Adopt London West Regional Adoption Agency

Adopt London

The Future of Adoption in London

Supported by ALDCS and London Councils

Business Case

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The creation of Regional Adoption Agencies is part of the national agenda to improve the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters and speed up the matching and placement of children for adoption.

In June 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) published a paper, 'Regionalising Adoption' setting out the proposals for the establishment of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs). Funding has been made available from the Department for Education (DfE) to fund the project management costs to develop and implement RAAs as part of a national Regional Adoption Agency Programme. The Education and Adoption Act 2016 requires local authorities to combine their adoption services into Regional Adoption Agencies by April 2020 or be directed to do so if they do not choose to do so on a voluntary basis.

The premise of regionalisation is to:

- Increase the number of children adopted
- 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

It is recommended that a new West London Regional Adoption Agency is created by combining the resources of the adoption services of the following six West London Boroughs: Brent, Ealing, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and The City of Westminster. The latter three currently operate a shared fostering and adoption service. The current four services will become one single shared adoption service.

This document describes how establishing a single agency will facilitate the six Boroughs to provide a more cohesive, efficient and effective use of resources and develop practice to the benefit of children, adopters and others who access adoption and special guardianship support services.

Outline Proposal for West London

This proposal forms part of an overarching programme to develop four RAAs across London with a common approach. Project Managers across London have worked together to ensure consistency of approach, share information and avoid duplication.

The chosen model is a shared service hosted by the London Borough of Ealing. The intention is for the new shared service to become operational by July 2019.

It is proposed that there will be one base for the service which will be in Ealing. This is to allow for closer working relationships within the new team, the development of a

new shared team culture and for the provision of effective management oversight. The new model will create a mobile and agile workforce, supported by technology who will have access to touchdown bases in all six Boroughs. This is critical to support and maintain the relationships with children's social workers and other key stakeholders.

The West London RAA, currently known as Adopt London West, builds on a strong legacy of collaborative working with both the West London Adoption and Permanence Consortium and the West London Alliance (WLA) Children's Programme which have a proven track record for delivering effective services. (Harrow, which is part of both the WLA and the consortium, has joined another RAA "Ambitious for Adoption" with other Local Authorities hosted by CORAM, a voluntary sector provider, Hillingdon has also applied to join this RAA arrangement).

By establishing a West London RAA, the boroughs aim to build on the success of their existing services to improve performance in meeting the needs of those children who require permanence through adoption and bring together best practice from each authority within the RAA and learning nationally. The West London project has the benefit of being able to access previous learning from those RAAs who are fully mobilised to share lessons learnt.

Adopt London West also propose to include Special Guardianship support from the outset in the new shared service. This is an area where there is increased demand and a robust focus is required to support family members or connected people to continue to care for children and young people who otherwise would be looked after in the care system.

The implementation of the new RAA follows substantial project work currently being undertaken. Funding has been provided by the DfE to fund the project to develop proposals through to implementation. Activity has included undertaking an analysis of the current position in terms of performance, demand trends and future need considerations; and identifying staffing and financial resources for each Borough to contribute to the RAA. A range of workstreams continue to work through the operational detail for the future service design these include: stakeholder engagement; finance, performance and demand modelling; HR and workforce implications; IT and property logistics and staff engagement in the service redesign.

Pan London Working

Each RAA will focus on the specific needs in their region. However, a range of opportunities are being considered on a pan London basis where there is evidence that further collaboration across the regions makes sense.

Work is underway on a pan London basis to consider options for a London-wide commissioning framework. This should create a mechanism for improved longer term, outcome focussed and cost effective commissioning.

Staffing implications

There are the equivalent of circa 31.67 full time equivalent (FTE) posts affected within these proposals. The new proposed model has 26.5 FTE posts. There are a range of vacancies within each borough across a range of service areas. Work is underway to map opportunities for existing staff. There are also a range of new posts to be established in the new model.

For the boroughs of Brent, Ealing and Hounslow, it is proposed that staff affected will transfer to the host authority (retaining their existing terms and conditions) under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) regulations (as applicable). Within the Tri Borough service, it has been advised that TUPE does not apply (due to the integrated nature of the existing Adoption and Fostering service). An internal review is underway to determine options for staff. This may result in vacancies/budget transferring rather than current post holders.

Any applicable restructuring activities and/or redundancy costs will be both managed and underwritten by the currently employing LAs. These will not be funded by the DfE or Ealing as the host Borough.

It is proposed that currently employing LAs also underwrite liability for employment issues for a period of two years post-TUPE transfer.

Statutory responsibilities of individual councils participating

Agency Decision Making responsibilities and all legal responsibilities for looked after children will remain with each local authority.

Section 5.4 below details the functions, roles and responsibilities that will transfer to the RAA and those which will remain in each local authority.

Resourcing

Based on current activity and demand across the West, which could fluctuate over time, it is estimated that 40 children annually will be placed by the RAA (some in sibling groups). Currently only an average of 26 adopter households are recruited annually. There is a significant sufficiency shortage of adopters across London including the West region. The establishment of the RAAs seek to address this over time by having a concentrated combined focus on recruitment and a post adoption support offer.

A thorough analysis of each Borough's financial spend on adoption services has been undertaken, including peer challenge reviews. Boroughs have not been asked to contribute sums over and above their confirmed relevant budget for adoption for 2018-2019. However, the need to purchase interagency placements from other providers to address the lack of sufficiency currently will require contributions from each Local Authority to provide for their children which require an external adoption placement.

Total confirmed contributions will fund the proposed new model, including staff and non-staff costs (excluding items detailed in the Partnership Agreement) and overheads attributed to the hosting of the agency.

Key principles

The principles which this business case follows have been agreed by the London RAA Executive Board which comprise each of the four Host Authority Directors (Ealing, Havering, Islington and Southwark).

- Local authorities involved in Adopt London and each of the four RAAs are committed to collaborating adoption arrangements so that the best interests of children and their adoptive families are secured and kept at the forefront of decision making.

- Adopt London will provide an overarching framework for enabling effective coordination, coherence and partnership working across London.

- Adopt London authorities, and the four RAAs, will make sure that there is consistency of approach in relation to key strategic and operational decisions, e.g. about whether staff are transferred under TUPE arrangements or seconded. Project teams in the four RAAs and RAA governance arrangements should reflect the ambition to promote such consistency of approach.

- The remit of some RAAs (provisionally) should include Special Guardianship Order (SGO) support. Further work on the implications for this is to be undertaken across the other three London RAAs. West London is committed to including SGO support within the West RAA from the outset. Financial responsibility for Adopters and Special Guardians' allowances will be retained by participating Authorities.

- Adopt London is committed to working effectively together with Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) making sure that their unique and important contribution is maximised and that VAAs are involved in the development of the RAAs and Adopt London.

- The focus of work over the coming months will be on establishing the four separate RAAs. The Adopt London Executive Board will continue to provide London-wide governance and oversee the options for developing joint commissioning opportunities across London; maintaining common design principles for the RAAs and exploring opportunities for further development of a Pan London Hub in phase 2. This is likely to include commissioning arrangements and other collaborative arrangements, it is not intended to need a separate infrastructure.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document sets out the case for creating a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) currently named '*Adopt London West*' through combining the adoption services for the local authority areas: Brent, Ealing, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and The City of Westminster. It describes how establishing a single agency will allow the six authorities to provide a more 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. It proposes that London Borough of Ealing will host the new adoption agency, the development costs are funded by the Department for Education. This document also sets out how Adopt London West will work with other RAAs across London to develop a Regional Hub for the provision of some services yet to be determined.

2.2 SCOPE & VISION OF THE NEW RAA

The proposed Regional Adoption Agency will incorporate six boroughs in West London. Based on current demand (which will fluctuate over time) it is estimated that approximately 40 children annually will be placed by the RAA (some in sibling groups). Currently only approximately 26 adopter households are recruited annually[1]. There is a significant sufficiency shortage of adopters across London including the West region. The establishment of the RAAs seeks to address this by having a concentrated combined focus on recruitment. The development of a specialist post adoption support service and SGO support service will strengthen the west London offer. While support services will transfer the RAA, financial allowances to Adopters and Special Guardians will continue to be retained by the participating Authority.

In May 2018 it was agreed by Association of London Directors of Children's Services in consultation with the DfE to develop a pan London hub for services that benefit from being delivered at scale (yet to be determined, it is intended this will form Phase 2 of implementation). This is likely to include commissioning arrangements and other collaborative arrangements, it is not intended to need a separate infrastructure.

The vision of the new RAA is to achieve excellent outcomes for children and adults affected by adoption and special guardianship through:

- Working closely with the Local Authorities and partners to ensure that children's best interests are at the heart of placement decisions which will fully meet their needs

[1] https://**www.gov.uk**/government/publications/**adoption-scorecards**

- Targeting recruitment and establishing a wider and more diverse pool of prospective adopters
- Embedding early permanence principles and matching so that children are placed without delay in secure, loving families
- Providing and commissioning outstanding and good value adoption and special guardianship support services
- Investing in the workforce to ensure they have the right skills and capacity to deliver excellent services
- Continually seeking to apply best practice and innovation to our ways of working

- Actively listening to and learning from children, adults and staff to develop and improve the services provided

2.3 DELIVERY MODEL OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDATION

Whilst a number of options were considered early on including the creation of a new single entity to deliver adoption services across London, the preferred option is the development of four London RAAs with an option of developing a London wide hub to provide some shared functions, yet to be determined. The four RAAs – North, South, East and West are broadly based on the current permanence consortia arrangements.

In the West this entails pooling the resources of the six London Boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and The City of Westminster and creating a new shared service with one Borough becoming the Host authority.

Governance of the RAA will be provided through a board comprising of senior representatives from all participating councils with representation from stakeholders as appropriate. (**See Appendix 1 proposed governance model**)

The RAA will continue to be accountable to Local Authorities including reporting on performance to Corporate Parenting Panels and scrutiny bodies as required.

The preferred option for West London addresses these requirements and proposes to work collaboratively with three other hosted RAAs across London namely:

Adopt London North – Islington
Adopt London South – Southwark
Adopt London East – Havering

2.4 STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS – THE 'MUSTS'

The operating model for the RAA must address the following DfE minimum expectations of a Regional Adoption Agency:

1) **Single line of accountability** – *The new body must be in a position to act as a single entity on behalf of the individual authorities.*
2) **Core functions are transferred to the RAA** – *As set out in the policy paper 'Regionalising Adoption', we want RAAs to be responsible for recruitment, matching and support.*
3) **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.*
4) **Recruitment, support and matching** – *It is essential that RAAs 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.*
5) *Each RAA to appoint a* **Head of Service** *with line management responsibility for staff in the RAA.*
6) **Pooled funding** – *We want LAs to pool their adoption funding into one RAA funding pot that is managed by the RAA.*
7) **Partnership with the voluntary sector** – *VAAs have an important role to play in the provision of adoption services. We want RAAs to involve them in the design and implementation of RAAs and to consider their role in the delivery of services.*

2.5 STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED

Consultation with stakeholders is an integral part of the Regional Adoption Agency project.

A range of workshops and task groups with practitioners and managers across West London are ongoing. These have been designed to ensure current staff and managers views, experience and ideas inform the practice development of the service.

Views ascertained in the Adopter Voice West London consultation report (in early 2018) have been taken into account when developing the service specification and have informed agenda items at task and finish groups. Engagement to seek views of birth families, children and young people, adopters and Special Guardians is planned during Spring 2019.

On a London-wide basis, regular meetings with voluntary sector providers along with the London wide Executive Board take place to discuss their offer and to seek views on future opportunities to work collaboratively and to consider how a longer-term commissioning approach could improve outcomes, efficiency and effectiveness. Across the four RAAs work has been commissioned to develop a joint commissioning framework.

VAAs attend the West London Consortium, the Practice Lead will engage VAA and other partners going forward on the specific practice development work stream.

3. THE CASE FOR CHANGE

In June 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) published a paper, 'Regionalising Adoption' setting out the proposals for the establishment of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs). Funding has been made available from the Department for Education (DfE) to fund the project management costs to develop and implement RAAs as part of a national Regional Adoption Agency Programme. The Education and Adoption Act 2016 requires local authorities to combine their adoption services into Regional Adoption Agencies by April 2020 or be directed to do so if they do not choose to do so on a voluntary basis.

The premise of regionalisation is to:

- Increase the number of children adopted
- 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.

3.1 WHAT RESEARCH AND BEST PRACTICE TELLS US

Research identifies several factors which contribute to timely, successful family finding and matching outcomes for children with a plan of adoption.

The University of Bristol (June 2010) and Oxford University (Feb 2015) identified within research briefs, key factors seen to enhance the adoption journey for both children and their prospective adopters.

- **Quality of information** – all information at all parts of the process must be of high quality, factual and comprehensive. Poor quality information is identified as a direct correlation to disruption.
- Local authorities with access to a **wider pool of prospective adopters experienced less delay** in their family finding and matching processes.
- Family finding done at the **point of ADM decision** (rather than at the granting of the placement order) resulted in children experiencing less delay.
- Delay was reduced when **case responsibility for children transferred to adoption service** at point of placement order.
- Delay was also reduced when **early family finding strategies** were agreed for individual children deemed to have complex needs.
- **Tracking of children** throughout their journey is critical and adoption workers involved in this can drive and empower the process.
- **Timely joint decision making** re whether to pursue ethnic matches or sibling separation also reduced delay for children.

- **Post placement support** (in a variety of formats) is particularly valued by adopters, contributes to positive transitions and reduces the risk of disruptions.

Proposals contained within this report have taken account of these key factors alongside the need for quality and efficiency.

3.2 INEFFICIENCES

There is a highly-fragmented system nationally with around 180 agencies recruiting and matching adopters for only 5,000 children per year (this number has subsequently decreased to 4,350 in 2017 according to DfE published statistics). The majority of agencies are operating on a small scale with over half recruiting fewer than 20 adopters.

Subsequently in 2017/18 the six boroughs in West London approved 26 adopter households in total for 42 children adopted. This is not an effective and efficient scale to be operating at and is likely to mean that costs are higher because management overheads and fixed costs are shared over a smaller base. Having a system that is fragmented in this way reduces the scope for broader, strategic planning, as well as specialisation, innovation and investment. Large numbers of small agencies render the system unable to make the best use of the national supply of potential adopters, more vulnerable to peaks and troughs in the flow of children, and less cost effective.

3.3 MATCHING

The system needs to match children with families far more quickly. Nationally, the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) data shows that, as at 31st March 2017, there were 2,470 children with a placement order waiting to be matched.

In West London participating Boroughs, at the end of December 2018, there were 42 children waiting for adoption. The average timescale for children between becoming looked after and being placed with an adoptive family nationally in 2017 was 520 days. The average in West London was 519 days. The DfE Adoption Scorecard Key Performance Indicator threshold is 436 days. Although the West performs in line with the national average, there is scope for further improvement. The costs of delay, both to children and to the system, are high. It is vital that children are given the best and earliest possible chance of finding a family, irrespective of authority boundaries and lack of trust of other agencies' adopters. It is unacceptable that children are left waiting in the system when families can be found. Successful matching relies on being able to access a wide range of potential adopters from the beginning and operating at a greater scale would allow social workers to do this, thus reducing delay in the system. It could also reduce the number of children who have their adoption decisions reversed. Furthermore, the opportunity for practice innovation created by moving to a new delivery model also has real potential to improve matching.

3.4 RECRUITMENT

Nationally there are currently 1064 children on the register and only 377 adopters[2]. Recruiting from a wider geographical pool as part of a regional recruitment strategy will go some way to addressing the shortage in adopters. However, being bigger won't necessarily lead to being better. Strong leadership and clear focus are needed along with incentives better aligned with post adoption support to recruit the right kind of adopters given the characteristics of the children waiting. Recruitment from a wider geographical base than an individual local authority, that takes account of the needs of children across those local authorities in a regional recruitment strategy and uses specialist techniques for recruiting adopters for hard to place children, would potentially lead to fewer children waiting.

3.5 ADOPTION & SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SUPPORT

Currently adoption support services are provided by a mix of local authority provision, the NHS and independent providers (voluntary adoption agencies, adoption support agencies and small independent providers). There is a risk that the public and independent sectors are unlikely to be able to grow sufficiently to meet increased demand for adoption support. There are regional gaps in the types of services on offer and little evidence of spare capacity. The sector is currently dominated by spot purchasing and sole providers. This is not an efficient way to deliver these services.

For providers to expand and therefore operate at a more efficient scale, services need to be commissioned on bigger and longer-term contracts. RAAs should enable this to be done. It is envisaged that the Hub will act as a conduit to the wider voluntary sector, providing economies of scale and opportunities for innovation.

The new combined service provides the opportunity for the provision of a service of excellence for adoption and special guardianship support. This will be a multi-disciplinary service in partnership with colleagues from health and education and providing comprehensive and high level targeted support for children, adoptive parents, special guardians, adopted adults and birth family members.

3.6 THE LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

There is already a great deal of joint working between the adoption agencies in the West as part of the West London Consortium to provide parts of the current service. Joining the six local authority services together within Adopt London West should enable efficiencies to be achieved and improvements to services for all those affected by adoption. Whilst robust working relationships are already established, the lack of a mandate has led to some initiatives being slow to progress or be sustained.

[2] https://adoptionmatch.org.uk/statistics/

Combining the services should ensure that management overheads and fixed costs will be reduced over time. The new service will allow for the more efficient use of staff time, for example prospective adoptive parents are provided with training as part of the assessment process. Adopt London West will continue to deliver training courses across the whole area resulting in less duplication and more timely access to the training courses for prospective adopters. There will also be the opportunity building on examples of existing good practice (e.g. the use of experienced adoptive parents as trainers and mentors).

Benefits will be delivered through adopting the "best practice" from the six contributing boroughs. This will be of particular value in delivering benefits from the areas of 'Early Permanence' (i.e. 'concurrency planning' and 'fostering to adopt'), improved adoption and special guardianship support, making optimal use of colleagues in health and education as well as those in the boroughs such as those registered as social workers and those with a range of other relevant knowledge, skills and experience.

In terms of recruiting adoptive parents all the agencies are currently competing with each other. There is a duplication of effort and associated costs with the risk that people wanting to be considered as adoptive parents are confused about where and how to proceed with their enquiry. Adopt London West will have a single point of contact for prospective adopters, reducing the current fragmentation of services.

Similarly, a single point of entry to the adoption service locally will improve access to adoption support services for adoptive families, and also for adopted adults and birth family members, who have a statutory entitlement to receive a service. Recruitment will be targeted for those children waiting in West London in order to ensure the service is delivering for those Boroughs contributing financially.

3.7 MATCHING CHILDREN TO ADOPTERS

Adopt London West will aim to reduce the proportion of children whose plans are changed from adoption because an adoption placement cannot be found as well as the number of adoption placement disruptions. The RAA will bring the existing local expertise among managers and social workers together in respect of what makes a good match and will be looking at a high proportion of children being referred to the RAA prior to the point of Placement Order.

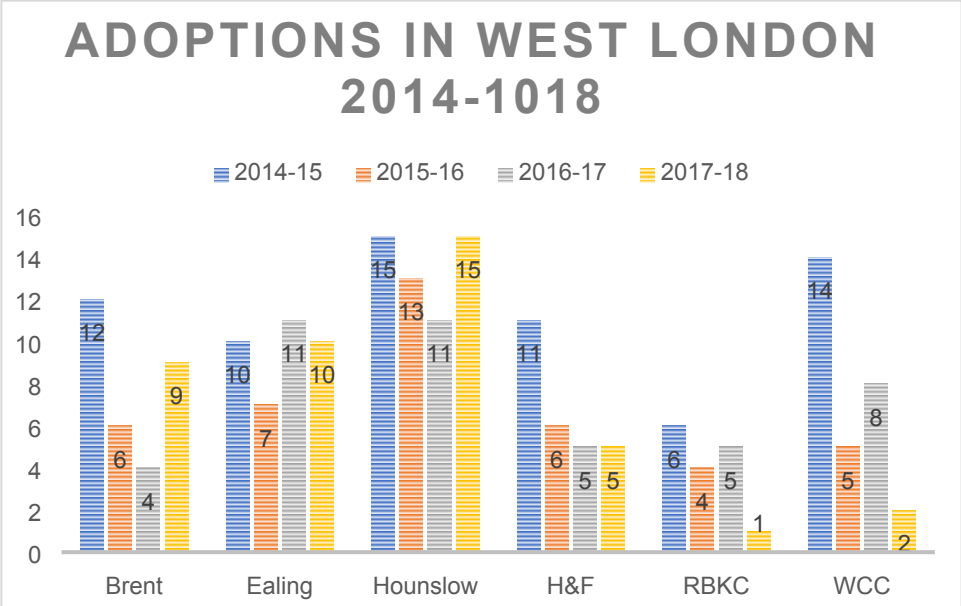
Consultant Practitioners in the RAA will work closely with those who have a permanence lead function in each of the boroughs to identify children with likely adoption plans, and liaison with the child's social worker during the court proceedings will enable fuller and more accurate assessments of an individual child's needs to inform matching and prepare the child. Being more strategic in terms of recruitment will also widen choice of potential adoptive families for children, which again should lead to better and more sustainable matching.

4. PERFORMANCE

Nationally, 3,820 children were adopted in 2017/18. This is a decrease of 13% on the previous year and down from a peak of 5,360 in 2015. The Children Looked After population continues to rise to 75,420 on the 31st March 2018. This is a rise of 4% from the previous year[3].

Between April 2017 and March 2018, 42 children were adopted in the Adopt West London region. London Local Authorities place fewer children from care than national averages. It is likely that Adopt London West authorities will continue to place fewer children due to local demographics and effective permanency options, including the use of SGO and kinship care with extended families.

The Department of Education Adoption Scorecard data (April 2014 - March 2017) shows that during this period, across the six West London local authorities there were 190 children adopted from care. The numbers of West London adoptions over the last four years are in the graph below:



Source: DfE Adoption scorecards 2014 – 2017; Adoption Leadership Board: 2017-18.

4.1 CURRENT DEMAND FOR ADOPTION PLACEMENTS IN WEST LONDON

In December 2018, 42 children in West London required adoptive families. Of these children, 13 are on a Placement Order (PO) and not yet matched to a family and 8 have an Adoption Decision but no PO. A further 21 children are likely to have a Plan for Adoption Decision made[4].

[3] https://**www.gov.uk**/government/publications/**adoption-scorecards**
[4] Source: Adopt London West Team Managers

4.2 WAITING TIMES FOR CHILDREN IN WEST LONDON

The average timescale for children waiting in the West for an adoptive family placement was 519 days. The national average is 520 and DfE threshold is 436 days[5].

Waiting times are affected by the suitability of adoptive families available for children who are deemed to be 'harder to place'. A number of children that typically wait longer are older (over 2 years), from ethnic minority backgrounds; and part of a sibling group. Children with disabilities and those with parents with a history of substance misuse and mental health difficulties tend to wait longer. There is more work to do with prospective adopters to prepare them for these cohorts.

4.3 RECRUITING ADOPTERS FOR WEST LONDON'S 'HARDER TO PLACE' CHILDREN

Although joint targeted recruitment is underway by Adopt London West authorities, there is an urgent need to increase the number of adopters. This mirrors a shortage nationally and across London. Last financial year (March 2017 – 2018), West London Adoption Authorities approved 26 adoptive families according to ALB published data.

Combined analysis of the needs of children in the west is underway to inform a targeted recruitment approach to identify families to meet the needs of west London's children.

The following table shows the profile of children and adoptive families in West London at December 2018:

WEST LONDON CHILDREN WAITING	%	WEST LONDON ADOPTERS	%
Children aged 2-5 years	24%	Willing to adopt a child aged between 2 and 5 years old	71%
Children 6 years and older.	9%	Willing to adopt a child aged over 5 years old	0
Black/Black British, Asian or Asian British, dual Ethnic Minority heritage or other ethnic background	87%	Black/Black British, Asian or Asian British, dual Ethnic Minority heritage or other ethnic background	91%
Children who are part of a sibling group.	12%	Would consider a sibling group of two or more.	9%

[5] https://**www.gov.uk**/government/publications/**adoption-scorecards**

Source: Adopt London West Team Managers 2019

4.4 CURRENT SUFFICIENCY OF ADOPTERS

In December 2018, West London Team Managers reported 20 families are in the adopter pipeline with 12 families approved and ready to adopt, and 8 families under assessment. Nationally, there were 377 families on the National Adoption Register and 1064 children. Insufficient adopters result in delays for children waiting to be adopted. When reviewing adopter sufficiency in London in 2018, the London Adoption Board in 2018 stressed the need for a minimum of three adoptive families per child waiting to provide appropriate choice.

There is some evidence to suggest that those RAAs which have gone live earlier are now starting to reap the benefits of targeted recruitment work. For example, One Adoption West Yorkshire increased numbers of approved adopters by 20% in Quarter 1 of this year compared to the same quarter the previous year. Timescales for children have also improved with the average number of days from a child becoming looked after to being placed with adopters reducing from 439 days to 315 days.

It is anticipated that a Performance Framework already in use within up and running RAAs will be utilised to ensure accurate performance reporting and sufficiency predictions. A quarterly performance report will be provided to the future Governance Board for Adopt London West RAA.

5. OVERVIEW OF RAA OPERATING MODEL

From a local perspective, the six boroughs have a long history of working together and West London has a clear identity. The West London Consortium has focussed on developing joint services for Fostering, Adoption and Special Guardianship. Robust working relationships are already established. However, the lack of a comprehensive mandate has led to some initiatives being slow to progress or be sustained.

Adoption and permanence services in West London have worked co-operatively in sharing practice and training opportunities. This has enabled constructive working together in developing the target operating model and ongoing practice development.

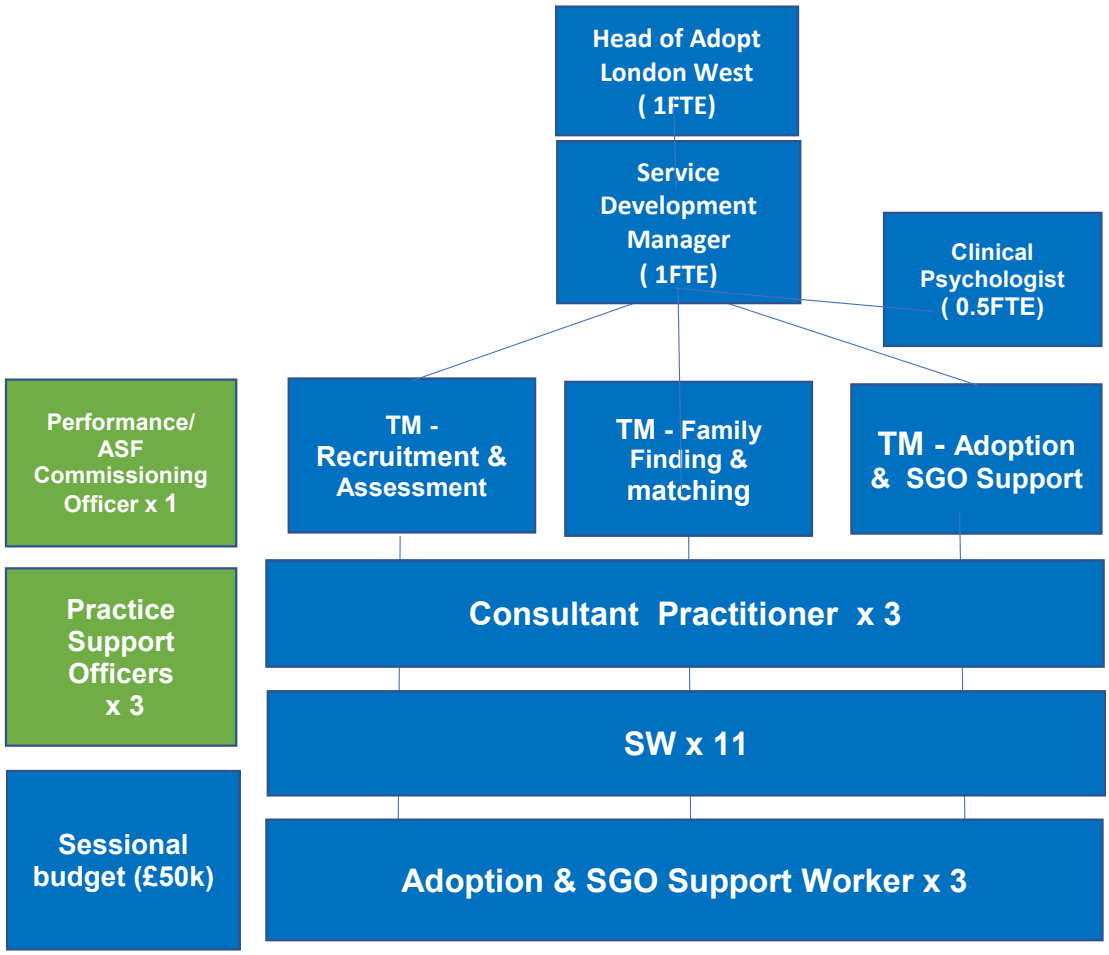
Adopt London West will therefore bring together best practice from these LAs while providing the opportunity to create clear practice improvements and enable a viable future market for recruitment. Approximately 31.67 FTE LA staff, many of whom work part time, are expected to become part of the new organisation to deliver the following main services across West London:

- **Recruitment and Assessment** – to provide the prospective adopters

- **Matching and Placement** – to match prospective adopters with children in need of adoption
- **Adoption Support** – to help all affected by adoption
- **Special Guardianship Support** – to support families and connected persons.

5.1 ORGANISATIONAL MODEL

The proposed model is based on Ealing grades and has been costed at the top of the pay scales for calculations in all cases. The proposed staffing structure for the LA hosted option comprises 26.5 FTE posts, with a total staffing budget of £1.6m.



5.2 RAA ROLES

New roles created in the establishment of the new organisation include:

- 1 FTE Head of Service
- 1 FTE Service Manager this is a temporary 2yr post to support service development and provide additional capacity in the transitional phase)
- 0.5 Clinical Psychologist
- 1 FTE Performance and Commissioning Officer

Summary of Roles

The **Head of Service** will provide leadership and vision for the continuous development of the Adopt London West, leading the strategic planning, development and management of all aspects of the Agency to ensure the delivery of high quality, effective and legally compliant Adoption and SGO support services. They will manage the relationships with Local Authority partners through interaction at Senior Management level. Transformational leadership skills will be essential as part of this role to drive the practice improvement and cultural change required. This role will also be crucial in influencing both the local and national adoption agenda working with the other RAA leaders across the country. They will be the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

The **Service Manager** will be responsible for the operational management of the service, supporting staff, developing, monitoring and driving performance standards and innovative practice. They will deputise for the Head of Service when necessary.

The **Clinical Psychologist** will lead on embedding a therapeutically informed model of practice and provide consultation and guidance on individual cases in relation to ASF applications and the most appropriate therapeutic intervention.

Team Managers in addition to line management and operational responsibilities will share the role of **Agency Advisers**. They will be centrally located and will work closely with child care social workers throughout the permanence and adoption process. They will provide quality assurance and advice to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) and act as Agency Adviser to the Adoption Panel.

Consultant Practitioners will have lead responsibility for development of practice areas and also be responsible for some line management duties. These roles will also hold cases. Practice areas covered by this role include: permanence coordination with LAs practice development work (e.g. developing the SGO support offer, providing 'bite size' training for LA SWs).

Social Workers - will be responsible for preparing and assessing prospective adopters, undertaking post order assessments of support needs for adopters and special guardians , Permanency Planning Meetings; working with CSW when child on referral to RAA; sibling assessments if commissioned; family finding activity including profiling; Shortlisting families; family visits; Child Appreciation Day coordination; preparing support plans, matching panel preparation/follow up. A Duty Rota system will operate.

Adoption and SGO Support Workers - will undertake non-statutory duties, including: 'Stage One' processes; preparation group co-ordination; organisation of 'Activity Days' and 'Profiling Events'; family finding for adopters; 'Child Appreciation Day' co-ordination; coordinating adopter/SG training and social events; coordinate Buddy scheme for adopters and SGs; Life Story Work; letterbox contact; support plan review co-ordination; facilitating support groups.

Performance and Commissioning Officer - will be responsible for developing and maintaining performance management systems and all associated data requirements, including tracking of activity to inform future activity-based modelling. This role will also be responsible for coordination of ASF applications, reviews and any grant applications. In addition, the coordination of RAA commissioning and contract reviews.

Practice Support Officers is a service focused and enhanced business support role. Duties will include: panel co-ordination; undertaking statutory checks and references; invoices and sales; raising purchase orders and tracking interagency fees; room bookings; minuting Panel meetings/'Child Appreciation Days'; file searches and retrieval and a range of other duties that support service delivery.

The **Marketing and Recruitment** budget will be managed by Ealing's fostering and adoption recruitment team, building on existing knowledge and ensuring that resources are used flexibly and recruitment is targeted for children who are waiting.

The organisational structure has been designed building on the shared knowledge of key stakeholders with experience of working in adoption and permanence services across the region. The operational staff numbers have been determined to meet the anticipated demands of the service, within the available financial envelope to ensure the ability to deliver and sustain practice improvement to the benefit of children, adopters and others who benefit from adoption and special guardianship support services.

More detailed work on mapping existing staff to the teams in the new staffing structure will form part of the HR Work Stream activities during consultation pre implementation.

5.3 PROCESS

The target operating model for the new RAA focuses on delivering the following core functions:

- **Recruitment and Assessment** – to provide the prospective adopters;
- **Matching and Placement** – to match prospective adopters with children in need of adoption;
- **Pre and Post Placement Support** – to help all affected by adoption
- **Special Guardianship Order support** – to promote resilience

5.4 FUNCTIONAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The table below sets out how 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	✓	
Post Placement training for Prospective Adopters	✓	
PERMANENCE PLANNING		
Early identification of a child possibly requiring adoption		✓
Tracking and monitoring the child possibly requiring adoption	✓	✓
Support and advice to child care 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 for the child		✓
MATCHING AND PLACEMENT		
Family finding	✓	
Looked After Child reviews	✓	✓
Shortlist potential families	✓	
Visit potential families	✓	✓
Organising child appreciation day	✓	

FUNCTION	Regional Adoption Agency	Local Authority
Ongoing direct work to prepare child prior to placement	✓	✓
Adoption Panel administration and management	✓	
Agency adviser role	✓	
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 AND SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SUPPORT		
Assessment for adoption and special guardianship support	✓	✓
Developing and delivering adoption/special guardianship support plans	✓	✓
Agree and administer financial support to adoptive and special guardianship support families pre and post Order		✓
Adoption and special guardianship support delivery including: • Support groups • Social events • Post adoption/special guardianship training • Independent Birth Relative services • Support with ongoing birth relative contact • Adoption/special guardian counselling/training	✓	
Financial support to adopters including adoption allowances		✓
Access to birth records		✓
NON-AGENCY ADOPTIONS		
Step parent/partner adoption assessments	✓	
Inter-country adoption assessments and post approval and post order support	✓	

As part of pre implementation, project managers across London are exploring potential areas for the VAA and other providers sectors work with the other London RAAs to support service delivery including consideration of the following areas:

- Targeted recruitment activity focusing on Early Permanence and targeted assessments for priority children
- Specialist adoption support training
- Specialist practical or therapeutic support services for children and families post placement and post order
- Adoption counselling and services to adopted adults
- Continued provision of VAA families

Practice improvements will be delivered through the implementation of new ways of working. Adopt London West will work jointly with the other RAAs and the Hub (once developed) in London to seek to explore further sources of funding to work jointly with the VAA/Provider sector, for example, in the areas of Early Permanence and adoption support to design and deliver practice improvements.

6. HR IMPLICATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Staff will transfer from the partner boroughs to the London Borough of Ealing under the provisions of TUPE where this applies. Formal consultation will form part of the HR Work Stream project plan.

The project plan for implementation in order to complete the TUPE transfer will be subject to the following:

- Cabinet approvals in mid-March 2019.
- Once cabinet approval is secured, formal consultation with staff affected and recognised trades unions will commence in late March 2019.
- Recruitment to the post of Head of Service will be finalised.
- The staffing structure for the new service will be finalised (subject to consultation with affected staff and trade unions) to be effective from July 2019.
- Staff will transfer to London Borough of Ealing on their existing terms and conditions unless, through consultation, it is agreed they will transfer on London Borough of Ealing terms and conditions.
- Any remaining vacant posts within the new structure will be subject to LB Ealing's recruitment and selection procedures and successful applicants will be appointed on LB Ealing terms and conditions.
- HR processes will be put in place to formalise the process and populate the RAA staffing structure.
- HR/Payroll administration process to be undertaken.
- Training and support for news ways of working in a single agency.
- Establishing plans for on-going professional development.

7. FINANCE

A thorough analysis of each Borough's spending on adoption and SGO support services has been undertaken, including peer challenge reviews. Boroughs have not been asked to contribute sums over and above their confirmed relevant budget for adoption for 2018-2019. However, the need to purchase interagency placements from other providers to address the lack of sufficiency currently will require contributions from each Local Authority.

Total confirmed contributions will fund the proposed new service, including staff and non-staffing (excluding items detailed in the Partnership Agreement) and overheads attributed to the hosting of the agency.

To meet current demand, the six local authorities' budget for 2018/19 is £1.9 million for adoption services and special guardianship support services. This figure includes staffing, non-staffing costs and adoption and SGO support costs.

Adjustment for any interagency income or fees, the agreement for Adopt London West is for current 2018/19 budgets to transfer as indicated in the table below.

Transferring Budgets (revised)		
Authority	**Budget**	**Proportions %**
Brent	378,647	19%
Ealing	656,913	33%
Hounslow	404,264	20%
Hammersmith & Fulham	198,797	10%
Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea	152,869	8%
City of Westminster	201,519	10%
TOTAL	**1,993,009**	**100%**

The financial modelling of Adopt London West has been developed with the LA hosted option. Non-staffing is based on current budgeted spending and adoption and SGO support costs.

These budgets have been developed from examining the current Adoption and SGO support service budgets and then making an assessment about resources which are currently used to fund activities which will now be the responsibility of the new RAA.

Total RAA Costs vs transferring budget (excluding Hosting Cost)	RAA cost
Staffing total	£1,600,679
Non-staffing budget	£213,500
Adoption/SG Support costs	£64,172
Total Cost (excluding Hosting)	**£1,878,351**
LA transferring budget	**£1,993,009**
Variance	£114,658

The overall cost of the RAA will be determined by total host cost that is to be applied. An overhead of £6k per FTE worker transferring to the RAA is proposed. Thus the total host cost is dependent on the proportion of Ealing staff retained in the RAA and how many staff from participating boroughs transfer in. The table below sets out worst (1) best (2) and mid-range (3) scenarios from a purely financial basis.

Scenarios based on Ealing staff	Hosting	Hosting cost	Total Cost of RAA	Variance from transferring budget
Scenario 1	**Host Cost @ £6k per FTE - 0 Ealing staff**	**£159,000**	£2,037,351	-£44,342
Scenario 2	**Host Cost @ £6k per non-Ealing FTE (assume 13 transfer)**	**£81,000**	£1,959,351	£33,658
Scenario 3	**Host Cost @ £6k per non-Ealing FTE (assume 8 transfer)**	**£111,000**	£1,989,351	£3,658

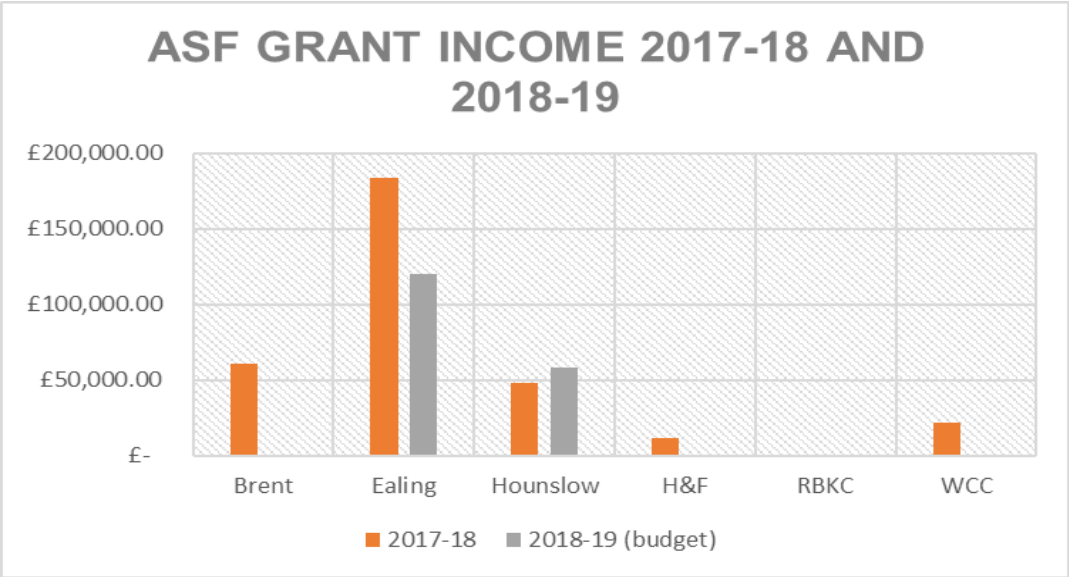
7.1 POST ADOPTION AND SGO SUPPORT AND ADOPTION SUPPORT FUND

The DfE created the Adoption Support Fund in 2015 to provide targeted support for individual children affected by special guardianship and adoption. In 2017-18, West London received £325,000 ASF; 56% of this by was claimed by Ealing. Since the ASF grant began, Ealing has been awarded the highest funding across London (£880,000). Two LAs have budgeted for ASF funding 2018-19 totalling £178,000. The table below indicates the proportional ASF grant allocations per west London borough in 2017/18.

In West London in December 2018, a reported figure of 229 families were supported at pre and post adoption stage across the boroughs, with significant variance in the

numbers per borough. Team managers also reported support activity for 89 families with a Special Guardianship Order.

A total of 26 Special Guardianship Orders were granted in west London in 2017-18 and according to trends and Adopt London West strategic leads, this number is expected to rise.



Source: LA finance leads September 2018

Currently ASF is based on individual need and claimed through the grant nationally. The current grant is due to end in April 2020. The Government is yet to announce the plans for future allocations or approach. It is possible that grants will be devolved to RAAs to spend more flexibly. This could provide an opportunity for more creative and strategic commissioning of support. However, there is also a risk that any allocations could be based on current usage, which does not necessarily reflect current or future need, given the variations in usage to date or indeed the total amount being reduced.

8. RISKS

8.1 STRATEGIC RISKS

There is a risk to any Local Authority that fails to join a regional agency. This would include central government directing how its services would be delivered.

Major reorganisation of adoption services in the region may have an impact on service delivery to children and adoptive families in the short term. To mitigate these risks, performance measures aligned with the revised operating model and regular monitoring arrangements will be established between the host and non-host authorities.

Separation of functions could cause delay through ineffective communication. The service delivery model promotes co-location and local delivery in all Local Authority areas. Effective information sharing agreements and close working relationships between children's and adoption social workers will mitigate against this risk.

Any future difference in opinion across the LAs as to the role and scope of Adopt London West and future governance arrangements could delay implementation.

The organisational staffing levels proposed in this business case have been based on actual demand experienced over the past three years, however because of the current difficulties in predicting the levels of activity (e.g., numbers of children with adoption plans) there is a risk that suggested staffing levels might not be consistent with future demand.

There is risk, even regionally, of not being able to recruit adopters able to meet the needs of the children waiting, leading to more interagency placements and financial viability issues. More coordinated and targeted recruitment activity is expected to address this. Scope for enhanced recruitment and assessment has been built into the delivery model. However, this is likely to take up to at least 3 years to reach sufficiency requirements.

Major change will mean a potentially worrying time for staff and proposed changes to ways of working could lead to a risk that the RAA may find it challenging to retain its existing experienced and qualified adoption team workforce. 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 to ensure they are informed and involved opportunities and developments of a joint agency.

8.2 FINANCIAL RISKS

The primary risk is that the agency is underfunded and therefore unable to deliver adequately for the children of West London. This will also impact on timescales for children waiting and influence Ofsted judgements about the service provided to Children in Care.

Failure to provide high quality adoption support services may result in placement disruptions meaning children will return to care. The detrimental impact of this in respect of the child's wellbeing (and adopter) cannot be underestimated.

It is well evidenced that satisfied adopters are a critical factor in recruiting new applicants. Adopters who are dissatisfied with their experience during any part of their journey may negatively influence recruitment success.

Financial risks can be mitigated by the inclusion of a detailed Schedule in the Partnership Agreement that details all financial risks, including the treatment of any

over (and under) spends. This reduces the risk to the host but would not affect the overall financial pressure.

There is a risk that spend against non-staffing structure costs may exceed current budget allocations, economies of scale may take longer to achieve.

The aspiration is that the model will become activity based in the future, the ability to increase sufficiency of adopters, have consistent and reliable performance data and base lines set will inform when and how this can be achieved. Given the significant shortage of adopters, it is anticipated this will take at least 3 years to achieve.

8.3 INTER-AGENCY ADOPTION

The potential to increase the scope for trading with other Local Authorities and other RAAs is uncertain given the reshaping of the adoption landscape by regionalisation. Four of the local authorities that comprise Adopt London West are net beneficiaries of inter-agency fees and have consistently been net beneficiaries for the last three years.

However, it has been assumed that the net beneficiary position may be affected as the boroughs transition to the RAA over year one. Therefore, if there is a net income or deficit as a result of interagency fees it will be managed through the process outlined below and further detailed in the Partnership agreement.

8.3.1 MEETING CURRENT DEMAND

Based on December 2018 data, there are 42 children waiting and 20 families in the pipeline (8 under assessment and 12 approved and in the matching process). While targeted recruitment activity prior to going live is underway, there will be a requirement to purchase inter-agency placements in year one of operation of Adopt London West.

Currently there is significant variation between West London LAs in relation to spending on fees, and on income from trading adoptive families. The table below shows the inter-agency transfer position (per the financial returns) from each LA.

8.3.2 INTER-AGENCY INCOME IN WEST LONDON

The table below also shows that five Partner Authorities expected to be net beneficiaries when setting 2018-19 budgets. These income targets are within their overall cash limits for Children's and Families budgets. Activity assessment shows the RAA would need to be a net beneficiary of 16 placements (assuming £27,000 per place which is the non-London rate for one child). Slow recruitment across the sub region means this is highly unlikely to be realised.

	Activity	WL total	Brent	Ealing	Hounslow	H&F	RBKC	WCC
Interagency income target 18/19	27	-754,550	-50,000	-263,000	-75,000	-156,000	-80,550	-130,000
Interagency expenditure	11	297,984	0	142,047	121,937	32,000	0	2,000
Net interagency costs	**-16**	**-1,052,534**	**-50,000**	**-405,047**	**-196,937**	**-188,000**	**-80,550**	**-132,000**

Interagency budgeted net costs as at September 2018

8.3.3 INTER-AGENCY BUDGET TRANSFER APPROACH

To manage this pressure for Adopt London West, LAs have agreed an approach to interagency income and expenditure by undertaking an upfront analysis of interagency activity which will ensure that fairness and proportionality. The principles of this funding approach are:

- Based on actual adopter/child pipeline data (currently being updated). Adopters approved prior to an agreed cut-off date will form the basis for the inter-agency income 'target' that is included in the transferring inter-agency budget.
- Children on placement orders at the agreed cut-off date are matched with Non RAA adopters will form the basis for the inter-agency fee budget which is transferred to the RAA.
- Children on placement orders from each LA not matched/linked will form the basis of the inter-agency fee to transfer over.

Detailed forecasting analysis to the funding for purchasing of placements has been undertaken by Ealing Finance and will form a schedule of the Partnership Agreement subject to agreement by all Finance Leads and the Project Board in February 2019.

9. BENEFITS

Benefits expected to be realised include:

- Improved timescales for adopter assessments
- Higher conversion rate from enquiry to approval of prospective adopters
- Early identification of children with potential adoption plans and more children placed on an Early Permanence (Fostering to Adopt or concurrency) basis
- Reduction in the number of children for whom the permanence plan has changed away from adoption
- Increase in the percentage of children adopted for care
- More timely matching of approved adopters
- Improved timescales for placing children with their adoptive families
- Fewer prospective adopter approvals rescinded as approved adopters are not matched with a child
- Fewer adoption placement disruptions pre and post adoption order

- Improved performance measurement and management across the service

Baselines need to be developed as part of the practice workstream and agreed with all partners so effectiveness can be monitored as the RAA develops.

10. IMPLEMENTATION

10.1 PROPERTY AND IT IMPLICATIONS

The proposed base for staff will be at Perceval House, Ealing. The model proposes flexible and mobile working, including access to touchdown spaces in all boroughs. This will facilitate the sustainment and development of positive working relationships with Children's social workers and local accessibility to adopters.

IT solutions that will deliver an effective efficient service to the RAA and its stakeholders are currently being explored. Both operational and technical staff are involved. There is no additional funding to implement new IT systems, however the DfE project grant can support piloting new ways of working as the transition into the RAA progresses. A workstream is underway to develop the IT solution and will draw on advice from other RAAs that have delivered a cost neutral approach.

10.2 DATA AND INFORMATION

Data and Information will be required for the day to day operation and management of the RAA. Management Information will be generated automatically from core systems where possible. Information needs to be presented to the RAA Management team, Ofsted, Local Authorities including senior management teams and elected members, the Adoption Leadership Board, the Department for Education and other partners.

The way in which data will be shared and exchanged is detailed in an information sharing agreement. A draft Information Sharing Agreement is in development.

10.3 GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

A partnership agreement setting out the agreement of the 6 Boroughs to the establishment of the Adopt London West Regional Adoption Agency has been drafted and will be reviewed and signed off by Finance, Legal and RAA Board members in each Borough. The agreement will need to be signed off prior to implementation.

The agreement contains the aims of the RAA, the operational basis and the functions which are delegated to the Host.

The agreement also details the intended service delivery model, requirements for an annual plan, financial contributions, over and underspend arrangements and the

premises to be provided for the purposes of the RAA. The information sharing agreement will also be incorporated into this document.

10.4 PRACTICE

A number of workstreams with task and finish groups are underway with staff teams and the key stakeholder groups to underpin and develop the practice model for the West RAA. These are led by the practice lead who is an experienced adoption manager, seconded full time, funded by the DfE grant to focus on practice and policy development.

10.5 IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

The business case is scheduled for sign off at Borough Cabinets in March 2019. Once sign off in all Boroughs is obtained, the consultation process for staff can commence with an anticipated Go Live date for the new service of July 2019.

APPENDIX 1

Governance Arrangements

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

1) Adopt London West Partnership Board

Status of the Board

The Adopt London West Partnership Board is fully accountable to: the London Boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Hounslow, Hammersmith& Fulham, the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and the City of Westminster.

The Adopt London West Partnership Board will be supported by the Adopt London Executive Board and will co-operatively engage with and work alongside the North, South and East Regional Adoption Governance Boards on matters of pan London interests.

The Board will commission activity that is required for a range of forums, including the London Adoption Board and ALDCS.

Purpose of the Board

The Adopt London West Partnership Board will be responsible for providing effective oversight of the partnership agreement and the hosting of adoption services by London Borough of Ealing.

The Board will present the Annual Report of the Adopt London West Partnership Board to the local authority partner Cabinets, with the support of the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the Adopt London West Partnership Board.

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 Adopt London West and monitor service delivery of the key priorities of the partnership, that is to:

- Place more children in a timelier way;

- Recruit more of the right families for the children waiting, preparing them consistently and well;
- Improve the range, accessibility and quality of post adoption and special guardianship support; and
- Improve the outcomes for children and families.

Roles and responsibilities of the Adopt London West Partnership Board

Ealing Council will provide the Adopt London West Partnership Board with a report on a quarterly basis 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 Adopt London West 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 on:

- Joint working arrangements
- Inspection readiness

The Adopt London West 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 West London 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
- Review and consider reports presented by the Adopt London West RAA
- 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 Director of Children's Services London Borough of Ealing and the five Directors of Children's Services from Brent, Hounslow, Hammersmith & Fulham, the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea and the City of Westminster.

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 Joint Partnership Agreement.

Chair

The Board will be chaired by the Director of Children's Services Ealing as host authority.

Membership

Director of Children's Services - Brent
Director of Children's Services – Ealing
Director of Children's Services – Hounslow
Director of Children's Services – Hammersmith & Fulham
Director of Children's Services – RBKC
Director of Children's Services – Westminster City Council

Advisory Representatives:

Head of Service – Adopt London West RAA
Director of Finance – Ealing
Head of Finance - Ealing

Head of Performance and Business Intelligence - Ealing
VAA /Provider representative

Frequency

The Partnership Board will meet bi - monthly for the first 6 months following implementation, the frequency will then be reviewed.

2) Quality Assurance Group

Purpose of the Group

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.

The Quality Assurance Group will be responsible for holding all partners to account in respect of performance outcomes for children and adopters and financial management.

The purpose of the group is:

- Ensure that all work undertaken is compliant with national standards, legislation and inter authority partnership agreements
- To ensure that all work undertaken is carried out with the best interests of the child/young person at its core
- To secure and promote good working relationships amongst Adopt London West, partners and stakeholders
- To ensure effective efficient delivery of the objectives as agreed at the Adopt London West Partnership Board
- To support joint working practices across the Adopt London West to improve timeliness and outcomes for children and adopters
- To compare, contrast and report on the work of other RAAs across the region and nationally
- To ensure all work is underpinned by best practice recommendations and research findings
- To ensure discussions/decisions align with those reflected within the London RAA's
- To ensure an annual health check for adoptive families is undertaken

Roles and responsibilities of the Adopt London West Quality Assurance Group

- Ensure appropriate preparation for the Adopt London West Partnership Board to enable comprehensive oversight of the delivery of adoption services across West London
- Receive and review the monthly performance reports from across the partner agencies on matters such as issues relating to the delivery of services and performance against service standards (including possible future developments)
- Review and consider benchmark reports
- Review the implications of any recently issued national policy and or guidance
- Review the general inspection readiness of the Adopt London West, and monitor progress of actions to address areas of concern
- Receive and review the Adopt London West service delivery risk management matrix, together with identified mitigating actions
- Report to the Adopt London West Partnership Board any future service specific requirements or other significant issues requiring discussion and decision by the Adopt London West Partnership Board
- Scrutinise service quality via:
    1. Anonymised case audits
    2. Findings from service led case audits and staff file audits
    3. Customer feedback (including complaints, concerns and compliments)
    4. Stakeholder feedback including health, schools, courts etc.
    5. Panel recommendations, panel schedules and panel chairs' appraisals
    6. Findings from LA and VAA case reviews
    7. Ofsted inspection outcomes and action plans from other agencies.

Chair

The Quality Assurance Group will be chaired by Head of the Adopt London West RAA.

Membership

Members of the quality assurance group to include:

- RAA Service Manager & staff representatives
- RAA Performance Lead
- Panel Chairs
- LA officers (e.g. IROs, principal managers etc.)
- Virtual head teacher representatives
- Health partners
- VAA /Provider representatives
- Service user representatives

Frequency

The Board will meet monthly for the first 6 months following implementation, the frequency will then be reviewed.

3) Annual Review Meeting

Purpose of the Review Meeting

The Annual Review Meeting will be an expansion of the Adopt London West Partnership Board meeting that will include other stakeholders as required. 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 Joint 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 the West London region, whilst ensuring alignment with partner organisations aims, objectives, and budgetary capacity.

Aims of the Annual Review Meeting

- Assess whether the Partnership Agreement is operating in the most satisfactory manner
- Assess whether the services are being delivered to the Partnership Agreement standard
- Review the RAAs performance of adoption services in the previous contract year against the performance indicators set
- Review performance against the annual budget for the previous year, together with a review of the proposed budget for the following contract year
- Review the Councils' performance of the co-dependencies that affect the overall performance of adoption services within the West London region
- Consider any proposals from partner Councils relating to possible contract variations, and note any variations agreed at the quarterly Adopt London West Partnership Board meetings
- Agree any proposed changes to the Services Specification, the Financial Mechanism, and the Performance Indicators for the following Contract Year
- Confirm the Contract Sum payable by the respective Councils to the Adopt London West for the next contract year
- Provide an annual report to each Boroughs Corporate Parenting Forum

Ways of Working

- The Annual Review Meeting of the Adopt London West Board will be held no later than one full calendar month following the expiry of twelve (12) months from the Services Commencement Date
- Members of the Board will receive papers two weeks before the Annual Review Board meeting

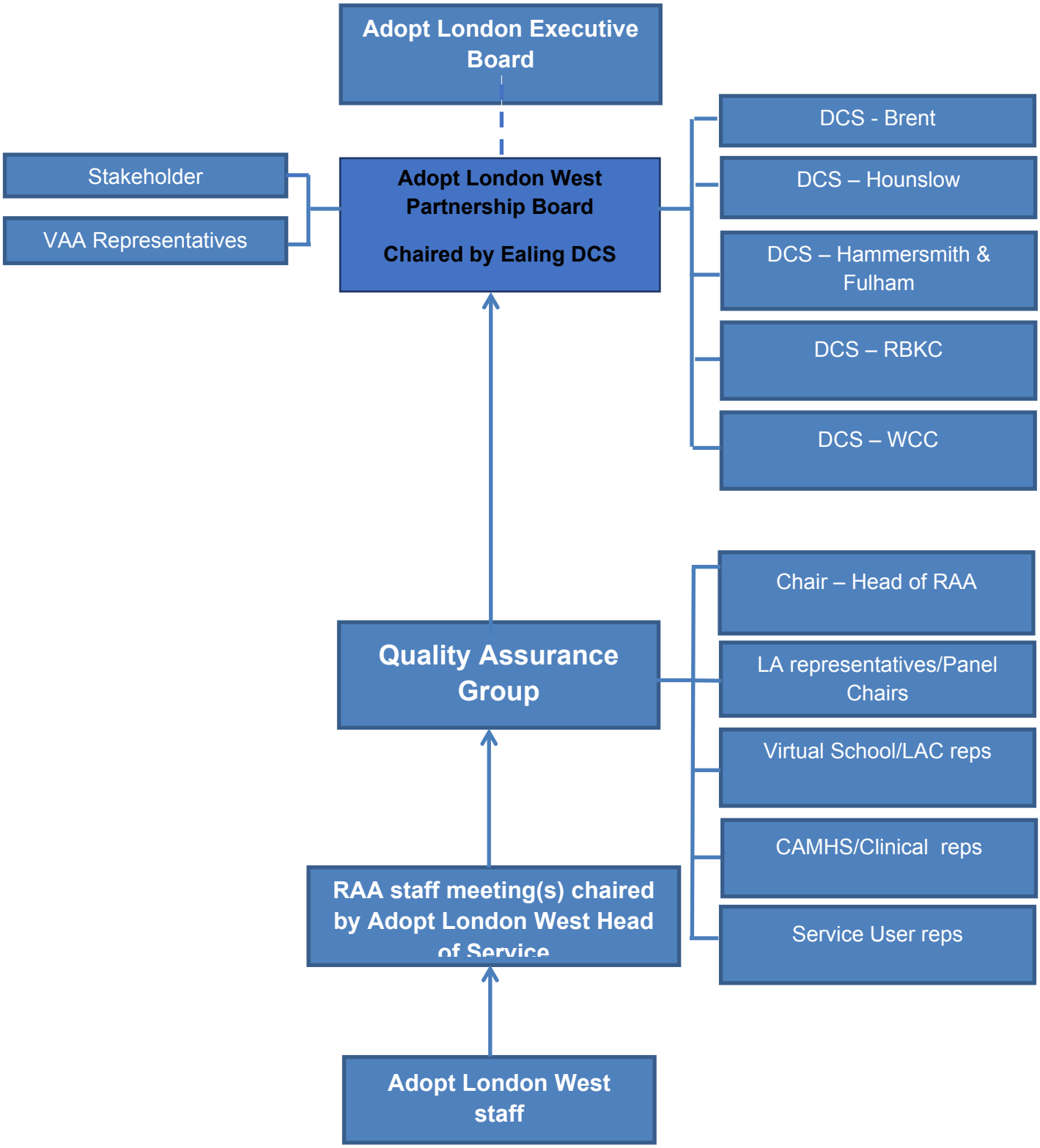
Chair

The Annual Review Meeting of the Adopt London West Partnership Board will be chaired by the Director of Children's Services Ealing as host authority.

4) **RAA staff meetings**

There will a number of internal staff meetings within the RAA that will feed into all aspects of the strategic and quality assurance governance. Exact details of these meetings including, memberships, frequency, purpose and standing agendas, will be co-designed and agreed with staff by the new Head of the RAA.

Governance Structure



Partnership working and risk sharing

The RAA governance will be underpinned by clear partnership and risk sharing agreements. The formation of these agreements will be agreed through the project board prior to implementation. The suggested content for the document wil be made up of but not limited to the following sections:

1 Definition and Interpretation
2 Commencement and Duration
3 Extending the Initial Term
4 Adopt London West Arrangements
5 Delegation of Functions
6 Services
7 Annual Adopt London West Plan
8 Financial Contributions
9 Overspends and Underspends
10 Intellectual Property Rights
11 Premises
12 Assets
13 Staffing and Pensions
14 Adopt London West Management Governance
15 Host Support
16 Management Board Quarterly Review and Reporting
17 Annual Review
18 Variations
19 Standards
20 Health and Safety
21 Equality Duties
22 Freedom of Information
23 Data Protection and Information Sharing
24 Confidentiality
25 Audit
26 Insurance
27 Not Used
28 Liabilities
29 Complaints and Investigations
30 Dispute Resolution and Exit Arrangements
31 Termination and Review
32 Consequences of Expiry And Termination
33 Publicity

34 No Partnership
35 Third Party Rights
36 Notices
37 Severability
38 Child Practice Reviews or Multi Agency Professional Forums
39 Entire Agreement
40 Counterparts
41 Governing Law
42 Records Management
43 Third Sector Partners

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. With all RAA staff moving to Ealing's IT system, 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.