

# Regional Adoption Agency Programme Expansion

## Proposal for new project

Section 1: Contact details	
Name of RAA:	Coast to Coast Regional Adoption Agency
Lead contact	Karen Robb: Strategic Manager Looked After Children & Permanence
Organisation and position	Durham County Council
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Who is involved in your Regional Adoption Agency?	
Please list the organisations involved in your RAA project (including VAAs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cumbria County Council</li><li>• Durham County Council</li><li>• Together for Children Sunderland</li> <li>• VAA Alliance including: ARC Adoption NE, Barnardo's, DFW Adoption, After Adoption and Caritas Care Adoption.</li></ul>

### Where have you got to so far?

We are keen to understand the progress you have made i.e. the steps you have taken to get to this point and the lessons that have been learnt along the way.

### Section 2: What have you done and where are you now?

#### Project summary – where are you now?

This section should summarise discussions that have taken place around the development of the RAA, including what has already been agreed and at what level.

This can be high level as there is a more detailed section on this below.

This bid is to enable the working group to carry out the activity required to establish a regional adoption agency between Cumbria County Council, Durham County Council and Together for Children Sunderland, working with a VAA Alliance. The VAA Alliance is made up of the following VAAs; After Adoption, ARC Adoption NE, Barnardo's, Caritas Care Adoption and DFW Adoption.

The working group was formed in December 2016 and has been meeting regularly throughout this time looking towards the future development of a Regional Adoption Agency. The group confirmed their intention to work together towards a RAA in March 2017 in a telephone meeting with the DfE and confirmed this formally as requested October 2017. The group is now in a position to make an application for funding to enable them to move on with the project work to form what will be the Coast to Coast Regional Adoption Agency. The geographical area covered by the proposed RAA will be from the Cumbrian Coast in the West to the Durham and Sunderland Coast in the East across the North of England with the clear intention of creating a single service for adoption across the region.

There are already in existence partnership arrangements between Cumbria, Durham, Sunderland and the proposed VAA Alliance. There are some identified excellent practice examples arising from joint working between local authorities and the VAA's in the region that would be replicated in the proposed Regional Adoption Agency.

There have been regional matching and linking meetings in place for several years involving all local authorities and VAAs in the North East, and these have included Cumbria (although it sits within the North West region). Cumbria also already has a contract with one VAA to provide placements, and the two agencies already hold joint linking and matching meetings.

The best practice from both of the above is being further developed between the members of the proposed Coast-to-Coast RAA by formalising the matching and linking meetings with member agencies as opposed to the full regional group of local authorities and VAAs. A pilot regional linking and matching meeting to include all partners of the Coast to Coast RAA is being held on 7 December 2017 feedback from this meeting has been that it had been particularly useful in identifying potential links and anticipating needs across the three local authority areas. These will enable us to have a full picture of our current children and adopters and start to work together as a region, as well as starting to gain a better understanding of trends and future needs so the RAA can be responsive and anticipatory. The meeting will consider, children prior to placement orders being made including complex sibling groups, children with placement orders and adopters at all stages of the adoption approval process. As these meetings develop they will enable early linking to provide children with the best start in life as early as possible. We will ensure that the RAA maintains strong and sound working links into the Local Authorities in order to have early indication of children potentially needing an adoptive family.

There is commitment from each member to work together in a single RAA across the geographical area proposed, to achieve:

- A culture of early permanence planning in order to identify possible suitable adopters for children at the earliest possible stage during the care planning process to ensure the timeliness of the child living in their adoptive family.

- Marketing and Recruitment of adoptive families to meet the needs of a range of children, including sibling groups.
- Assessment and training of adopters to a consistently high standard.
- Development of services across the range of adoption functions by capturing the best practice from across the region and delivering this throughout the RAA.
- Matching, linking and adoption support that enables children to live in supportive and safe placements with their adoptive families.
- Pre and Post Adoption Support tailored to meet the needs of the children and adoptive families and to deliver this as a consistent package of support across the RAA area.
- Effective and easily accessible Birth Parent Support.
- Access to Intermediary Services.
- Local authorities involved are aware that they will need to pool their funding for adoption into the RAA to achieve this, using the funding formula to be agreed in the project phase.

### **Key roles in the project**

- Who will be the named sponsor with ownership of the project (Director of Children's Services at a member local authority)?
- Please provide a summary of the key roles and who will be doing them. Please identify your champions for recruitment, matching and early placement, and adoption support.
- Has a project manager been appointed?
- Will any additional staff join the project team?
- What specialist advice do you think you will need during this phase and how will you access this advice?

### **Named Sponsor**

The named sponsor with ownership of the project development phase will be discussed and agreed in the first Governance Board Meeting to be held in February 2018.

The two Directors detailed below have both indicated their preparedness to be the sponsor and will agree who is best placed to carry out the role at this point in the aforementioned meeting in February 2018.

- Margaret Whellans Corporate Director: Children and Young Peoples Service, Durham County Council
- John Macilwraith Director of Children Services, Cumbria County Council.

### **Governance Board**

This will be made up of Directors of Children's Services.

Monthly meetings – likely to be a mix of video conferencing and face-to-face meetings.

The first Governance Board meeting is to be planned for the beginning of February 2018 following on from the first Project Board meeting on 25 January 2018. This meeting will start the work to develop the Terms of Reference for the Governance Board.

### **Membership of the Governance Board**

- Margaret Whellans Corporate Director: Children and Young Peoples Service, Durham County Council
- John Macilwraith Director of Children Services, Cumbria County Council.
- Debra Patterson, Director of Children's Social Care Together for Children Sunderland
- Representative from the VAA Alliance – not yet confirmed but options currently put forward are Lynn Charlton CEO After Adoption and Terry Fitzpatrick, ARC Adoption North East

- Representative from the Project Board – to be confirmed at first Project Meeting in January 2018
- Individuals will be invited to attend to discuss specific agenda items as and when required
- Coach Ian Waters and DfE Officer Peter Windram to attend when invited

## **Project Board**

Members of the Project Board will include the 3 operational leads from Cumbria, Durham and Together for Children Sunderland (Chair to be identified from one of these 3) and representative from VAA Alliance, the coach although not a formal member would be expected to attend. In addition once the Project Manager is appointed she/he will become a member of the Project Board.

We have identified that there will be a need for representatives from CAMHS/therapeutic services and Head of the Virtual School to be part of the Project Board.

The Project Board will meet monthly and following the meeting will feedback up directly to the Governance Board. The first meeting of the Project Board has been planned for 25 January 2018. This meeting will work on the development of the Terms of Reference for the Project Board.

## **Membership of the Project Board**

- Karen Robb, Strategic Manager Looked After Children, Durham County Council
- Ruth McHugh, Adoption Service Manager, Cumbria County Council
- Kathryn McCabe, Lead Manager for Fostering and Adoption, Together for Children
- Sue Holton, Business Development Manager, ARC Adoption NE – VAA Alliance Representative
- Head of the Virtual School – to be agreed between Cumbria, Durham and Sunderland
- Representative from CAMHS/Therapeutic Support Services
- Coach Ian Waters and DfE Officer Peter Windram to attend when invited.

## **Identified Champions/Initial Work Stream Leads**

Early Permanence Planning including particularly further developments in Foster to Adopt and concurrency placements - Cumbria County Council: Ruth McHugh and Kathryn McCabe Together for Children Sunderland

Matching and Linking – Cumbria County Council: Ruth McHugh

Adoption Support – Cumbria County Council: Ruth McHugh and Jane Gray

Marketing and Recruitment – Together for Children Sunderland: Kathryn McCabe and Durham Council County: Karen Robb

Identification of Best Practice – Durham County Council: Karen Robb together with representative from VAA Alliance

ADM and Panel Decisions: Durham County Council: Karen Robb

From the first meeting of the Project Board in January 2018 work on the development of additional work streams and leads will be identified.

### **Appointment of a Project Manager**

The Project Manager has not yet been appointed. Preliminary enquiries are being made via recruitment agencies to identify suitably experienced candidates who may be available within our timescale.

Project Manager job descriptions from other RAAs will be used as a template for developing the job description for this post.

Decision is yet to be made regarding whether Cumbria, Durham or Together for Children Sunderland will be responsible for the engagement of the Project Manager.

This could be under a number of arrangements including:

- Contracted on a daily or weekly rate
- Officer already employed by one of the parties and seconded to the Project Manager post for the duration of the project
- Employed on a fixed term contract

## **Additional staff identified as being required to join the Project Team**

- 12 days of a social work consultant time has been commissioned to complete pieces of research and work with the organisations and the coach to prepare the Proposal for New Project document and facilitate the work leading up to April 2018. This has been agreed and is funded by Cumbria County Council, Durham County Council and Together for Children Sunderland in equal parts.

A lead from the VAA Alliance will be required as part of the Governance and Project Boards. In addition in order to ensure that VAA members of staff are available to fully participate in the project development then financial support will be required to cover staff costs.

- In order to ensure VAA participation in the development of the RAA financial support will be required for representatives to lead on the work stream in the identification of best practice and participate in specific pieces of work to ensure that clear needs analysis is completed.
- Project Management Administration staff
- The need for a data performance officer and analyst working across Cumbria, Durham and Sunderland has been identified as being required in order to gather and to analyse adoption data across the RAA. This information is vital to provide base line data on which to identify current need and future trends. The work will also help us to develop reporting system for the future that enables the gathering of data across all of the RAA. This work will identify where the best performance is, and how this can then be used to further explore practice and identify specific good practice to be replicated across the RAA. The role of the data performance officer in assessing and tracking sufficiency across the region and in producing shadow RAA data reports to the Project Board and Governance Board is key to understanding performance. Where the data is highlighting issues the Project and Governance Board can start to influence local authority practice during the 18-month project period. The expectation is that the costs to support these roles would come from the DfE funding allocation.
- Consideration to be given to having identified hours available from a Children's Commissioner in order to understand current contracting arrangements and explore any future contracting options during the sufficiency audit. This will ensure that the RAA can move forward in a timely way with any specific services that need to be commissioned to provide continuation of current provision that is being bought in or options for future services that may be required. This will be funded from the DfE funding allocation, either through appointment or backfill cover.
- There is an identified need for IT staff to work across Cumbria, Durham and Sunderland to be able to explore the options around the linking of IT systems

and design implications of data sharing and formulation of a specific service for the RAA.

### **Specialist Advice Required**

- We have identified the need for education input in the development of the RAA and will intend to invite Head of the Virtual School from Cumbria, Durham or Sunderland to be part of the project board.
- CAMHS and therapeutic services would need to be part of consultation and development work and having a representative from CAMHS to provide specialist advice on service development will be required.
- The support provided by the DfE coach allocated to us is essential in our progress along the journey to designing and planning implementation of the project.
- Learning from Cohort 1 and 2 will be extremely useful and it is group's intention to use the documentation on the portal to inform our planning.
- Human Resources and Pensions/Unions/TUPE\*
- Governance and Legal\*

\*HR/Pensions/TUPE/Commissioning/Governance and Legal are all areas where it may be possible to provide from within each organisation involved but this has yet to be fully considered and agreed. Expectation would be that some back filling of posts would be required in order to have this work completed by members of staff from within each organisation who have a sound working knowledge of their own local authority. Involvement of officers is likely to be throughout the 18 month period of the development project with dedicated time at varying levels the project processes.

During the project development stage the expectation will be that HR information and views of experts in this area will be required as part of decision making and will therefore be invited to attend Governance and Project Board Meetings as required.

### **Involvement of stakeholders**

- What plans do you have in place to manage change, communicate with and engage stakeholders? Who are your key stakeholders?
- Have you had any discussions with voluntary sector organisations on their involvement in supporting the RAA?
- What role do you envisage VAAs will play in the development of the project?
- How do you propose to engage with the adopter voice?
- How do you propose to engage with the voice of the child?

- What are your proposals for ensuring that VAAs and Adoption Support Agencies will play an ongoing role within your RAA after it has gone live?

## **Stakeholders**

- Children
- Adopters
- Foster Carers
- Birth families
- Staff working within the Adoption Teams
- Staff working in Children's Care Planning Teams
- Staff working in Fostering Services
- Central List of Adoption Panel Members
- Voluntary Adoption Agencies
- Health and Education Services/Head of the Virtual School
- Nursery Providers, Child Minders
- CAMHS and therapeutic services for children and their families
- Corporate Parenting Boards and elected members

Communication methods will include newsletters both hard copy and online, information on respective websites, team meetings, briefing sessions, staff engagement sessions, cabinet reports and local press and social media, Cabinet and Council Meetings.

## **Voluntary Sector Organisations**

Cumbria, Durham and Together for Children Sunderland have agreements in place with a range of voluntary sector organisations. The plan will be for these to be looked at as part of a work stream looking at best practice and the commissioning of those bespoke services necessary to meet the identified needs.

## **The role of the VAAs in development of the RAA project**

Cumbria, Durham and Together for Children Sunderland have already a working relationship with the group of VAAs. It is expected that as a fourth member in the form of the VAA Alliance they will be fully involved in the development of the RAA project.

The VAA Alliance will be a member of the Project Board via their VAA Alliance representative.

The role of the VAAs as part of the RAA in the future will be determined by the work undertaken in the audit of current services, adoption figures, projections and by jointly completed work to identify areas of good practice to be replicated across the RAA area.

We have identified the need for a commissioner to work with us in the earlier stages to ensure that current arrangements are considered and maintained and future needs identified and plans made for commissioning where needed. We are aware that VAAs will require some reassurances around the continued procurement of some services during the development stages of the RAA project. By having a commissioner working with us we ensure that vital arrangements are maintained to provide services and to give the reassurances needed to VAAs during this period of change. This work will also enable us to develop a sufficiency strategy that realistically reflects the provision that can be supplied from the RAA. The areas where placements and other services may need to be purchased from elsewhere on a commissioned or spot purchased basis.

### **Adopter and Child Voice**

- Workshops with adopters, adopted adults and children during the initial stages and then again during the final 12 months as part of an evaluation on the development of the business plan.
- Children's social workers together with their managers and Independent Reviewing Officers engagement sessions.
- Children in Care Council involvement in engagement sessions.
- In order to capture the comments of adopters and children on their adoption experience, consideration being given to engaging one of the VAAs within the group to take a lead on this piece of work and for them to explore more creative ways of gathering and evaluating the information. This will ensure that the views are used to develop specific services within the RAA.
- Use of sensitively compiled questionnaires, direct work with young people, information from adopted adults, children's social workers, adopter feedback, views of IRO and social care managers.

**Proposals to ensure VAAs will play an ongoing role in the RAA after it has gone Live.**

The development of the new RAA will be worked on jointly with VAAs. Identification of good practice and how to implement this across the RAA area is vital and it is likely that high quality practices from across all agencies including VAAs will be taken into the new RAA. We will be considering the best people to carry out each part of the work to ensure the best outcomes for children.

Commissioning and procurement expertise will be brought in as part of the work streams and once this is completed and evaluated then we will be in a better position to describe the role that VAAs will play after the RAA has gone Live. We would anticipate the RAA will still need to use some interagency placements and the extent of this will be part of the work in developing a sufficiency strategy as stated above.

### Detailed design of the RAA – what you know so far

The following section requests much more detail about your RAA. It explores what you know about what your RAA will look like when it's up and running, rather than details about your project and getting to implementation. There is **no expectation** that this section will be completed in full. You may not know all of the answers at this stage, but where you do have any detail about your thinking so far then please do record it.

Where you don't yet know the answers to these questions, please outline the steps you will take to get there in your project plan (see section 5).

## Section 3: Design of your RAA

### Delivery Model

Please describe what you know at this point about the following:

- The options analysis approach you have taken. This should include what steps have been taken so far to come to any decisions about a preferred delivery model and if no decisions have been made yet, what options are being considered and how you will reach a conclusion on this?
- The scope of the RAA and an initial statement about what services will be delivered by the RAA; will remain in the LAs; and will be commissioned from other organisations.
- How will the RAA deliver the core functions of recruitment, matching, and adoption support (including for birth families and adult adoptees)?
- The child's and adopter's journey through the LAs, VAAs and RAA. This should be provided in the format that you have used to capture this information.
- How you will ensure your RAA focuses on excellent practice and improved outcomes for children?

### Options Analysis Approach

## **What steps have been taken so far about preferred delivery model**

The scoping and sufficiency work and the work stream developments will inform the options and decision for the delivery model. We strongly believe that the model needs to be the one which best promotes excellent practice learning to improved outcomes for all children. In architectural terms “form ever follows function” the expectation is that once functions are agreed based on data analysis and exploration of best practice, finance added, then how the organisation is structured will follow. We will also consult with RAAs from the first phase to understand the decisions they have made and their relevance to our RAA.

No decisions have been made regarding the preferred delivery model, this being a task for the first six months of the project, however there are a number of things we do know at this stage.

- There will be a single management structure across the Coast to Coast RAA.
- That the formation of the RAA will require a pooling of adoption budgets from Cumbria, Durham and Sunderland.
- The delivery of services on a day-to-day basis due to the geographical limitations would rule out working from one location. Therefore services would be delivered from multiple locations on a Hub and Spoke Model.
- Agile working facilities would be required for staff.

## **Scope of the RAA**

- Early permanence planning
- Marketing and Recruitment of adopters
- Assessment and training of adopters
- Matching and linking
- Pre and Post Adoption Support
- Birth Parent Support
- Intermediary Services

The expectation would be that all adoption functions as currently carried out by Cumbria, Durham and Together for Children Sunderland or commissioned by them would be in scope of the new RAA. The commissioning of inter-agency placements as undertaken currently would continue. It is anticipated that post adoption support services that are currently being commissioned will remain in the initial stages of services delivery in order

to provide consistent support to children and adopters. The expectation would be that at some point the RAA would jointly procure services across the region.

We will review the functions currently delivered by VAAs, and also consider what functions can be better commissioned from VAAs, in the meantime we will seek to provide some clarity and reassurance to the VAA providers about their existing contracts and likely extension.

### **What at present is out of scope of the RAA**

Special Guardianship Order assessments and subsequent support services have not been included in the scope of the Coast to Coast RAA at this point. However, there will be an opportunity for the advantages and disadvantages of inclusion or not of Special Guardianship to be explored during the 9 – 12 month stage of the development project.

Legacy Adoption Services including adoption allowance payments agreed prior to the setting up of the RAA will remain as part of existing services and only new allowances will be part of the RAA.

### **HR and staffing implications**

Please set out what you know, if anything, about the HR and staffing implications for the RAA. Again, this should include thinking so far. If possible, it should set out:

- A description of how the new organisation will be staffed and managed and the capability anticipated for each team.
- Consideration of any resource or staffing implications, particularly TUPE and pension implications.
- Your plans regarding engagement/consultation with staff and unions.

### **How will the new organisation be staffed and managed**

We will not be able to provide staffing structure detail until work planned within each of the work streams is complete and is evaluated, from this work will come a plan for how the new organisation will be staffed and managed to meet the needs of children in the most effective way. We also need to consult with existing RAAs and learn from their experiences.

The role and function of Adoption Panels across the region will be part of the one of the work streams and again more details on how panels will work as part of the RAA will be

identified. There is an expectation that there will be reconfiguration of some adoption panels to meet the needs of a RAA given the geographical area covered.

We do know that the Coast to Coast RAA will be a single managed structure.

### **Consideration to resources/staffing implications including TUPE/Pensions**

Cumbria, Durham and Together for Children all have dedicated adoption social workers. Part of the HR work stream will be to explore the implications for bringing together staff from each local authority. How this will work is dependent upon the delivery model identified and when this has been agreed then HR staff can begin exploring options including TUPE should this be required.

Where they are posts that are shared across other disciplines in addition to adoption then consideration of how these posts would be configured as part of the RAA would be needed.

Cumbria County Council are currently working on reconfiguring teams in the light of the RAA to more clearly identify team functions and budgets.

### **Engagement with Staff and Unions**

Staff directly involved with the provision of adoption services are aware of the regionalisation plans to form a Regional Adoption Agency bringing together Cumbria, Durham and Together for Children Sunderland together with VAAs from across the region. Broadening out the range of groups linked to adoption provision and ensuring they are kept up to date will form part of a communication strategy. Staff and unions will be invited to take part in information sharing and engagement sessions when more is known about HR implications and possible staffing structures.

### **IT design**

Please set out what you know, if anything, about the IT implications for the RAA. If possible, it should set out:

- What these systems will be and how they are different to and will integrate with existing systems across the different organisations that are part of the RAA.
- Are there any specific IT issues/complications that you think may impact on the progress of the RAA at this stage?

### **IT Systems**

Dedicated IT support will be required from the start of the project work in April 2018.

Liquid Logic Data System will be common to:

Together for Children Sunderland from January 2018  
Durham County Council from September 2018  
Cumbria County Council – currently using Liquid Logic

The collating of data required for Regional Adoption Agency monitoring, ALB Returns and Ofsted Inspections is an area that will require IT expertise and agreement for information sharing across all 3 of the organisations where the planning for children needs to be captured as data. Understanding this data is crucial to ensure that children's needs are met and they are effectively linked and supported.

Liquid Logic development work on a linking system between authorities is currently in progress. Coast to Coast would require such a system, updates on progress of this development will need to be shared with the Governance and Project Boards.

### **Specific IT/Complications that may impact**

How this will link with recruitment activity from the VAAs within the RAA and how this feeds into the performance between each will need to be explored.

Learning from Cohort 1 and 2 will be useful together with work already done on this by Liquid Logic in relation to other RAAs currently in design and implementation phases.

Performance data on adopter recruitment, assessment and approval requires a system to be devised to enable performance to be evaluated across all organisations making up the RAA.

## **Future Plans**

We would like to understand a little more about your longer term plans, appreciating that you are still at an early stage on your journey.

### Section 4: Vision for your RAA

#### **Looking Ahead**

Please outline any thinking that you have undertaken about the following:

- What is your vision for the RAA and what specifically are you looking to improve as a result of establishing an RAA?

- What are the strengths of the local adoption system; are you looking strategically towards preserving and developing them?

### **Vision for an RAA**

We aspire to develop a Regional Adoption Agency that will improve quality of services for children and develop services that are built on the best practice aspects of the LAs and the VAAs and promote the best outcomes for children, their adopters and their families; and maintain this consistently across the Cumbria, Durham and Together for Children Sunderland area.

During our work over the past 12 months we have identified a number of ways in which we are able to work closely and improve performance and the quality of services provided to children and adopters. We believe in working together in developing a Regional Adoption Agency with colleagues from the VAAs we can improve the child and adopter journey. We are committed to identifying excellent practice that is currently happening in the region and provide this as a consistent offer to children and adopters. We are also looking at ways we can practise differently to improve services and will aim to be an innovative and forward looking service.

In working together to extend and improve the early permanence planning for children we can ensure that children have the best start in life by being part of a permanent, safe and loving family as early as possible in their lives. Our RAA will be giving particular consideration to the strong links required with the teams who care plan for children so we are involved and informed at the earliest possible stage.

Early permanence planning will ensure that we are working together to seek the right adoptive family as early as possible. We can develop recruitment and marketing strategies that target recruitment of families that can best meet the needs of the children for whom we are seeking families. Together we can use our combined expertise to prepare children to move to their new families and support adoptive families with bespoke adoption support to meet child and adopter needs.

Accessing good independent birth family support is essential and we can across the region look for innovative and sensitive ways of providing this service based on research and good outcomes.

Foster to Adopt and Concurrency planning for children is strong and effective in parts of the proposed Regional Adoption Agency area and the expectation is that this early placement planning can be further extended across other areas.

### **Strengths of the Existing Local Adoption System to be Built On**

There are already in place a number of joint training opportunities between the VAAs, Adoption Support Agencies and Cumbria, Durham and Together for Children Sunderland. Maintaining the current consistently high quality of training and assessments of adopters and the needs of children is essential and new training and mentoring will be identified through the work streams and additional and targeted training developed and shared.

Digital Life Story Work has been developed by one of the VAAs in the area and they are working closely with one local authority to support children in using this new and exciting form of life story work. This is something that would be extended across the RAA areas.

## What is next for 2018-19?

This section asks you to provide detail on the focus for your project in the next phase of work, and will need to be clear regarding what you will do to take your project to the next stage. You should focus on how the work of the project will enable you to answer the questions in section 3 in more detail than you can at this point in the process.

- Please provide us with a copy of your project plan for the initial development phase (2018-19), using the provided template.
- Please provide us with a copy of your financial plan (this doesn't need to extend beyond March 2019 at this stage) using the embedded template. Please indicate for each budget line where you are confident about costs or where you are making estimates - please also describe any assumptions.

### Section 5: What is next?

#### Plans to develop your RAA

- Please summarise the overarching aims of your project in 2018-19 and the main activities you will carry out to reach these aims.
  - We will read this alongside your project plan so please ensure the two tell a coherent narrative about your aims and how you will achieve these. All projects should outline what steps will be taken to ensure your RAA has excellent practice at its heart.
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- Work to be done in 2018/2019 from April 2018 is detailed on the Project Plan however we intend to start working on the Project Plan as early as January 2018 and will plan towards implementation by October 2019.
  - Setting up of Governance Board and Project Board
  - Governance Board with Chair being a DCS chosen from Cumbria, Durham or Together for Children Sunderland.
  - Recruitment of Project Manager
  - Agreeing the terms of reference, working groups and timetable for the work streams.
  - Regular Governance Board meetings to ensure that financial and cabinet decision are made in a timely manner and by those able to make those decisions. Frequency of meetings to be agreed, however, frequency needs to reflect the timescales necessary to progress the project towards final design and implementation planning
  - Project Board with correct membership to be set up and to begin setting out the work programme for each of the leads and frequency of meetings to be at a level again to avoid any delay in the development work being held up by

waiting for decisions to be made either at Project Board level or Governance Board.

- Governance and Project Board will ensure that work stream explore areas of excellent practice delivered by local authorities and VAAs and learn from innovative work currently being undertaken. With the objective of ensuring that the RAA has excellent practice at its heart.
- Sufficiency Strategy work to be completed by all involved – children and numbers of adopters to inform recruitment, training, assessment, matching and linking, adoption support and birth parent support.
- Expectation is to complete work to understand practice during April – September 2018 and the implications from this in identifying the delivery model by December 2018.

We are aware of the need for decisions regarding the financial input required from each local authority. The work described above will help us formulate the options. We need to consider what we do currently spend, what budget we will need, what staff we will need. Answers to these questions together with the exploration of good practice to be adopted by the RAA as a whole will enable us to set out a clear case for change. The work on ensuring that we have a sound understanding of current spend and allocation of budgets will be done April – September 2018. Having this information will give us a firm base from which to project future budgets as we explore delivery options for the RAA.

### **Project management and specific areas to consider**

Please set out:

- How will you project manage the development phase?
- What are the top 3 priorities for your project?
- What are the top 3 risks for this phase of work? How will you manage them?
- What are the dependencies for the project? What is needed to help make your project a success?

Project Manager to be appointed early by the Governance Board early in 2018 with the aim to have someone in post to drive the project and develop a detailed project plan with key milestones and measurable timescales forward throughout 2018.

Project Manager will work closely with the work stream leads to bring together information for analysis toward the end of the September 2018.

Specialist advice together with lessons learned from other RAAs involved in phases 1 and 2 will be used to support the work of the work streams and the Governance and Project Boards.

Members of both the Governance and Project Boards are committed to working within the timescales of the development project with agreement to progress each stage through decision making via Chief Executives and Cabinet within each local authority.

Monthly Governance and Project Board meetings will ensure that work is kept to timescales and the expectation is that service delivery model will be identified between September – December 2018 and Business and Implementation Plan developed by the end of March 2019 for going live in October 2019.

**Top 3 Priorities for the initial phase of the project are:**

1. To develop a service design that incorporates best practice leading to improved outcomes for children.
2. To understand the financial baseline.
3. Using information from the work streams and performance data analysis to consider the most appropriate delivery model.

**Top 3 risks for this phase of the work**

The 3 risks are all linked to timing of setting up the project as any delays in starting as early as the New Year 2018 will impact upon completing the first part of the work which will focus upon financial planning and auditing of current service provision and future trends.

1. Delay in setting up a functioning Project and Governance Board in order to ensure that decisions are made in a timely way about the direction of work in the first crucial months of the project development phase.
2. Delay in recruiting the right Project Manager due to lack of availability of a candidate with the right skill and knowledge base.
3. The development phase of this project is dependent upon financial support via the DfE grants as specific individuals need to be recruited and backfill for officers taking time from their substantive post to make a major contribution to the development of the RAA.

There is a commitment from Sunderland City Council to the development of the Coast to Coast RAA. Clear decisions about how any management oversight will be demonstrated by Sunderland City Council where this is required separately from, or in addition to Together for Children Sunderland are being clarified. The RAA Project proposal has been developed in consultation with senior council officers (in addition to senior staff within Together for Children). Cabinet endorsement will be sought for the proposal at the next cabinet meeting to be held on 10 January 2018.

### **What are the dependencies for the project and what is needed to help make it a success**

1. A clear commitment to this RAA policy being communicated to lead members, DCSs and Chief Executives by the DfE.
2. The agreement of DfE funding to take forward the Coast to Coast development project.
3. Commitment from Governance Board and Project Board to work within the tight timescale of this 18-month project.

### **Funding required to develop the RAA**

- Based on your financial plan, please provide us with an overview of what the funding will achieve next financial year (2018-19).
- At this point, do you envisage needing set-up funding beyond 2018-19? If so please provide an indication of how your grant allocation will be spread across financial years.

### **Overview of how funding will be used during 2018-19**

- Recruitment of Project Manager, Identification of Work Stream Leads, agreements in place for involvement of paid staff from VAA Alliance.
- Completion of a sufficiency audit and development of sufficiency statement/strategy – to ensure that accurate data is used to base future planning and data from previous years used to forecast future need.
- Have a clear understanding of current budget by the end of September 2018 to enable forecasting budget requirements across a range of service delivery options.
- Excellent practice identification and exploration of what would be required to embed this into practice across the RAA.
- Where there are excellent practices currently working between the VAAs and LA within the Coast to Coast group – exploration of resources required to replicate this across the RAA – funding, practice and legal considerations. Input from Children’s Commissioner with this would be helpful at the earliest stages of development.

- Identify areas there could be expected savings due to economy of scale and reduced duplication in the provision of some services.
- Identification of specific work that will be commissioned by the RAA to maintain continuity for some existing services provided by individual LA under Service Level Agreements, for example some of the adoption support provision, therapeutic services, birth parent support and Post Box Services.
- IT links and information sharing agreements/governance/legal services.
- Consultation with Unions and implications for current staffing levels.
- Identify delivery model and produce final business plan together with RAA implementation plan to go live in October 2019.

### **Set up funding beyond 2018-2019**

Set up funding will be required until at least October 2019 as this is the date that we intend for the RAA go to live.

### **Support to deliver your RAA**

In addition to the financial support outlined above and in your financial plan what support do you need to drive your project forward? You should outline:

- What you need from your coach in terms of the level of support and in which areas you consider support is needed most.
- Access to up to date information regarding the implementation of RAA's around the country, to ensure opportunities to learn from best practice examples and to have early awareness of any specific difficulties or complex situations encountered by others to avoid repeating mistakes.
- The support of the DfE coach to provide some of the above, together with consultation sessions at each stage of the RAA consultation, planning, design and implementation planning.
- At the present time the 3 local authorities within the Coast to Coast area belong to two different Adoption Leadership Board areas. In order to be make full use of adoption performance data gathered via the Adoption Leadership Board we

need this data to be provided to us as a group and so that we can bench mark against other RAAs and areas and use this to inform our practice. It will be crucial that we are located within the remit of one ALB only, rather than two.