

Implementation strategy

Exploring national and pan-RAA commissioning

June 2023



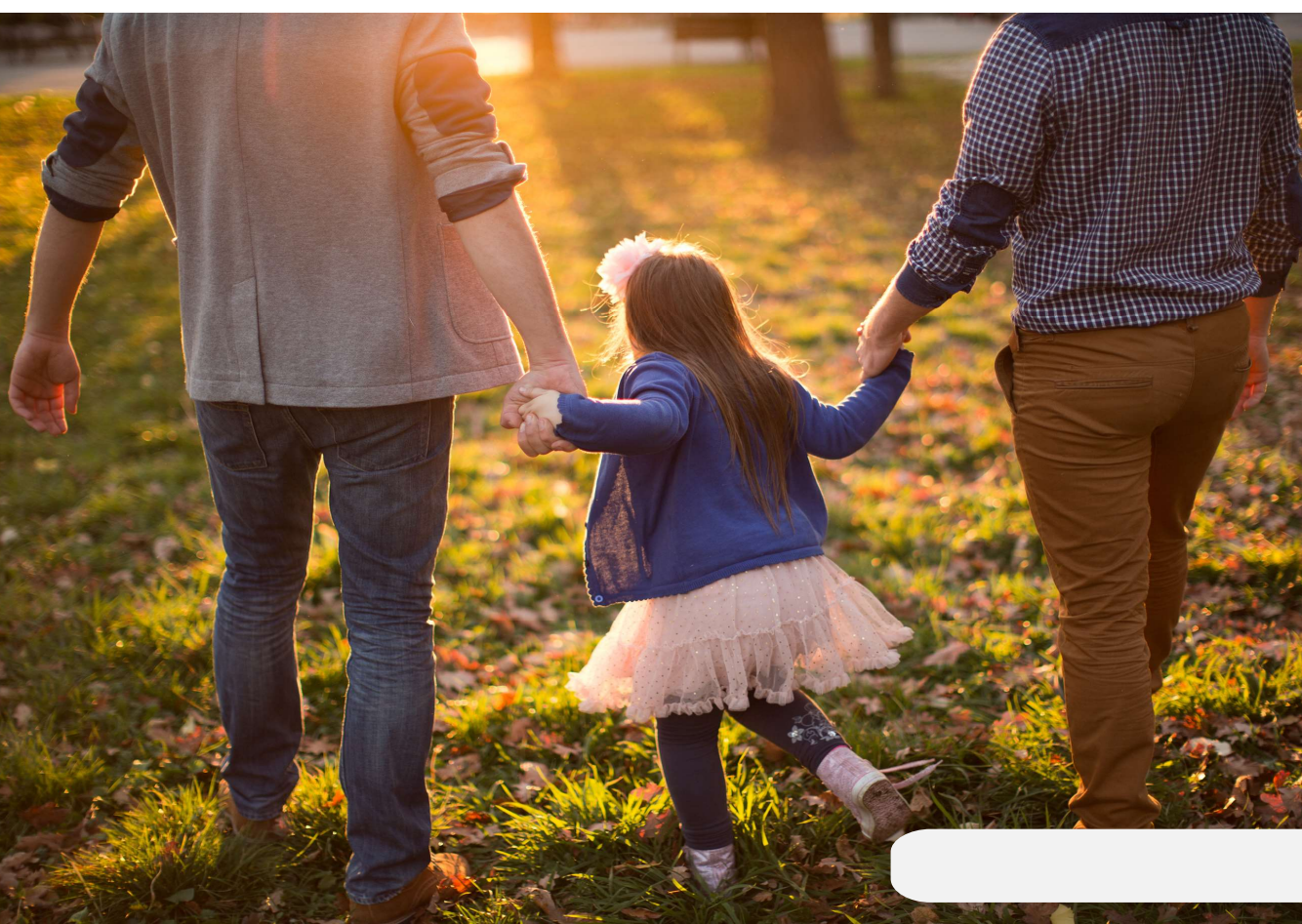
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Introduction

In support of the National Adoption Strategy, the Department for Education (DfE) has made grant funding available of £1.5m in 2023/24 and £2m in 2024/25 to explore national or pan-regional commissioning arrangements for adoption support.

This implementation strategy sets out how the funding will be used to deliver this work over the next two years, exploring commissioning arrangements at both national and pan-Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) levels to improve the speed, quality, and consistency of adoption support services across the country.



Introduction

It is intended that the strategy will be used by the National Adoption Team, in collaboration with RAAs from all regions, to establish and deliver the National Adoption Commissioning Programme. The strategy outlines the Programme in detail, including:

- ▼ The background of the funding and why commissioning of adoption support is a priority area.
- ▼ The long-term vision for the commissioning of adoption support for adoptive families, RAA and local authority staff and the market.
- ▼ An overview of the National Adoption Commissioning Programme, including how the Programme was developed, feedback from the regions and four key programme goals:
 1. To provide additional commissioning capacity across the country
 2. To improve our collective understanding of the need of adoptive families, now and in the future
 3. To increase pan-RAA commissioning arrangements on the ground
 4. To share best practice and increase consistency
- ▼ Details on how the Programme will be delivered by the National Adoption Commissioning Team, the roles and responsibilities and the 4 work packages to be delivered:
 1. National Adoption Commissioning Team
 2. National and regional needs assessment
 3. Innovation Fund
 4. National commissioning support offer

An action plan, detailing the work packages, has been included at the end of the document to enable the National Adoption Team and RAAs to come together to progress the key priority areas in commissioning adoption support.

This implementation strategy has been developed over the past six months by Mutual Ventures (MV) with input from the National Adoption Team, RAA Leaders, and other stakeholders. This work has included:

- ▼ A focused piece of work carried out by MV at the beginning of the year (2023) to consider the options for national commissioning of adoption support, leading to a recommendation to explore both national and pan-RAA commissioning.
- ▼ Work with the National Adoption team to establish the foundations for the programme of work, developing the overall vision and designing the roles and responsibilities of the team to deliver the programme: the National Adoption Commissioning Programme.
- ▼ Engagement with RAAs at a regional level to capture the current baseline of commissioning approaches, to help understand the existing landscape and start to consider opportunities to explore commissioning at a national or pan-RAA level.
- ▼ Workshops with RAA leaders, their staff and commissioning representatives from each region to consider how they could work together at a pan-RAA level to commission adoption support. These workshops included discussions about their regional priority areas for commissioning and how the funding could be used to innovate and test approaches to address these priority areas.

Background

The DfE's Adoption strategy: Achieving excellence everywhere (July 2021) included a proposal to investigate whether some national or pan-regional commissioning would provide better value for money in commissioning adoption support. This was proposed in the context of multiple challenges in the adoption support commissioning landscape which, it was felt, a system of cross-RAA or national commissioning approaches could help to address.



Adoption support commissioning landscape

The current challenges in the adoption support landscape include:

- ▼ **Increased demand and spend:** The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) has led to increased demand for support and high levels of commissioning activity across RAAs with many purchasing the same types of interventions for their families. However, because of the way the ASF is set up, this is being done in a disjointed way, with limited strategic oversight and coordination.
- ▼ **Varied processes:** Commissioning of adoption support varies widely across the country meaning providers must engage in multiple processes with different requirements which RAAs have limited capacity to manage. There is also variation in how quality is assessed and managed.
- ▼ **Gaps in provision:** There are areas across the country where adoption support provision is more limited which creates a postcode lottery. This, combined with the stretched capacity of providers, means RAAs can struggle to get the right support in the right places and have a limited strategic view of future needs and resources impacting their ability to influence and shape the market.
- ▼ **Families experiencing delays:** It can be difficult for adoptive families to know how to access support because of the different ways RAA's are structured across the country. The administration required for the ASF, and different purchasing frameworks, mean Adoption Support Teams have heavy caseloads creating delays for families when trying to access support.

Due to this proposal in the DfE's Adoption Strategy, grant funding has been made available by the DfE over the next two years to start to develop a system of national and pan-RAA commissioning. This should help families to get access to support quicker and improve the quality and consistency of the support being provided across the country.



*Whilst there are improvements, too many families do not get the support they need when they need it. Adoption UK's Barometer report (2021), found that adopters with newly placed children were mainly positive about the support they received but that there is still **unmet need**. There is **inconsistency in the provision of support services across the country**.*

Department for Education,
Adoption Strategy (July 2021)

Vision for national and pan-RAA commissioning of adoption support

To improve adoption support services in a sustainable way, a collaborative effort is required exceeding the life of this funding. A long-term vision for commissioning of adoption support has therefore been developed to support this which provides a clear direction of travel for stakeholders to engage with and commit to over the next 3 – 5 years.

This was developed following a session with the National Adoption Team to consider what ‘good looks like’ and then shared with regions during workshops for feedback.



Adoptive families

Adopted children, young people, and their families have access to timely, high-quality support that meets their needs. They are satisfied with the support they receive, knowing that their views matter in shaping the services offered.



RAAs & LA staff

Staff have a shared understanding of what good looks like and are confident that they can offer families high-quality support for a fair price. They understand what services they need and commission them in the best way to meet these requirements, using streamlined processes and shared arrangements where appropriate.



The Market

There is a vibrant market consisting of a range of flexible providers whose offers are shaped by need. Streamlined processes provide better support to providers and trusted relationships between them and commissioners give them the confidence to invest and develop their offer.

The National Adoption Commissioning Programme

To progress towards the long-term vision, the DfE funding will be used to create the National Adoption Commissioning Programme ('the Programme') which will explore both national and pan-RAA commissioning arrangements across the commissioning cycle of analyse and plan, implement and monitor and review.

The Programme will be delivered by March 2025 by a single team, made up of dedicated national staff located within the National Adoption Team in Leeds City Council and regional representatives (full details of the team are set out in Section 6).



Developing the Programme: what regions think

To help develop and shape the Programme, RAA leaders and wider stakeholders were involved in a wide-ranging engagement process, which included 8 regional workshops to explore the opportunities that the DfE funding presents.

Areas provided a wealth of feedback highlighting both the benefits of commissioning at a national or pan-RAA level alongside the potential challenges; the key points of which have been summarised below. For full details see Appendix 3.

Key benefits and opportunities of commissioning at pan-RAA and national levels:

- ▼ **Opportunity to build and strengthen regional joint working approaches:** all areas have examples of working collaboratively at pan-RAA level and for some this extended to commissioning of adoption support. All agreed that building on and embedding these relationships would provide wider benefits outside of commissioning as well.

Regional example: North East

For example, the North East see the funding as an opportunity to build on and compliment their existing regional work to develop a multidisciplinary approach to deliver in-house specialist assessments and therapeutic services recognising that services will still need to be commissioned outside of this.

- ▼ **Benchmarking current commissioning arrangements:** for a number of areas, taking stock of current commissioning arrangements and establishing useful benchmarks to measure the success of the programme at a regional and national level would be beneficial.

Regional example: Yorkshire & Humber

Yorkshire & Humber have an established approved provider list (renewed in April 2022). While they feel confident in their approach to onboarding providers, they have not had capacity to fully assure the quality of what is being delivered which this funding could be used to support.

- ▼ **Predicting future needs:** having regional needs assessments would enable areas to better predict future needs of adoptive families and help them plan their commissioning strategies. Regions highlighted this as a key area for improvement and felt that they were currently limited in their ability to analyse and plan based on limited understanding of needs.
- ▼ **Opportunity to innovate and adopt learning from successful commissioning approaches:** regions were keen to explore innovative approaches to commissioning adoption support and to improve their understanding of 'what works'. Examples of innovation included piloting a pan-RAA commissioned service, alliance commissioning or block-purchasing adoption support.

Regional example: West Midlands

The West Midlands discussed the possibility of extending an existing procurement portal used in their region to manage commissioning of adoption support, market engagement and brokerage of ASF packages.

- ▼ **Adopt learning from the ASF Covid-19 Emergency Scheme:** In addition to new opportunities to innovate, regions felt it was important to adopt learning from the ASF Covid-19 Emergency Scheme, which enabled RAAs to commission with more flexibility, access more types of support, and to experiment with block-purchasing.
- ▼ **Ensure adoption support remains family-led:** Using the commissioning process to consult with adoptive families to better understand their support preferences, whilst ensuring that the changes do not increase families' dependence on therapeutic services.

Key challenges of commissioning at pan-RAA and national levels

- ▼ **The Adoption Support Fund:** The structure of the ASF presents a potential obstacle to areas in relation to their regional aims for commissioning adoption support. In particular, regions highlighted feeling constrained to spot purchase support due to the individual applications for funding. Some regions felt their ability to develop the market and reduce costs was also limited by the ASF fair access limit, which some providers and families viewed as a floor rather than a ceiling.
- ▼ **Workforce challenges:** Some regions raised concerns surrounding the workforce required to deliver commissioning at a pan-RAA level, highlighting that their existing workforce lacked capacity. They also had concerns about their ability to recruit to new roles based on their previous experience of recruiting commissioners.
- ▼ **Engaging with health colleagues:** The overlap between adoption support and health provision was a key theme across engagement with regions. Whilst regions thought it was important to involve health colleagues to understand overlaps and who is providing what, they also recognised that this could be challenging.
- ▼ **Impact on small providers:** Whilst regions recognised that commissioning at a pan-RAA level could expand their access to a wider pool of providers, regions also highlighted that regional working carried a risk of isolating smaller independent providers and sole traders.

These points highlight that there are potential benefits to commissioning adoption support in this way but the potential complexities, particularly given the current infrastructure and workforce capacity, makes delivery at a pan-RAA or national level challenging. Regardless of this, areas demonstrated a will to work collaboratively to help ensure adoption support is fit for the future and start to address the challenges being experienced. Regions saw this funding as providing an opportunity to kick start this work at both a regional and national level, with national ideas for support including:

- ▼ A database to facilitate information sharing across regions, including basic checks on providers
- ▼ Quality standards for therapies and providers as businesses
- ▼ Training for providers on basic commissioning processes, minimum standards, expectations and lines of accountability
- ▼ Guidance regarding how RAAs procure and commission in line with procurement regulations
- ▼ A helpline/Q&A function to answer RAA's commissioning queries
- ▼ Myth-busting events or guidance about being a provider of adoption support
- ▼ A shared suite of resources providing an evidence base of commissioned adoption support interventions for social workers

Programme Goals

Based on feedback from the engagement process with the regions and the National Team, the Programme will deliver four goals. These goals will make strides in progressing towards achieving the long-term vision for commissioning adoption support.

Goal 1: To provide additional commissioning capacity across the country

Commissioning support and expertise is limited at both individual and pan-RAA levels. In the areas where commissioning expertise from within local authorities is provided to support RAAs, the officers are stretched with many competing priorities. The Programme will provide funding to fill this gap, giving areas access to regional commissioning expertise to support local ambitions and national priorities in line with the overall Programme. Support will also be provided to secure this expertise.

Goal 3: To increase pan-RAA commissioning arrangements on the ground

Regions are keen to test out new ways of commissioning adoption support services or improving current arrangements and doing this at a pan-RAA level. This is particularly true given the direction of travel more broadly in children's services and areas wanting adoption support to be well positioned for the future. However, given current workloads and demand, RAAs don't have the space or available expertise to prioritise this. The Programme will give areas the opportunity to innovate and test different ways of working to see if they do have a positive impact including improving outcomes, reducing administration and delivering more value for money.

Goal 2: To improve our collective understanding of the need of adoptive families, now and in the future

Currently, demand for services is often led by the market and what is available as opposed to being driven by an understanding of needs and requirements now and in the longer term. The Programme will provide resource to take a coordinated approach to understand need and gaps at a pan-RAA and national level while also providing transparency of costs. This collective view will enable regions to take a more strategic approach to shaping the market to improve quality, ensure value for money is being achieved and innovate based on evidence of need whilst sharing risk to make it more manageable.

Goal 4: To share best practice and increase consistency

The considerable time required by staff in RAAs and local authorities (LAs) across the country to manage their individual commissioning processes and by providers to engage in these varying arrangements has been highlighted throughout the work to date. This has also been coupled with a lack of confidence with regards to quality and what value areas are getting for their money. The Programme will ensure that best practice is shared across the regions and opportunities to streamline and join up approaches where this makes sense are taken.

The Team



To deliver the programme goals and achieve meaningful change for families, the national staff and regions need to work together to deliver a series of work packages at a national and pan-RAA level. To achieve this, a single team will be established: the National Adoption Commissioning Team.

The National Adoption Commissioning Team

Team structure & purpose

The National Adoption Commissioning Team will be made up of core staff members from the National Adoption Team and regional virtual members from each of the regions involved in the Programme.

The single team will work to deliver a shared purpose to:

- ▼ Maximise opportunities for joint working both nationally and regionally
- ▼ Reduce duplication in commissioning of adoption support
- ▼ Drive improvements in quality and consistency of adoption support
- ▼ Streamline procurement approaches

Core staff

The core staff will be employed by Leeds City Council and sit within the National Adoption Team. The team will report to the Head of Strategic Commissioning in Leeds.

There will be three core staff members:

- ▼ Programme Manager – to take strategic responsibility and oversee the operational delivery.
- ▼ Commissioning Manager – to manage and deliver key packages of work.
- ▼ Commissioning Officer – to support the delivery of key packages of work.

Key responsibilities of the core staff members will be:

- ▼ **Oversight:** driving the programme of work and providing direction
- ▼ **Governance:** managing the funding provided by DfE and overseeing spend and delivery of pan-RAA level projects
- ▼ **Direct delivery:** developing and delivering packages of national work across the commissioning phases, such as a national commissioning support offer
- ▼ **Regional support:** Providing support to regional team members including upskilling staff in commissioning
- ▼ **Facilitation and administration:** Coordinating and running the National Adoption Commissioning Team meetings
- ▼ **Communications:** producing information in a way it can easily be shared or managing national campaigns



The Team



Regional virtual members

There will be two virtual members from each region that will form part of the National Adoption Commissioning Team: Regional Commissioning member and a Regional Champion. There will be programme funding available to cover the costs of these members (full details are set out on P16).

Regional Commissioning member

Each region will have a representative with commissioning expertise who will sit within the National Adoption Commissioning Team. This representative will likely be operational, understand the commissioning landscape and the work of the RAA's in their region, and have the authority to make day-to-day decisions on behalf of their area to progress the work. For more significant decisions, there will be a clear route to gain approval so as not to impact delivery. Although delivery of pan-RAA projects may sit across several individuals, it will be the responsibility of this member to take ownership of regional delivery for their area and bring regional insight and experience to the wider team.

Key responsibilities of the regional commissioning member will be:

- ▼ **Participation:** attending monthly team meetings and carrying out any resulting actions
- ▼ **Communication:** sharing learning from their area and ensuring key documentation and information is disseminated back
- ▼ **Governance:** gaining approval for key decisions, overseeing the delivery
- ▼ **Direct delivery:** delivering pan-RAA projects and contributing and helping to shape the development of national workstreams such as the national support offer.

The time commitment for this role will vary across regions. It will likely range from 2-5 days a week and will be dependent on the size of the region and the projects each region decides to undertake.

As recruitment timescales can be challenging to secure this role and to ensure the Programme is not delayed, existing resource with commissioning expertise will be asked to undertake this role and input into the Programme during the set-up phase (June – August 2023). Key activities would include joining team meetings, defining the delivery resource required based on the priorities in their area and appointing that resource via their preferred route. The expected time commitment will be 1-3 days a month.

Regional Champion

Each region will have one nominated individual to act as the regional champion. Their purpose will be to provide strategic direction to the commissioning representative while also securing and maintaining buy-in from key stakeholders in their area to ensure progress remains on track. The representative will likely be an RAA Leader and will bring regional expertise in the RAA landscape, existing governance arrangements and adoption support.

Key responsibilities of the regional champion will be:

- ▼ **Participation:** attend team meetings on a quarterly basis and regular contact with their commissioning representative to support them in their role
- ▼ **Strategic input:** utilising specialist knowledge and expertise in adoption support and RAA landscape to shape work
- ▼ **Governance:** approving key outputs and gaining approval for key decisions in their areas as required
- ▼ **Promotion:** championing the work and maintaining commitment at the right levels within their area

It is estimated that the time commitment for this role will be 1 day a month and managed within existing capacity.

The Team



Ways of working

A set of principles that underpin how the team will work together have been developed during this work and are set out below.



Communication: regular and open channels of communication to support strong relationships and enable issues to be raised.



Integrity: each member will take accountability for their actions and lead by example.



Innovation: understanding that work will evolve, and approaches may need to alter and adapt, but being open and committed to developing and trying new approaches together.



Co-production: co-producing and jointly delivering outputs, regularly involving adoptive families, VAAs and other key stakeholders.



Commitment: joint responsibility for the successful delivery of the work, driving forward change together even when challenging.



Collaboration: utilising collaborative working methods, such as online tools, as well as seeking to co-design tools and templates for the Programme together and share best practice.



Impact: focusing on areas that will make a real difference for adoptive families.

The first formal team meeting will be held face-to-face, but most of the work together as a team will be conducted virtually. It will be important to ensure that the right IT support is identified to enable collaboration and information sharing.

The Team



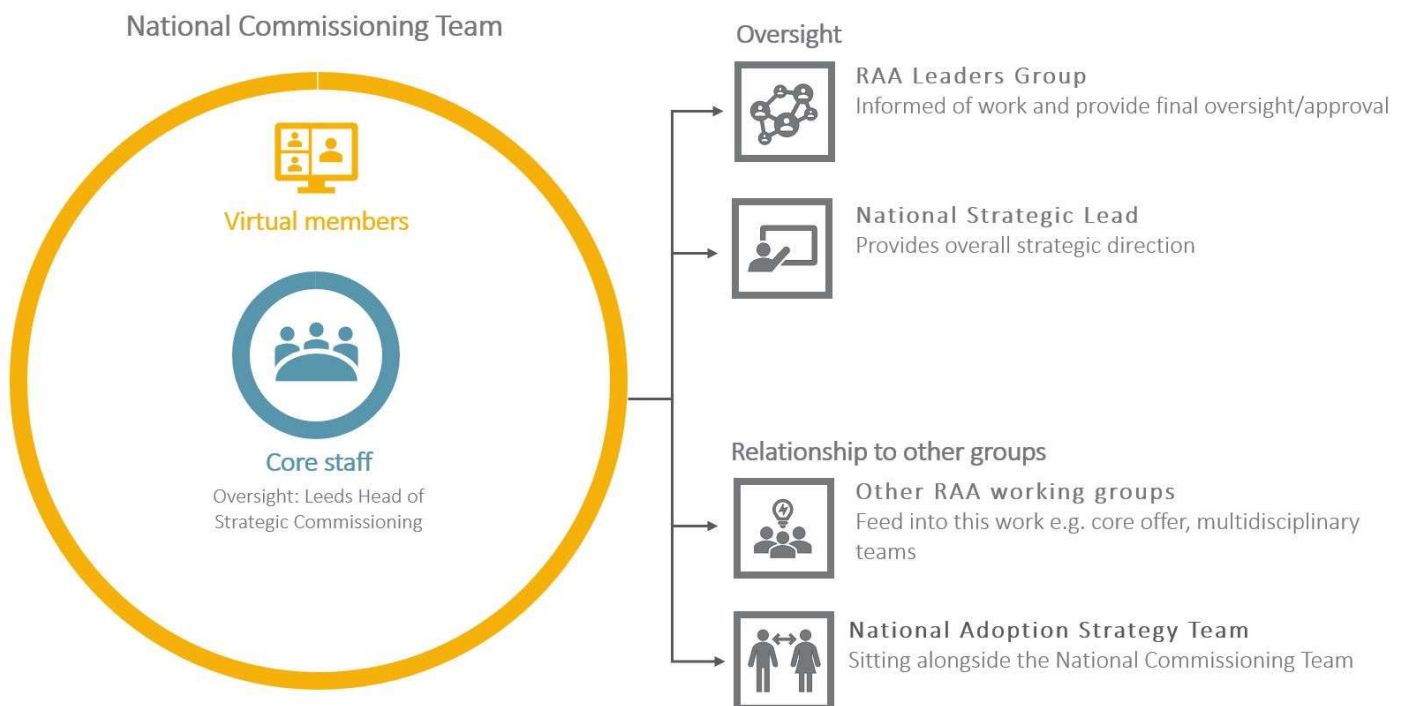
Governance

The National Adoption Strategic Lead, Sarah Johal, will have oversight of the National Adoption Commissioning Team providing overall strategic direction for the work. Further oversight will be provided by the RAA Leaders Group, who will be regularly informed of the work of the Programme and provide final oversight and approval.

It is also important that a holistic approach is taken to this Programme and that work does not occur in silos. To avoid this the Programme will need to communicate regularly with other RAA working groups, such as the core offer, to ensure all work is being fed in and join-up is achieved where possible.

The core staff in the National Adoption Commissioning Team will also sit alongside the National Adoption Strategy Team, which will also help to avoid work happening in silos and support communication.

As the core staff will have responsibility for overseeing and delivering complex commissioning work over a large geography they will also need support and guidance from a commissioning perspective. To enable this, their formal line management arrangements will be overseen by the Head of Strategic Commissioning in Leeds City Council.



The Work Packages

Introduction

To achieve the programme goals, there will be a series of work packages delivered at a pan-RAA and national level:

1. National Commissioning Adoption Team
2. National and regional needs assessment
3. Innovation Fund
4. National commissioning support offer

Work package 1: National Adoption Commissioning Team

Mobilisation of the National Commissioning Adoption Team began in May 2023 to recruit core staff and identify regional members as soon as possible. The mobilisation and setup phase will continue until September 2023 to allow regions to recruit or appoint external resources to support the delivery of the Programme.

The delivery phase of the National Adoption Commissioning Team will commence in September 2023 and continue until the end of the Programme (March 2025).

Cost

Regions will be able to apply for funding to cover the Regional Commissioning member's salary and to backfill the Regional Champion role. There will be a national pot of £700,000 per annum to fund the regional commissioning roles, which will enable regions to recruit or appoint external resources to support delivery, and a national pot of £54,000 per annum to cover the regional champion's time.

The application process for funding will be streamlined so as not to delay recruitment. Regions will be required to outline how much resource they will need to deliver the work at a regional level.

This will depend on the size of the area and the challenges they chose to address but will have a primary focus of understanding needs and gaps to feed into work package 2 (see work package 2).

Budget has also been allocated for an independent evaluation of the programme commencing in year 1. This will ensure the impact of the funding is understood and best practice is captured.

	Year 1 (23/24)	Year 2 (24/25)
3 core staff members	£238,836	£238,836
Regional commissioning member	£525,000*	£700,000
Regional Champion	£40,500*	£54,000
Programme evaluation	£35,000	£70,000

**These roles will not begin until July 2023, so funding has been allocated for a 9-month period in 23/24*



The Work Packages

Work package 2: National and regional needs assessment

At present regions have a limited understanding of the current provision and existing commissioning approaches at a pan-RAA level. This work package will seek to establish a baseline of current provision and providers, to understand the needs of adopted children and families and therefore identify the gaps in the existing market. Regions will take a coordinated approach to understanding needs and gaps at a pan-RAA level, building a national level picture.

Developing this collective view will enable regions to then take a more strategic approach to shaping the market and allow them to explore innovative approaches to commissioning adoption support based on evidence of need via the Innovation Fund (work package 3).

At a regional level, this needs assessment will be undertaken, or at least overseen, by the regional commissioning team members. In some regions, this may lead to regional market position statements to support future market development.

The national team will coordinate the work package, gathering insight at a regional level to develop a national understanding of need. They will also support regions by developing tools and templates, and undertake specific elements of data analysis e.g., ASF data.

This work package will be completed by March 2024.

Cost

The cost of the regional needs assessment will be covered by the regional commissioning member funding (i.e., £700,000 per annum). However, we expect further funding will be needed to support data analysis at a national level.

	Year 1 (23/24)	Year 2 (24/25)
Data analysis support	£40,000	N/A



The Work Packages

Work package 3: Innovation Fund

The Innovation Fund will support regions to test new ways of commissioning adoption support services and improve current arrangements at a pan-RAA level. The fund will give areas the opportunity to innovate and test different ways of working to see if they have a positive impact including improving outcomes, reducing administration, and delivering more value for money. This will also potentially support national pieces of work where, for example, a national commissioned service is required as a result of the findings from the national needs assessment in work package 2.

Areas will have multiple opportunities to apply for grant funding:

- ▼ Round 1 will open in September 2023, enabling regions with developed ideas to apply for funding.
- ▼ Round 2 will open in March 2024 and will enable areas to apply for funding based on the outcome of their regional needs assessment. For example, some regions may choose to apply for grant funding to fill an identified gap in the market and develop it, whereas others may choose to pump prime a commissioned service at a pan-RAA level to address an identified need. However, this second option would need to be match funded by the RAAs in the area and done with assurance of sustainability.
- ▼ There may be further opportunities for funding rounds in year 2, dependent on funding available and timescales.

The terms and conditions and scope of the Innovation fund will be finalised during the mobilisation and set up phase (June – August 2023). During the design of the fund, it will be important to apply the lessons learnt from previous grant-funded programmes to avoid any delay to regions receiving funds.

Cost

The funding allocated to the Innovation Fund is currently £1,017,828 as outlined below, however, we expect this to rise to by the end of the Programme. This is because funds not spent elsewhere in the Programme will be allocated to future rounds of the Innovation Fund.

	Year 1 (23/24)	Year 2 (24/25)
Innovation Fund	£380,664	£637,164



The Work Packages

Work package 4: National Commissioning Support Offer

The core staff will develop a national commissioning support offer that will focus on but not be limited to:

- ▼ Increasing consistency in commissioning adoption support
- ▼ Reducing the time required by staff in RAA's and LAs to manage commissioning processes
- ▼ Supporting providers
- ▼ Increasing confidence amongst social workers in commissioning
- ▼ Improving monitoring and reviewing of provision.

This support offer will be co-designed with other members of the National Adoption Commissioning Team in year 1, with some elements of the support offer being tested within regions e.g., quality standards, templates or KPIs (key performance indicators). Insight and evidence from the needs assessment work will feed into the development of the support offer, e.g., whether national market engagement would be beneficial.

The support offer will also include the development and delivery of training courses on commissioning adoption support and could include sessions for social workers on best practice approaches to monitoring and reviewing provision, or myth-busting sessions for providers.

The support offer will be ready to be rolled out across pan-RAA's at the start of year 2.

Cost

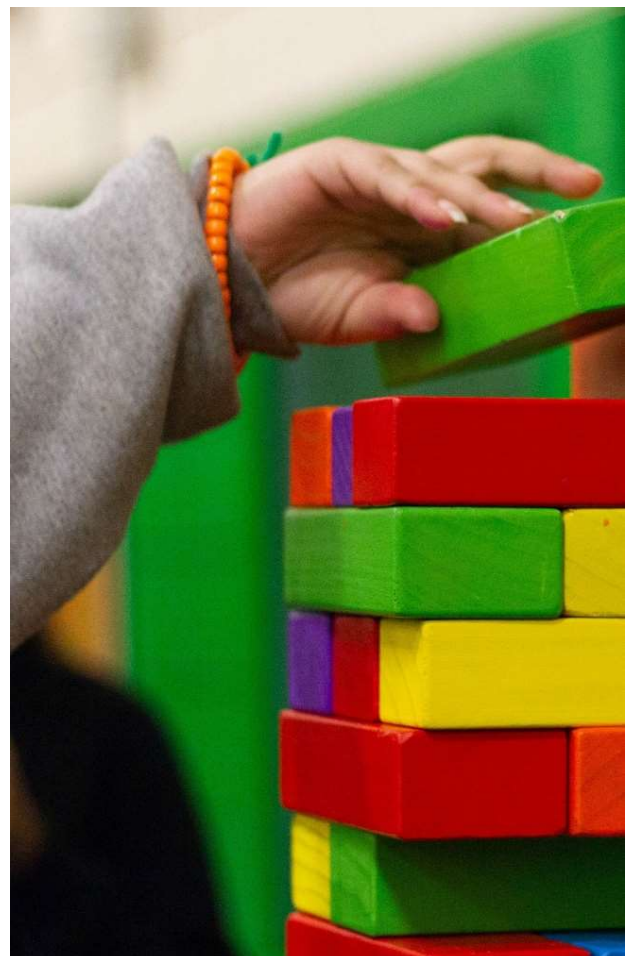
The core staff will be dedicated to developing the national support offer, however further funding has been allocated to enable additional resource or external expertise to be purchased if needed.

The level of additional funding required will depend on the final content of the support offer, however, ideas such as developing an online repository/database may need technical expertise, or developing quality standards for adoption provision may require further resource.

Funding allocated for year 2 will be to roll out the support offer nationally and cover any marketing events or training required.

	Year 1 (23/24)	Year 2 (24/25)
National support offer	£40,000	£50,000

A full cost breakdown of the Programme can be found in the Appendix 2.



The Action Plan

This action plan, detailing the four work packages, will enable the National Adoption Team and RAAs to come together to progress the key priority areas in commissioning adoption support.

Work Package	Action	Lead	Deadline
National Adoption Commissioning Team	Develop application process and paperwork for regions to draw down funding for regional commissioning support	Core staff	July 2023
	Applications for the commissioning support fund open and funds are allocated	Core staff	August – September 2023
	Virtual interim team meetings	Core staff, interim regional commissioning members & regional champions	July & August 2023
	First formal team meeting face-face	Core staff, regional commissioning members & regional champions	September 2023
	Schedule monthly team meetings with commissioning members (regional champions will join meetings on a quarterly basis).	Core staff, regional commissioning members & regional champions	September 2023
	Scope and commission an independent evaluation of the programme	Core staff	January 2024 - onwards
National and Regional Needs Assessment	Needs assessment process developed	Core staff	August 2023
	Regional needs assessment undertaken	Regional commissioning members	October 2023 – January 2024
	National data analysis	External resource/expertise	October 2023 – January 2024
	Regional needs assessments analysed to develop a single national picture that is accessible	External resource/expertise	February – March 2024
Innovation Fund	Application process design	Core staff	August 2023
	Round 1 application opens and grants approved	Core staff, regional commissioning members & regional champions	September – October 2023
	Round 1 project delivered regionally	Regional commissioning members & regional champions	October 2023 onwards
	Round 2 application opens and grants approved	Core staff, regional commissioning members & regional champions	March – April 2024
	Round 2 projects delivered regionally	Regional commissioning members & regional champions	April 2024 – onwards
National Commissioning Support Offer	Develop proposal for support offer and sign off at team meeting	Core staff	September – October 2023
	Development of the national support offer	Core staff & external resource/expertise (as required)	November 2023 – March 2024
	Testing of national support offer products	Regional commissioning members	February – April 2024
	Support offer to be rolled out to all regions including training and market engagement	Core staff	April 2024 onwards

Appendices

1. Project plan
2. Full cost breakdown
3. Summary: what regions think



1. Project plan

		Year 1 (2023/24)										Year 2 (2024/25)											
		Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
1	Programme Management																						
1.1	Ongoing programme management																						
1.2	Agree governance process for programme including reporting process																						
1.3	Establish a programme steering group with representatives from the national team, DfE and wider stakeholders as required																						
1.4	Create report template to support programme steering group and engagement with DfE																						

1. Project plan

		Year 1 (2023/24)										Year 2 (2024/25)										
		Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2	National Adoption Commissioning Team																					
2.1	Develop draft terms of reference for team to be agreed at first formal team meeting in September.																					
2.2	Set up for team meeting including agreeing IT requirements and solutions to enable collaboration and information sharing																					
2.3	Monthly virtual meetings with agreed interim commissioning representatives from each region to support regional set up and start to establish the team																					
2.4	Develop application process and paperwork for regions to draw down funding team members																					

1. Project plan

		Year 1 (2023/24)										Year 2 (2024/25)										
		Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2.5	Application for commissioning support funds opens																					
2.6	Review applications and allocate funding																					
2.7	First formal meeting with full team - face to face																					
2.8	Monthly team meetings with commissioning members from each region to shape the ongoing development of the programme and share learnings (regional champions will join meetings on a quarterly basis).																					
2.9	Scope requirements and commission programme evaluation																					

1. Project plan

		Year 1 (2023/24)										Year 2 (2024/25)										
		Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
3	National and Regional Needs																					
3.1	National Team to develop needs assessment process include what information is required, in what format, the process for overseeing collection, data cleansing etc																					
3.2	Needs assessment process rolled out																					
3.3	National team to undertake data analysis of national level data e.g. ASF funding data, utilising external resource and expertise as required																					
3.4	Regions to undertake needs assessment																					
3.5	National Team to collate all regional assessments and develop final national needs assessment that is accessible in an online format																					
3.6	Some regions to develop market position statements																					

1. Project plan

		Year 1 (2023/24)										Year 2 (2024/25)										
		Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
4	Innovation Fund																					
4.1	Design application process for innovation fund including approval process and paperwork building on existing examples e.g. Centres of Excellence (CE)																					
4.2	Grant application opens for Round 1																					
4.3	Workshops to develop ideas (using learning from CE application approach) with more advance regions to ensure strong applications are made																					
4.4	Grant assessment and approval process																					
4.5	Round 1 projects delivered regionally, with learning regularly fed back to National Adoption Commissioning Team.																					

1. Project plan

		Year 1 (2023/24)										Year 2 (2024/25)										
		Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
4.6	Application process for round 2 amended if necessary to address any challenges or apply lessons learnt from round 1 process																					
4.7	Round 2 application opens																					
4.8	Grant assessment and approval process																					
4.9	Round 2 projects delivered regionally, with learning regularly fed back to National Adoption Commissioning Team.																					

1. Project plan

		Year 1 (2023/24)										Year 2 (2024/25)										
		Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
5	National Commissioning Support Offer																					
5.1	National Team to develop a proposal for support offer																					
5.2	Proposal for support offer to be presented and signed off by National Adoption Commissioning Team																					
5.3	National team to bring in resource and expertise required to develop support offer																					
5.4	Regions to test products developed as part of support offer																					
5.5	Support offer to be rolled out to all regions including training and market engagement events																					

2. Full cost breakdown

Activity	Year 1 (2023/24)	Year 2 (2024/25)
Leeds host fee	£200,000	£250,000
National Adoption Commissioning Team:		
• Core staff	£238,836	£238,836
• Regional commissioning member	£525,000	£700,000
• Regional Champion	£40,500	£54,000
• Programme evaluation	£35,000	£70,000
National and regional needs assessment	£40,000	N/A
Innovation Fund	£380,664	£637,164
Commissioning support offer	£40,000	£50,000
Total	£1.5m	£2m

3. Summary: what regions think

Eastern

RAAs	Peterborough & Cambridgeshire – Joanne Banks Adopt East – Pamela Whittaker Nickie Phillips – Adoption Connects
Summary	<p>The Eastern region do not currently work together in relation to commissioning adoption support and have various arrangements in place across the region. Commissioning works differently across Adopt East’s eight local authorities and two VAAs, with three LAs using the same framework agreement, and some LAs managing commissioning on an individual basis. Adoption Connects have an approved provider list. Peterborough & Cambridgeshire are in the early stages of developing a framework agreement.</p> <p>The three RAAs in the Eastern region are committed to working together, and with adoptive families, to improve commissioning where it will make a real difference for adopted children. Joint working should be based on collaboration between RAAs, whilst also respecting their differences. It is important that joint working should also involve consultation with adoptive families and be underpinned by transparency and fairness.</p>
Aims	<p>The Eastern region are most interested in practical, operational improvements to commissioning which will make the most difference to adopted children and families on the ground.</p> <p>RAAs in the Eastern region also view the National Adoption Commissioning Programme as an opportunity to increase much-needed commissioning capacity across the region.</p>
Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pan-RAA commissioned Adopter Hub, which is run/supported by adoptive families, using Adopt East’s learning of setting up community hubs in 6 out of their 8 LA areas. • Regional needs assessment • Understanding where adoption support provision overlaps with health • Engaging with adoptive families to understand their support preferences • Supporting small providers to grow their organisations • Supporting small provides to engage with frameworks/APLs in the region, possibly through external consultants

3. Summary: what regions think

London

RAAs	<p>Adopt London East – Sarah Johnson Adopt London South – Audrey Bouazizi Adopt London West – Debbie Gabriel Adopt London North – Lydia Samuel* Coram Ambitious for Adoption – Sue Lowndes*</p> <p>* Not in attendance at regional workshop</p>
Summary	<p>London do not currently work together in relation to commissioning adoption support, with each London RAA using an ad hoc spot purchasing approach due to a lack of commissioning capacity.</p> <p>There is a strong sense of commitment amongst London RAAs to make regional working on commissioning adoption support a priority. Joint working on the National Adoption Commissioning Programme will build on positive regional working arrangements outside of commissioning and rely on information sharing across RAA boundaries. RAA leaders in London envisage establishing a project steering group to oversee and support delivery of regional work.</p>
Aims	<p>London RAAs are keen to establish regional commissioning arrangements such as a joint framework agreement or approved provider list through the National Adoption Commissioning Programme. The approach taken will be informed by an understanding of commissioning needs and market engagement.</p> <p>London also view the Programme as an opportunity to obtain some commissioning resource which will be essential to drive regional work on commissioning.</p> <p>Additionally, London RAAs stated a long-term aspiration to increase support around early help and a universal offer for all adoptive families.</p>
Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide resource for analyst role to conduct needs assessment, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establishing a baseline of current provision ○ Needs of adopted children and families ○ Gaps in the market ○ Learning from what has worked e.g. Covid funding • Market engagement to feed into needs assessment e.g. regional ‘meet the market’ events to understand provision and challenges providers are facing • Standardising documentation for providers

3. Summary: what regions think

North East

RAAs	<p>Adopt North East - Nik Flavell Adopt Tees Valley - Vicky Davidson-Boyd Adopt Coast to Coast - Paula Gibbons</p>
Summary	<p>The North East do not currently work together in relation to commissioning adoption support, and have various arrangements in place across the region. Adopt Tees Valley and Adopt North East have their own individual framework agreements, whilst Adopt Coast to Coast partner LAs manage their own commissioning separately using a spot purchasing approach.</p> <p>The three RAAs in the North East view regional working as the direction of travel for their area. Regional working would allow them to achieve more collectively than as individual RAAs, to achieve equality of adoption support across the region, to resolve collective issues, and give them increased assurances of sustainability. Joint working will be underpinned by pooled resources and sharing intelligence across RAA boundaries. RAA leaders in the North East are also committed to networking at a strategic level in order to improve the profile of adoption support.</p> <p>Additionally, the North East view the National Adoption Commissioning Programme as an opportunity to build on the work funded by the Centres of Excellence to develop a multidisciplinary approach to deliver in-house specialist assessments and some therapeutic services.</p>
Aims	<p>Currently, the North East have a limited understanding of their commissioning needs and the market, including the quality of provision and value for money. To address these challenges, the North East would like to achieve a better understanding of need and gaps in the market, as well as develop increased control of the market, in terms of monitoring and review, and market development.</p> <p>The North East also view the Programme as an opportunity to increase commissioning capacity across the region and relieve strain on social workers, who are currently acting as commissioners and administrators due to the structure of the ASF.</p> <p>Whilst recognising the programme of funding has a 2-year timeline, the North East are interested in work to future-proof commissioning of adoption support in the event the ASF does not continue after March 2025. This could include piloting a commissioned service at pan-RAA level.</p>
Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide resource for analyst role to develop a commissioning strategy, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establishing a detailed baseline of existing commissioning approaches across the North East ○ Data analysis of commissioning patterns and regional needs assessment ○ Engagement work with families to understand children’s pathways and experiences of support ● Piloting a commissioned service at pan-RAA level ● Trialling different approaches to ASF-funded provision e.g. block purchasing ● Improving understanding of therapies that are outside scope of ASF ● Streamlining monitoring and review processes

3. Summary: what regions think

North West

RAAs	<p>Blackpool and Lancashire - Karen Barker Together for Adoption - Cathy Sowden Adoption Counts - Gail Spray Adoption Now - Karen Barrick Adoption in Merseyside (AIM) – Wandzia Cody</p>
Summary	<p>The North West do not currently work together in relation to commissioning adoption support and have various arrangements in place across the region. Adoption Counts have a Flexible Purchasing System (FPS), which is open to all RAAs and LAs in the North West but only used by Adoption Counts in practice. Together for Adoption have an approved provider list. Adoption Now have a provider list and are in the process of developing a more formal framework agreement for adoption and SGO support. Adoption in Merseyside (AIM) and Adoption Blackpool and Lancashire have informal provider lists and use a spot purchasing approach.</p> <p>The five RAAs in the North West are keen to build on existing collaboration in their region through the National Adoption Commissioning Programme. In particular, regional working would allow them to achieve more collectively than as individual RAAs, drive improvements by sharing learning and best practice, ensure best use of resources, whilst also respecting that the RAAs have differences. The North West will use their existing approach of having a dedicated lead for each area of adoption, to ensure there is a single individual with clear responsibilities to drive the programme forward. The North West will also work closely with their VAA colleagues as part of their regional working approach.</p>
Aims	<p>North West are not looking to establish a uniform commissioning approach (e.g. through a single pan-RAA framework agreement), but are interested in opportunities to understand regional need, and explore regional opportunities for monitoring and review, and market development and engagement.</p> <p>AIM and Adoption Blackpool and Lancashire are keen to establish commissioning arrangements through the Programme, potentially joining an existing framework in the North West or learning from the experience of other RAAs in order to establish an approved provider list or framework.</p>
Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional needs assessment to understand needs and market gaps, and produce a regional market position statement. Potentially conducted by external commissioning capacity. • Development of a regional register of providers operating in the region (opposed to a formal approved provider list) • Additional capacity to support monitoring and review of providers • Market engagement/development actions which fall out of the needs assessment, early ideas include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Developing new programmes ○ Block purchasing provision ○ Work with providers to develop their offers ○ A pan-RAA commissioned service

3. Summary: what regions think

South East

RAAs	Adopt South East – Michael Wilson Adopt South – Rachel Reynolds Adoption Partnership South East – Sarah Skinner
Summary	<p>The South East do not currently work together in relation to commissioning adoption support, and have various arrangements in place across the region. Adoption Partnership South East and Adoption South East have an approved provider list. Adopt South are in the process of developing their own approved provider list, and rely on spot purchasing their adoption support.</p> <p>Joint working in the South East will be underpinned by sharing information and intelligence between RAAs. They are also keen to ensure the work fits within their local context.</p>
Aims	<p>A priority for RAAs in the South East is around quality assurance, building a shared understanding of what good looks like in adoption support. Whilst the RAA's have different commissioning arrangements, with different contract requirements when monitoring and reviewing providers, this shared understanding will help to reduce any existing duplication.</p> <p>They also recognised the importance of understanding the needs in the region to better plan for services and use this funding to fill any gaps in support outside of ASF funded services.</p>
Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity to understand needs and gaps in the market, including establishing a detailed baseline of existing commissioning approaches across the South East, including differences and similarities between RAAs • Engaging with the market directly • Pump priming a new type of provision • Jointly commissioning services in a different way to support young people that aren't engaging • Look at the mid level of support available - opportunities for youth services • Explore creative and new ways of doing things outside of the ASF funding - want to achieve transformation rather than just making the current process slicker • Explore other forms of adoption support e.g. respite care • Shared standards for quality assurance recognising the limitations of different RAA contracts that already exist • Sharing of best practice from RAAs in the region that are more advanced • Look at the quick wins over the next two years to help standardise and streamline • Opportunities to collectively boost staff knowledge and skills in commissioning e.g. training opportunities

3. Summary: what regions think

South West

RAAs	<p>Adoption West – Alison Lewis Adopt South West – Kath Drescher Aspire – Allan Charlton Adoption Thames Valley – Teresa Rogers*</p> <p>* Not in attendance at regional workshop</p>
Summary	<p>The South West do not currently work together in relation to commissioning adoption support and have various arrangements in place across the region. Adopt West have a light-touch framework agreement. Adoption South West and Adoption Thames Valley have their own approved provider lists. Aspire have an ‘access to resources’ service, operated through their host local authority.</p> <p>The three RAAs in the South West view regional working as the direction of travel, and important to deliver on their commitment to improving services for children and families in their region. In particular, regional working would allow them to adopt an innovative approach, ensure best use of money and improved understanding and oversight of quality. The South West will also engage with their VAA partners as part of their approach to regional working.</p>
Aims	<p>The South West are experiencing challenges with a significantly provider-led market, as a result of a shortage of providers and a high proportion of small providers who require additional support. To address these challenges, the South West would like to better understand the need and gaps in the market, improve quality assurance, and develop the market.</p> <p>In addition, the South West are interested in exploring and learning from other possible commissioning approaches.</p> <p>Whilst recognising the scope and timeline of the National Adoption Commissioning programme, the South West are interested in how a regional needs assessment can help them to future-proof commissioning of adoption support.</p>
Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity to understand needs and gaps in the market, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establishing a detailed baseline of existing commissioning approaches across the South West and where there is duplication ○ Regional market position statement ○ Mapping provider support for different cohorts e.g. is there provision that is not delivered to adopted children and families ○ Using needs assessment as an opportunity to explore different models for service delivery. This will support RAA’s to consider whether internal service delivery would be a viable option in the future. • Pan-RAA guidance or standards for providers on current challenges • Sharing information between RAAs on providers • Market engagement/development actions will fall out of the needs assessment, early ideas include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support for providers with standard policies and templates ○ Myth-busting events or guidance about being a provider of adoption support ○ Support for providers to get onto various frameworks/APLs in the South West (but risk that different arrangements could make this disjointed) • Exploring other commissioning approaches, such as community catalyst approaches or alliance commissioning

3. Summary: what regions think

West Midlands

RAAs	<p>Together4Children – Scott Crawford Adoption @ Heart – Lisa Preston Adopt Central England – Brenda Vincent Birmingham Partnership – Andrew Logie</p>
Summary	<p>The West Midlands have some joint working arrangements for commissioning adoption support in place. Children’s and Family Support Service (CAFSS), a Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System for non-accommodation support services for children and families across the West Midland, is available to all RAAs and LAs in the West Midlands, but usage in practice varies across the region, with some RAAs having their own framework agreement for therapeutic providers.</p> <p>The four RAAs in the West Midlands region are keen to build on existing collaboration and view the Midlands Together Collaboration as a good foundation for joint working. In particular, the West Midlands are keen to foster an atmosphere of collaboration in relation to adoption support, rather than competition, and to improve ease of access to adoption support for adoptive families in the region.</p>
Aims	<p>A priority for RAAs in the West Midlands is delivering therapeutic services for their adoptive families in-house where possible. As a result, the West Midlands are interested in conducting exploratory work through this programme that supports this, including gaining a better understanding of need and gaps in the market.</p>
Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity to understand needs and gaps in the market, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establishing a detailed baseline of existing commissioning approaches across the West Midlands ○ Gap analysis, including differences within the region ○ Survey with families to understand adopter views on support ○ A catalogue or directory of all providers operating in the West Midlands, including those on frameworks and those commissioned via spot purchasing ○ Understanding differences between support needs of adopted children and families, and SGOs ○ Understanding staff skills through a skills audit – help us with ‘make or buy’ decisions • Resource and capacity to conduct relationship work with providers • Provider newsletter on trends to encourage providers to invest in training / shape their offer (e.g. ACE’s quarterly newsletter) • Establishing consistent quality standards • Sharing information on quality and cost • Opportunities to experiment with commissioning methods e.g. block-contracting • Exploring different methods for delivery of services e.g. an RAA hosting something that other RAAs buy into

3. Summary: what regions think

Yorkshire & Humber

RAAs	<p>One Adoption West Yorkshire - Michelle Rawlings One Adoption North Yorkshire & Humber - Howard Lovelady One Adoption South Yorkshire - Stephanie Evans</p>
Summary	<p>The Yorkshire and Humber Region have an Approved Provider List (APL) for all three RAAs and their 15 LA partners to access therapeutic services across the whole region. Additionally, Yorkshire and Humber commission some adoption support services as a region including support groups for young adopted people (e.g. the Adoptees Youth Council), support for adults adopted as children (e.g. counselling), support with accessing adoption records and contacting birth families.</p> <p>Yorkshire and Humber view regional working as important for ensuring consistency across the region as well as provide access to a wider pool of providers. Regional work through the National Adoption Commissioning Programme will build on existing joint working practices, including sharing learning and best practice, and maintaining regular contact and communication channels.</p>
Aims	<p>Yorkshire and Humber aims to improve monitoring and review processes through the Programme, including through streamlining processes and reviewing provision. This will be important to relieve some of the existing administrative burden and relieve strain on commissioning colleagues.</p> <p>Yorkshire and Humber also hope to gain an improved understanding of needs and gaps in the market.</p>
Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis activity – including accessing data, reviewing purchased provision, and analysing spot purchasing trends. • Reviewing quality of provision e.g. logging delivery of support, monitoring visits. • Work with social workers to build understanding of interventions and what is good quality. • A monitoring and review pilot focused on one type of therapy – potentially aimed at addressing a gap in the market. • A ‘choose and book’ system – once need is identified, family is able to ‘choose and book’ a provider on one IT system (e.g. like in health) • Direct payments to families or personal budgets e.g. a voucher system