

Update on Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs)

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Mark Owers

(Professional Adviser to the Adoption Leadership Board)



Owers Advisory Ltd

LAs and VAAs are all helping to make adoption better

- 4,690 children were successfully adopted in 2015-16
- Fewer children with a placement order are waiting for adoption – 1,960 as at 30 June 2016
- Child timeliness has improved – latest quarterly data show average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adopted family is 515 days (17 months)
- The adoption support fund is supporting more families each year – over 7,000 families supported, over £27m spent, a range of vital therapeutic support delivered to families



But we need to make further improvements

- Adoption numbers are falling. Data suggest that the number of **adoptions** fell slightly between quarter 4 2015-16 and quarter 1 2016-17, from 1,120 to 1,060. 4,690 adoptions in 2015-16 is a decrease of 670 from 5,360 in 2014-15
- data suggests that the number of new **decisions** has continued to fall from 1,850 in quarter 2 2013-14 to 1,080 in quarter 1 2016-17, a decrease of 42%
- Quarterly data also suggest new **placement orders** granted have continued to fall from 1,630 in quarter 2 2013-14 to 890 in quarter 1 2016-17, a decrease of 45%
- Projected uplifts suggest that new decisions and placement orders **may have plateaued between quarter 4 2015-16 and quarter 1 2016-17**
- The number of **adopter registrations** decreased by 14% between quarter 4 2015-16 and quarter 1 2016-17, from 840 to 730. The number of **adopter approvals** increased by 1% from 700 to 710.



There is a clear vision on RAAs and there is broad engagement

In 'Regionalising adoption' in June 2015 the Government set out its commitment to markedly improve outcomes for children through the delivery of a regional adoption system where:

- children are **matched** with the most suitable adopter as quickly as possible;
- **recruitment** takes place at an efficient scale to provide a pool of 'adoption ready' adopters large enough and well enough matched to the needs of children waiting; and
- enough high quality **adoption support** services are available nationwide.

- 19 RAA projects (132 LAs) are in place with the first projects planning to launch in April 2017
- All projects have plans for the RAA to carry out functions that relate to matching, recruitment and support and a few are considering extending the RAA's function to special guardianship.
- The statutory and voluntary adoption sectors are trying to work together to provide real and lasting improvements.



132 LAs out of 152 are engaged in the RAA programme

- 132 local authorities are involved in a project to form an RAA. They are covered by 18 projects with a 19th project on intercountry adoption.
- 13 of the 20 local authorities not yet engaged have spoken to DfE about joining the programme. Most of them are interested in forming a new RAA project rather than joining an existing project.
- DfE plan to help the remain 7 local authorities to join the programme in 2017.



Projects will launch in a phased way

Projects going live in 2017

April – June 2017

Greater Manchester
and Cheshire East

Yorks and Humber
(phased launch)

July – Sept 2017

Aspire Adoption
Wigan

Thames Valley
Merseyside

Oct – Dec 2017

Adopt Central
England
Tees Valley
West Pennine

Projects going live in 2018

March/April 2018

Adopt Central East
Yorks and Humber (final launch)
Adopt South West
Adopt@heart
Adopt West
East Midlands
Adopt North East
Adopt South Central
Adopt East
London



The following LAs and VAAs make-up the five demonstration projects

Adoption Central England	Aspire Adoption	Central East	Greater Manchester	Yorkshire & Humber
After Adoption Barnardo's Coventry Solihull Warwickshire	Bournemouth Dorset Families for Children Poole	AdoptionPlus Bedford Buckinghamshire Cambridgeshire Central Beds Coram Northamptonshire Norfolk St Francis	Adoption Matters Caritas Care Cheshire East Manchester Trafford Salford Stockport	After Adoption, Adoption Matters, Adoption UK, Barnardo's, Barnsley, Bradford, Calderdale, Doncaster, East Riding, Hull, Kirklees, Leeds, North Lincs, North East Lincs, North Yorkshire, PAC UK, Rotherham, SSAFA, Sheffield, Wakefield, York, Yorkshire Adoption



Together we have started to identify the features of a good RAA

Clear objectives for improving practice

- Early permanence is the norm
- More targeted recruitment of adopters
- Better tracking
- Streamlining processes to speed up matching
- Strategic commissioning of adoption support
- Better links with specialist services

RAA is organised to maximise impact

- Roles, responsibilities and accountability clearly defined
- Single entity drives consistency & efficiency
- Scale enables investment in expertise & staff support
- Better commissioning and understanding of need
- Strong links with LA child care teams
- Processes benchmarked and levelled up to the best

Effective use of interagency placements

- RAA & VAA adopters in region as one pool
- Agency neutral matching
- Funding mechanism responsive to demand
- Immediate national search for some children

Clear roles for VAAs and other partners

- RAA delivering in-house where there is a clear rationale
- Voluntary sector run services when best placed to do so
- Partners contribute to service design based on expertise
- VAA partners have a clear service offer



We have also identified a number of key questions to answers

1. How exactly will the adoption system be better – the devil is in the detail?
2. How will accountability work and what about corporate parenting responsibilities?
3. What practice arrangements will enable children to be placed without unnecessary delay?
4. How much will it cost and how will the funding arrangements work?
5. What legal form should RAAs take and how should they operate?
6. How will we minimise the impact of the change on service users and staff?
7. How will voluntary agencies be involved in RAAs?
8. How can we properly understand the performance of the system as a whole?
9. What regulation and inspection framework do RAAs need?



Crucially, bigger does not mean better, it just means bigger. Better is better.



It has been difficult to understand costs of adoption and it is too early for RAAs to provide information about future costs

- There are many issues when attempting to understand costs of adoption.
- The range for current costs of adoption were between £27,000 and £38,000.
- These initial data would suggest that adoption costs for LAs and VAAs and not that dissimilar considering the interagency fee is £27,000.
- This should not be a surprise give Selwyn et al (2009) found actual costs to a LA similar to a VAA.
- There is evidence that the current level of the interagency fee is insufficient to cover VAA costs - estimates are between £33,100 and £36,905.
- In preparing to understand the costs of RAAs, all projects have begun to consider RAA Funding Principles and RAA Funding Options.
- Most options produce 'winners and losers' so individual LAs and the RAAs are considering the most palatable options.



We need to get the balance right between placements provided directly to LAs by 'their' RAA and those provided by other RAAs and VAAs. This is no easy task however.

- Demo Projects expect to increase the number of children placed within RAAs and to reduce the use of interagency placements purchased from LAs and VAAs outside of the RAA.
- RAAs recognise that they will never be self-sufficient and so they will need to budget to allow for all interagency placements needed. This will give RAAs flexibility to pursue interagency placements and reduce their exposure to the risk of a mismatch between the adopters they recruit and the children needing placements.
- But we do not yet have a consensus on the services RAAs want from VAs and the voluntary sector's offer is not yet clearly enough defined or sufficiently compelling.
- At a time when the statutory sector is being told by Government that individual LAs are inefficient, the voluntary adoption sector should collectively consider how they could deliver at greater scale and be more efficient and effective.



Questions for discussion

1. How well sighted are you on the RAA programme?
2. What do you think are the opportunities and risks?
3. To what extent do you feel enabled to support and challenge the programme effectively?
4. What does the ALB need to hear and do to ensure the programme is a success?



Hopefully this has been
useful and thank you for
your time!

