120	55 (81) %
	18-19 Average	340	74	(1) 100%
Kent	LA's 3-year average (2015-18)	392	151	285 (73%)
	18-19 Average	363	120	73 (77%)
National	England 3-year average (2015-18)	486	201	11010 (56%)
	18-19 Average	558	226	47%

A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days)

A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)

Future RAA Performance

When the RAA goes live, its performance will be measured through a new framework which will consider the performance of both the RAA and local authority in relation to different aspects of the child and adopter journey, see below:
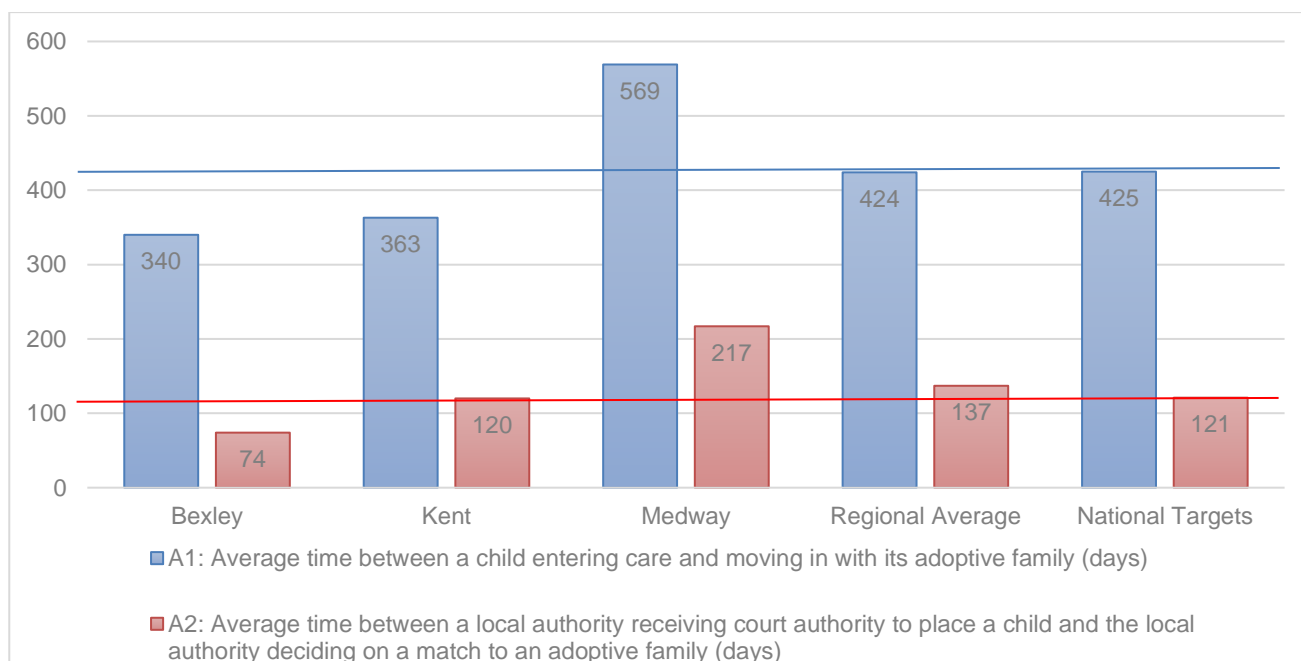
Timeliness*	Local Authority	Matching (RAA)	Recruitment (RAA)	Support (RAA)
LA and RAA Average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions. (A.10) RAA Average time (in days) between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family. (A.2) LA Average time (in days) between entering care and placement order. (New) * Both a single year average and a three yearly average.	Number of ADM decisions. (A.15) Number of new placement orders granted. (A.16) Children for whom permanence decisions has changed away from adoption. (A.5) Number of children in a Fostering for Adoption / Concurrent Planning foster placement. (A.17)	Total number of children not placed after placement order after 3, 6, 12, 18 months. (New) Number of approved adoptive families waiting to be matched after 3, 6, 12, 18 months. (New) Percentage of adoptive families matched to a child who waited at least 3 months from approval to matching decision. (A.12)	Number of applications to become an adoptive family still to be assessed (not yet approved or rejected). (A.13) Number of adopter approvals. (New) Number of applications commencing Stage 1. (New)	Average time (in days) from request from adopter to assessment. (New - subject to ASGLB data collection) Number of disruptions. (New - subject to ASGLB data collection)

The Department for education has set some clear targets for timeliness around the key indicators

- **A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days)**

- **A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)**

The table and chart below show the local authorities and regional current performance against these targets:

		A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with	A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court
Bexley	18-19	340	74
	Difference to national targets	-85	-47
Kent	18-19	363	120
	Difference to national targets	-62	-1
Medway	18-19	569	217
	Difference to national targets	144	96
Regional Average	18-19	424	137
	Difference to national targets	-1	16
National Targets		425	121

■ A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days)

■ A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)

The Bexley, Kent & Medway RAA aims to place itself at the forefront of adoption services nationally and this applies to timescales and performance as much as it does quality. The intention is to ensure that in year 1 of the RAA going live, performance continues *at the very least* in line with the previous year's performance. This would mean that regionally, the RAA is meeting the national targets for the A1 and A2 indicators. The RAA also intends to ensure that all local authority performance moves towards the best performing local authority in the partnership to ensure regional performance that competes with the highest performing RAA's nationally by year 2 of the model.

2.4 Strategic benefits

The key aim in combining services to create a single Regional Adoption Agency is to achieve the highest possible quality outcomes for all children and young people with adoption plans in the region. Local Authorities will come together and combine adoption services into a new regional agency to benefit

children and their adoptive families, with larger operating areas giving a wider pool of adopters and children, more effective matching and better support services.

2.5 Strategic risks

- There is a risk to all Local Authorities who fail to join a regional agency. This would include central government directing how its services would be delivered. In addition, failure to do so through collaboration would mean being directed by the DfE and bearing all the financial burdens associated with the establishment of the RAA.
- The introduction of RAA's in other parts of the country has seen some short-term risks in relation to performance due to major reorganisation of adoption services. To mitigate these risks, each local authority in this partnership will monitor their performance carefully during the transition phase, identify and respond accordingly to any risks to performance or service delivery.
- Performance measures aligned with the revised operating model and regular monitoring arrangements will be established between the partnership as quickly as possible and before go-live for the new arrangements. This approach to governance, quality assurance and performance management will draw on lessons learned and best practice
- Obstacles to data sharing could cause delay through ineffective communication in the short term but the service delivery model promotes location of staff and local delivery in all three Local Authority areas. Effective information sharing agreements, compliance with data protection legislation and close working relationships between children's and adoption social workers will mitigate against this risk.
- Any future difference in opinion across the partnership as to the role and scope of the RAA and future governance arrangements could delay implementation.
- Any change management process can be unsettling for staff. The proposed changes to ways of working could lead to a risk of recruitment challenges and the retention of existing experienced and qualified adoption team workforce for the RAA. The engagement of staff directly involved in the delivery of adoption services, and the involvement of current service users will be essential mitigation alongside keeping colleagues in partner organisations informed. The project team have been engaging with staff at service and operational levels to ensure they are engaged and enthused about the opportunities of a joint agency.
- The RAA will need to quickly find ways to meet the reporting demands of external (Ofsted) inspections of the constituent authorities.

All the above risks and specific local risks will be considered during set and implementation of the RAA. The executive board will review and mitigate for both new and existing risks and issues as they arise.

2.6 Realising the benefits of the RAA
Benefits expected to be realised through the project include:

- Improved permanency planning and early identification of children with potential adoption plans
- Improved performance monitoring of children's care plans and escalation of delays
- Increase in the number of children placed on an Early Permanence (Fostering to Adopt) basis
- Reduction in the number of children for whom the permanence plan has changed away from adoption
- Improved timescales for adopter assessments
- Higher conversion rate from enquiry to approval of prospective adopters based on better understanding of the most successful routes to adoption
- Improved timescales for placing children with their adoptive families
- Improved adoption support reducing the return of children and teenagers back into care
- Improved performance measurement and management across the service
- Reduced interagency placements and fees

2.7 Stakeholder engagement and involvement
Consultation with stakeholders is an integral part of the Regional Adoption Agency project. The list below sets out the stakeholders that will be engaged during the project set-up phase. Their feedback will be incorporated into the future model and will continue to lay the basis for service design and amendments going forwards. It is also worth noting that many of the workstreams listed below have been engaged on this project from as early as 2016 and their feedback has informed the emerging model:

- Practice / task and finish groups: This works team is made up of Heads of Service/Service Managers and frontline adoption staff. It includes developing the structure and practice model of the RAA.
- HR: This workstream includes mapping the as-is workforce, identifying roles, partial roles and functions that will move to the RAA, developing a new structure and job descriptions.
- IT: This includes mapping as-is IT systems, developing a practical and immediate solutions drawing on learning from other RAAs where different IT systems are used, develop approach to data sharing and scoping future IT solution.
- Commissioning: This includes identifying existing externally commissioned services across the authorities within the scope of the RAA and making recommendations about transition arrangements.
- Finance: This includes mapping existing cost of in-scope functions, developing financial model for new RAA and proposals for reviewing the financial arrangements.
- Legal and governance: This includes ensuring new proposed approach meets legal requirements via a partnership agreement and an agreed governance structure of the new RAA.
- Communications and engagement: This will ensure that all key stakeholders are kept up to date and are engaged in the design of the new RAA arrangements. It will include delivery of events, newsletters, workshops etc.
- Adopter and adopted people's voice: This workstream will ensure that the voice of both adopters and adopted peoples informs the RAA delivery model. There will be several events with adopters and adopted people during both the design phase of the project, but they will also form part of the RAA governance going forwards

These on-going workstreams have multiple representations from each local authority. The involvement of staff across the wider service has been an effective way of extracting specialist knowledge, skills and tools into the development of this model in order to develop a realistic implementation plan.

3. RAA OPERATING MODEL

3.1 Scope

The target operating model for the new RAA considers its role in the delivery of the following main services across the region:

- Recruitment and Assessment – to ensure sufficiency of adopters who can meet the needs of children requiring adoption within the region
- Permanence Planning – Identifying children whose needs would be best met through adoption
- Matching and Placement – to match prospective adopters with children in need of adoption;
- Pre and Post Placement Support – to support in a timely way children and families affected by adoption within the RAA area.

The table below sets out the RAA and LAs will work together, summarising roles and responsibilities for each:

Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT		
Marketing and Recruitment Strategy	✓	
Adopter Recruitment and Enquiries	✓	
Assessment of Prospective Adopters – all Stage One and Stage Two functions	✓	
Completion of Prospective Adopter Report	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for approval of adopters	✓	
Post approval training	✓	
Matching	✓	

Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
Post Placement training for Prospective Adopters	✓	
PERMANANCE PLANNING		
Early identification of a child possibly requiring adoption	✓	✓
Tracking and monitoring the child possibly requiring adoption	✓	✓
Support and advice to childcare social worker on the adoption process	✓	✓
Sibling or other specialist assessments if commissioned by LA	✓	✓
Direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	✓
Preparation of the Child Permanence Report		✓
Agency Decision Maker for "Should be placed for Adoption" decisions		✓
Case management prior to the point agreed by the LA ADM		✓
Case management from point agreed by the LA ADM		✓
MATCHING AND PLACEMENT		
Family finding	✓	
Looked After Child reviews	✓	✓
Shortlist potential families	✓	
Visit potential families	✓	✓
Organising child appreciation day	✓	
Ongoing direct work to prepare child prior to placement		✓
Adoption Panel administration and management	✓	
Agency adviser role (for adopter approvals)	✓	
Agency Decision Maker for Matching prospective adopters and child		✓
Placement Planning meeting administration and management of introductions	✓	✓
Support to family post placement and planning and delivery of adoption support	✓	✓
Ongoing life story work and preparation of Life story book	✓	✓
Independent Review Officer monitoring of quality of child's care and care plan		✓
Support prospective adopters in preparation and submission of application for Adoption Order – including attending at court	✓	✓
Preparation of later life letter	✓	✓
ADOPTION SUPPORT		
Assessment for adoption support	✓	
Developing and delivering adoption support plans	✓	
Agree and administer financial support to adoptive families pre and post Adoption Order		✓

Function	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
Adoption support delivery including: • Support groups • Social events • Post adoption training • Independent Birth Relative services • Support with ongoing birth relative contact • Adoption counselling and training	✓	
Financial support to adopters including adoption allowances		✓
NON-AGENCY ADOPTIONS		
Stepparent/partner adoption assessments	✓	
Inter-country adoption assessments and post approval and post order support	✓	

3.2   Overview of the Proposed Organisation and design principles of the RAA

Design Principles

Several principles have influenced the delivery model:

Close relationships with children's social workers

These will be promoted through the maintenance of the local base alongside; joint tracking, monitoring meetings and joint practice workshops. In order to ensure identification of children who may require adoption, a single permanence tracker and information sharing process will be developed on best practice principles. The RAA will aim to provide a seamless service working in partnership with children's social workers. The service will also provide training, advice and support for workers in each Local Authority on all adoption matters, including completion of Child Permanence Reports and Life Story Books.

Innovation and service improvement

The increased size of the service allows for innovation in all areas. Recruitment of adopters across a wider geographical area allows for a targeted approach based on an understanding of local need. A dedicated communications service will be able to provide low cost and effective promotions. As well as improved options for matching, the family finding team will be able to focus on development and promotion of early permanence options. Adoption support will benefit from the development of a core early intervention offer across the region through use of a team of workers with specialist skills. It will encourage the use of creative packages of support, including working with voluntary adoption agencies and clinicians. Innovation through co-production; investment in staff and an understanding of research and the evidence base will be developed as part of a learning culture within the organisation.

Flexible and responsive service

The service will develop an ability to provide a flexible response through service review; innovation; cross team working and development of strong partnerships.

Investment in Staff

Development of a Regional Adoption Agency allows staff to develop skills within a larger organisation with a single focus on Adoption. The larger service also provides a clear promotion route for adoption specialist workers. The organisation will embed a learning culture and ensure investment in staff to meet the ever-changing demands for adoption services. The service commitment to co-production of service development reflects the value placed on the voice of staff.

Adopter Voice and the voice of the child

The service will incorporate the adopter and child voice at the heart of all activity. All best practice evidence shows that development of direct and virtual adopter forums and means of direct communication with children improves service delivery and has a positive effect on adoptive family

satisfaction. Adopters often comment on the importance for them of peer networks and safe places for adopters and adopted children to meet.

Positive engagement with all partners and stakeholders

The service will engage positively with all partners in both statutory and voluntary sectors to ensure service providers meet their obligations and provide the best possible services to our adopters. The service will also work with agencies such as the courts and CAFCAS to develop mutual understanding, improve services and challenge where appropriate.

Provision of Value for Money

Economies of scale will reduce spend on areas where efficiencies may be made. Improved adopter recruitment will reduce spend on inter-agency fees. Improved rates of leaving care for adoption and timeliness in placement for adoption will provide savings in in-house budgets for all Local Authorities.

3.3   Property Implications

Property Implications

The property implications for each of the local authorities remain unchanged as staff will be retaining their local bases and there will be no need for extra space. Each local authority will agree this amount of desk space in the RAA partnership agreement.

3.4   IT implications

Proposal regarding Adopters records

- The number of open adopter records (households) is estimated at 40 for both Medway and Bexley, and 164 for Kent.
- Due to the volume of adopter's data with each Local Authority, and the desire for minimal disruption with the implementation of the RAA, it is proposed that Kent's version of the Liquid Logic Children's system (referred to as 'Liberi') is used.   This system has been in use within Kent County Council since 2013 and there are robust processes already in place for recording, reporting and identifying data quality issues. Use of one system is the simplest approach, and will simplify the processes for reporting, both across the RAA and for the statutory reporting to the Adoption Leadership Board. It will also ensure that performance monitoring and case tracking can be put in place within a very short timescale and is achievable for 1st April 2020.
- If this proposal is accepted all adopters' records to 31st March 2020 will be held by the individual Local Authorities, but all new adopters from 1st April 2020 and those in the adoption process at that time will be recorded on the Liberi system.
- This will require a migration of current adopters and those in the recruitment process within Bexley and Medway onto the Liberi System. Given the relatively low volume it is proposed that this is done manually. This will also ensure that all required information is obtained and validated prior to data loading.

Proposal regarding Children's Adoption Records

- For Children's Adoption records it is recommended that each Local Authority retain the use (and maintenance) of their existing system but that information is shared to provide a "view" of the data for the purposes of matching children to prospective adopters, for tracking of adoption milestones and to provide an overview for performance monitoring.
- The proposed solution will be provided with Power BI and will be developed by Kent County Council. This will require all three Local Authorities to populate a shared "work area" within Power BI with their children in the adoption process. The frequency of the updates will need to be agreed but the minimum requirement will be weekly.
- This solution will be the first of its kind within Kent County Council (utilising Power BI to share data across partners) and as such will require a formal Data Protection Impact Assessment and information sharing agreement. It will also require a security risk assessment.
- The solution will depend on available resourcing within Cantium Business Solutions so formal agreement on this as the preferred approach is required as soon as possible. This will allow for resources to be

3.5   HR Implications and activities

Although there will be no TUPE transfer or secondment of staff and therefore no *formal* consultation on the RAA model, there remain several HR implications and activities associated with the formation of the RAA under a partnership arrangement:

Implication	Activity
Staff will be on different terms and conditions performing the same / similar roles across the RAA footprint	The HOS and HR leads will undertake informal consultation with staff to explain
Administration and support roles are corporately provided	The RAA will need to consider whether it wants to ringfence admin posts or continue with corporately provided admin from all 3 LA's
There are 3 sets of HR procedures for the HOS to work with and manage the staff under	The RAA will have to work within this structure. Initial indications suggest that this will not create extra work or delay
A few staff may be working across both the RAA and their LA, with 2 managers. For example, as SGO is not in scope of the model some staff may be split 0.5FTE and 0.5 FTE across both the RAA and LA.	Ensure this is covered in consultation with staff. The HOS will build relationships with local authority managers to ensure time is allocated appropriately for these staff
There will need to be a process for agreeing who employs new starters when a member of staff leaves, or a new role is created. Similarly, there will need to be a process for merging posts.	The HOS, HR leads, and partnership board will agree a process for this
There are 3 separate change management procedures	HR leads have agreed that there will be a single approach for some situations. HR leads will agree this with HOS prior to go-live
The RAA HOS will need delegated authority to determine staffing structures, job functions and descriptions, and adoption operational practices	The RAA executive board will agree this delegation through the partnership agreement

3.6   Communications, Marketing and PR

The Executive Board will agree which Local authority will lead on the Communications, Marketing and PR work stream for the partnership. The development work will be funded through the DfE grant funding and once the RAA is established through a centralised budget, composed of the funds that currently go towards this activity, locally in each of the partner LA's. Work is currently being undertaken, in consultation with staff from all three authorities to design and shape the communications and marketing strategy and delivery for the RAA going forwards. The RAA intends to use the approaches listed below and other models of good practice to ensure the RAA has an effective communications and marketing strategy.

In 2013, the Department for Education commissioned Kindred to carry out a research study to identify effective communication and marketing channels that should be used when engaging with potential adopters in order to, ultimately, encourage them to adopt a child. Their findings provide insight into the common demographics, motivations and attitudes towards adoption. They have also developed six key phases of the adoption journey and have recommended the use of different channels and messages for each phase. The idea being, an appropriate mix of channels is an important factor to a successful marketing campaign. For example, one agency ran a press advertising campaign in local newspapers and lifestyle magazines. A radio and digital advertising campaign ran alongside this; all contributing to a 65% increase in enquiries on same period in the previous year.

Kindred's Journey Phase:

Role of marketing/communications	Key channels
PHASE ONE: Initial trigger/motivation	
Raise awareness to prompt consideration	Editorial coverage Advertising Friends and family
PHASE TWO: Fact-finding and research	
Inform potential adopters about the process	Websites Online search Information packs Information events
PHASE THREE: Deeper engagement	
Provide information about the realities of adoption	Social media Online forums
PHASE FOUR: The decision	
Reinforce a positive decision	May revisit channels and information accessed previously 'Keeping in touch' channels e.g. newsletters
PHASE FIVE: The process and adoption	
Keep updated and provide emotional support	Agency channels Peers
PHASE SIX: After care	
Create advocates for use in future communications	Mentor schemes Networking opportunities

Kindred's findings have been used to benchmark the effectiveness of marketing campaigns in reaching key audiences, tackling their barriers towards adoption and motivating them to engage. Drawing on best practice from Kindred's evidence-based research and in line with this regionalised model, the RAA will facilitate a coordinated delivery of marketing and recruitment and use a number of communication platforms to appeal to prospective adopters. This may include:

- **Radio advertising:** A call-to-action via a local radio station that matches the RAA target audience

- **Poster campaigns:** Posters placed in local libraries, community centres and other areas with a community focus.

- **Direct mail/leafleting:** Distributed at libraries, sports centres, cultural venues, post offices and doctors' surgeries, religious or community groups.

- **Branding:** An RAA logo will be developed and this will be followed with a catchy strapline to be used on all marketing materials.

- **Editorial content:** Feature in magazine articles and newspapers.

- **Single door:** A centralised specialist marketing team to receive all recruitment enquiries via the website, email dedicated phone line.

- **Website:** A centralised, digital platform for potential adopters to have access to information, advice and guidance as well as connect with other adopters. Based on best practice research the website will feature:

    - Networking forum for adopters/potential adopters
    - FAQ page
    - Use of visual images for adoption processes
    - Information on upcoming events & training sessions
    - Adoption support tools & techniques
    - Search engine optimisation
    - Engaging Blogs posted by adopters
    - Sophisticated, modern design and layout
    - Bitesize information with easy to understand language
    - Real life stories & experiences of people who have successfully adopted
    - Videos/vlogs

- **Other Social media Channels:** Strong emphasis on digital marketing via social media channels including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

    - Facebook & Twitter: Interactive platform to share real-life stories and facilitate deeper engagement use of visual images, blogs and hashtags.
    - The most used adoption-related hashtags over the past 12 months on social media in the UK are:
    - #adoption (208,000 mentions)
    - #familylaw (50,900 mentions)
    - #adoptionprocess (35,600 mentions)
    - #adoptionawareness (12,000 mentions)
    - #nationaladoptionweek (3,500 mentions)

YouTube: based on Kindred's recommendations, YouTube can have a key

3.7   Proposed Governance Arrangements

The governance structure and arrangements will be comprised of the following forums:

➤ RAA Partnership Board

The Partnership Board will be responsible for providing effective oversight of the partnership agreement.

The Board will approve the Annual Report of the RAA to be presented to the Partner Council's Cabinet Committees.

The Board will also enable effective overview and support for the collaborative working arrangements between the Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA's), Adopters and partner local authorities.

The Board will set and review the strategic objectives of the RAA and monitor service delivery of the key priorities of the partnership, that is to:

- Securing good and timely adoptive placements for children to avoid delay and unnecessary time spent in care
- Improve post-adoption support services to families who have adopted children from care
- Reduce the number of agencies that provide adoption services thereby improving efficiency & effectiveness.

The Head of the RAA will provide the Partnership Board with a report on a regular basis to be agreed detailing summary management information as part of the performance monitoring agreement that will include:

- Service delivery performance
- Financial performance
- Audit and assurance activities

Partner Councils will individually provide the RAA Partnership Board with a report on a quarterly basis detailing their Council's performance of the co-dependencies that will include:

- Key performance indicators relating to safeguarding pressures and overall children's services demand; and
- Pre-court proceedings activities and performance

Partner Councils will produce a joint update at a frequency to be agreed by the partnership board, on:

- Joint working arrangements
- Inspection readiness

The Partnership Board will also:

- Provide a forum to discuss and agree strategic issues relating to the delivery of adoption services.
- Provide a forum to discuss and agree future budget setting
- To provide constructive support and challenge of the adoption system within the Kent, Bexley and Medway region, with reference to national best practice / emergent practice, to provide an opportunity for sharing, learning and continuous improvement.
- To engage with national adoption services providers, voluntary adoption agencies and broader stakeholders, to inform regional service development.
- Authorise the commissioning and initiation of new business cases and assess opportunities for future service development.
- Confirm appropriate adjustments to the Contract Baseline regarding Target Performance Levels so that they are aligned with the updated Statistical Neighbour data.
- Consider any changes to the services that arise out of proposals and ensure that they are dealt with as a Variation in accordance with the Partnership Agreement

Decision Making

- Made by consensus between the Directors of Children's Services
- This cohort are primary funding partners and have shared responsibility for performance of adoption services as measured in published statutory performance information and in Ofsted inspection. They therefore form the voting members of the group.
- In the event of a continuing dispute, the Board will refer to the formal dispute resolution process detailed within the Partnership Agreement.

Chair

- A Director of Children's Services of one of the partners will Chair the Partnership Board and this role may be rotated at agreed intervals.

Membership will consist of voting representatives, who are the Directors of Children's Services and advisory representatives, such as:

- Finance Leads for each Partner Council
- Chair of Quality Assurance Group
- Performance Lead for the RAA
- Adopter representative
- Head of RAA
- Assistant Director for each partner

➢ **Quality Assurance Group – a sub-group of the Partnership Board**

The Quality Assurance Group will be responsible for monitoring performance and identifying performance issues at an early stage so that potential issues can be resolved in an efficient and effective manner. It will be responsible for holding all partners to account in respect of performance outcomes for children and adopters and financial management.

The precise details of the group, including roles & responsibilities will be determined by the Partnership Board.

➢ **Annual Review**

The Annual Review Meeting will be an expansion of the RAA Partnership Board meeting. This meeting will act as the primary vehicle to discuss, further develop and agree the strategic and specific objectives for the year ahead.

The Annual Review meeting will be held in accordance with the terms detailed within the Partnership Agreement. Past performance will be reported, with summary of the highlights and lowlights of the year, but the focus will be on supporting the continued development of adoption services within Kent, Bexley and Medway, whilst ensuring alignment with partner organisations aims, objectives, and budgetary capacity.

3.7 Legal Implications

The RAA will be an entity in its own right underpinned by a partnership agreement setting out how the three local authorities will jointly exercise adoption service functions.

The partnership agreement will be formulated between now and March 2020 at which point, Cabinet members will be provided with a clear summary of legal implications for consideration and the decisions required to implement the partnership. The detail of the partnership agreement will be drafted and agreed in collaboration between legal leads in all three local authorities.

A further report will be presented to Cabinet, which will include details of the formation of the RAA and the delegations to enable the RAA to perform its functions.

A Focus on Risk Sharing

The partnership agreement will also have a strong focus on risk sharing and financial equitability. It is crucial that no authority stands to benefit or lose out significantly as a result of the new model. The detail of the agreement will include but not be limited to the following:

- Budget setting and review
- How targets are affecting financial contributions
- Financial equitability (at the outset and over time)
- Savings reviews
- How surpluses/savings/efficiencies will be managed, drawn down and reinvested in the model

A Focus on Information sharing

The IT and governance work stream will establish a clear information sharing agreement alongside the IT transition plan. The agreement will focus on how data flows will be managed in the new system to ensure timely and accurate information continues to inform the RAA performance and outcomes framework. There will be data protection impact assessments undertaken to ensure legalisation regarding data sharing and privacy are upheld.

3.8 Commissioning arrangements

Most commissioned services within the region fall under adoption support but the three partner authorities have very different commissioning arrangements currently. Commissioned services and adoption support in general are likely to take the longest time to align due to the complexity of the offer and the current differences in that offer. However, the following steps are being proposed to align all commissioned activity, over time, to ensure that consistency of service

- The RAA intends to align some services and subscriptions at or before 'go live' where it is possible to do so
- Where contracts allow for variations, the support offered through those contracts will be extended to the region
- In year 1 the RAA will operate "as-is" with some variations to contracts where they are both; possible and in the interests of the region
- Further transition work over years 2 and 3 to reach an aligned commissioned offer by year 3 of the model

4 FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT

The DFE criteria states regionalised adoption services must operate under a pooled budget arrangement with a single Head of Service managing this budget. Although, there will be no transfer of staff within the Bexley, Kent & Medway RAA region, the financial proposal is that all budgets are pooled to ensure the smooth operational management of the RAA going forwards. This will mean:

- Each LA will transfer their annual total adoption budget to the RAA.
- Each LA contribution to the RAA will be set in agreement with both the RAA Executive Board and each LA's own Medium-Term Financial Planning/Budget process.
- The RAA budget will cover all adoption related costs including:
  - Staffing related spend
  - Non-staff costs
- Each partner LA will pay for direct staffing related costs such as salary, on costs or other expenditure administered through the local authorities' payroll and recharge/invoice the RAA staffing related costs to the RAA budget on a quarterly basis.
- All other non-staffing costs or staffing costs not administered through the local authorities' payroll system will be charged directly to the RAA budget.
- The RAA budget will be managed by the RAA Head of Service who will complete monthly monitoring of the RAA budget and will request additional financial information where necessary from partner authorities
- The RAA Head of Service will report the forecast financial position regularly to the Executive Board/Partnership Board. The Board will determine how any overspend is managed/funded or how any underspend should be spent/returned to the partner local authorities.

It is proposed the RAA budgets will be pooled from 1st April 2019 in line with the phased implementation of the RAA ahead of the proposed "Go Live" date in October. Therefore, the Head of the RAA will be delegated authority to manage the RAA budget from April 2019.

Budget

The RAA partnership is committed to the principle there will be no overall increase in the total adoption budget across the three local authorities in year one of the RAA. To this end, each LA will contribute it's 2019-20 adoption budget plus additional budget for the 2020-21 pay award. The RAA Head of Service will manage this budget in order to affect the smooth running of the RAA. In future years, the RAA will move to a demand led spending model, which may increase / decrease the contribution from each LA, but this will be agreed by the executive board in line with an equitable formula.

The draft annual budget for the RAA and total contributions from each local authority for year one is set out below. This estimated budget is based on 2019-20 budgets only and will need to be updated to reflect final budgets including the 2020-21 pay award. The budget for the RAA will be set using the following principles:

- Adoption budgets relating to recruitment, family finding, adoption panels, post adoption support and management costs will be transferred to the RAA in year 1
- The following budgets will not be transferred to the RAA in year 1 and will remain the responsibility of the respective local authority. This position will be reviewed on an annually basis to agree the future options:
  - Special Guardianship orders and associated support
  - Adoption administration services
  - General Overheads/ Centralised costs including building costs, ICT, HR & finance support, Training
  - Adoption allowances
  - Senior management costs (Director & Assistant Director)
- Staffing budgets are based on actual costs of permanent staff, and vacant posts will be set at mid-point.
- It is expected the RAA will be responsible for all costs of running the services listed above after 1st April 2020, this would include additional staffing costs resulting from maternity cover, sickness or agency usage. An exception to this is where an authority is using agency staff to cover a vacancy as at 1st April 2020, this is expected to be a temporary arrangement and the respective authority will cover the additional costs of the agency staff member until a longer-term solution is agreed.
- The RAA budget will be split into two parts:
  - The budgets for recruitment, adoption panels and other management costs will operate as a pooled budget from year one.
  - The Adoption Support budget will also be transferred to the RAA from year one, but each Local Authorities budget will remain separately managed under the RAA until the commissioning plan for the adoption support service is unified across the three authorities.

The total net budget for the RAA is estimated to be £4.2m in 2019-20 of which £1.3m relates to adoption support. These figures do not include expenditure funded from the Adoption Support Fund. ASF income will be generated by the RAA and used to fund specific adoption support costs.

Local Authority Draft Net Budget to be transferred to the RAA £'000s	Total recruitment, adoption panels and management net budget 2019-20 £'000s	Total adoption support net budget 2019-20 £'000s*	Total 2019-20 net adoption budget to be transferred to the RAA £'000s
Bexley	399.9	164.8	564.8
Kent	1,951.1	1,004.8	2,955.9
Medway	552.0	113.8	665.8
Total	2,903.0	1,283.4	4,186.5

*Expenditure funded from the Adoption Support Fund will also be transferred to the RAA (this is fully funded from the ASF income). Income and expenditure from the ASF is not cash limited by any of the authorities and so is not shown in the figures above.

Interagency placement budget and approach

Existing budgets for interagency placements will be transferred to the RAA in year one. This will be reviewed in future years alongside the demand lead funding model. It is recognised the three partner authorities have different approaches to the use of interagency placements and a process will be used to ensure local authorities are not disproportionately impacted by the transfer of this service to the RAA in year one. At 'go-live' each authority will have a number of approved and waiting adopters to transfer to the RAA, along with a number of children awaiting an adoption placement. The Executive Board will agree an approach to ensure each local authority is suitable financially compensated.

Future years

The RAA Partnership Board will decide the exact mechanisms and processes for budget review through the partnership agreement. The RAA budgets will be reviewed annually in line with Local Authorities Medium Term Financial Planning process. At the end of year one, this review will include a view of overheads to ensure no partner authority is significantly negatively impacted from the creation of the RAA and the expansion of the RAA to include other services such as administration.

The RAA intends to move towards a fully demand led formula for budget setting by the end of year three at the latest. A demand led formula will likely mean the contributions from each local authority will change over time, as the contribution will more closely reflect usage of the RAA between the three authorities. An equitable formula for demand led budget setting will need to be agreed through the partnership board but early indications suggest that future budgets will be set in line with either the number of placement orders or number of adoptions in each partner authority.

Bexley, Kent & Medway RAA - Project Plan

Workstream	Action	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20
Executive Board	Monthly meetings	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Establish new-partnership board / governance							X					
	Monthly partnership board meetings ahead of implementation										X	X	X
	Draft and agree cabinet reports		X	X			X						
	Cabinet report sign-off				X			X					
Operational Board	Head of RAA to meet with Heads of Service and key workstream leads	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Task and finish groups	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Finance	Agree financial envelope for RAA through executive board		X	X									
	Agree approach to interagency fees		X										
	Hosted comms, IT, finance and performance functions mapped, costed and agreed				X	X							
	Agree budget review process and transfer mechanisms						X	X					
Commissioning	Scope commisioned offer					X	X						
	Agree commissioning approach for RAA							X					
	Agree commissioning plan for RAA through executive board							X					
ICT	Source information on current systems	X	X										
	Agree system solution to joint IT			X	X								
	Implement changes to IT systems								X	X	X	X	X
Engagement	Staff engagement forums		X			X			X			X	
Communication (external / partners)	Identify all partner / external stakeholders		X										
	Meet with stakeholders pre and post sign-off		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Governance	Draft partnership agreement		X	X	X								
	Agreement approved by Operational Board						X						
	DCS sign-off							X					
HR	Design service model		X	X	X								
	Draft change management protocols		X	X	X								

Category	Task												
	Informal staff consultation		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
	HOS recruitment						■	■	■				
Performance	Develop schedule of required performance					■	■	■	■				
	Begin cross LA quality assurance meetings							■	■	■	■	■	■