



**FOSTERING
& ADOPTION**

Oxfordshire County Council

**Adopt Thames Valley
Due Diligence
Questionnaire for the selection of
Host Authority for RAA**

**Working
together
to change
Lives...**

Date: 30 September 2016
To: Elaine Redding
Chairperson, Adopt Thames Valley
Board

Children's Social Care
County Hall
New Road
Oxford OX1 1ND

Hannah Farncombe
Children, Education &
Families

Dear Elaine,

Please find attached the due diligence template completed by Oxfordshire County Council which aims to provide the Board with the necessary assurances required to become the host authority.

Oxfordshire welcomes the government's ambitions for regionalisation of adoption: the opportunity for agencies to combine their efforts to drive improvements, streamline processes, share resources and, potentially, find economies of scale that benefit adoptive families and services to children.

So far the Adopt Thames Valley project leads have set high standards by engaging stakeholders at all levels across the seven local authorities and voluntary agencies on an equal basis. Should Oxfordshire be confirmed as the host authority, we are committed to continuing the project along the same lines.

We are fortunate to have Adopt Berkshire to learn from and build on. Their experience of implementing a shared service and joining up teams is hugely valuable and we are keen to benefit from their learning as we move towards a regional agency.

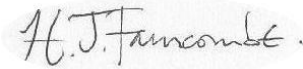
It would be understandable, given the unequal size of the constituent authorities and the changes ahead for Adopt Berkshire, that colleagues and elected members in our partner organisations will have concerns that Oxfordshire, as the largest organisation, will 'take over' the RAA and do things the 'Oxfordshire way'.

I should like to take this opportunity to state that our approach must continue to be built on a common vision, contributed to by all partners, which supports a service made up of all the talents, extending the best practice for the best value. The scoping in the project shows examples of good practice and rising standards in Adopt Berkshire and the other three local authorities. We have already established a good record of working together.

As a partnership we know we have not resolved all the issues that regionalisation poses. Our organisations are operating in a restrictive financial context. However, I have confidence that if we carry on as we have begun and continue to engage in both the governance and operation of the new service, differences and difficulties will be resolved.

As we progress to the next stage, Oxfordshire's commitment is to actively engage with all member organisations, developing mutual trust and problem-solving together in an open and transparent way.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "H. J. Farncombe". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed contact information.

Hannah Farncombe
Deputy Director, Corporate Parenting & Safeguarding
Children, Education & Families
Oxfordshire County Council

Tel: 07775 025254

Email: Hannah.farncombe@oxfordshire.gov.uk

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

**Adopt Thames Valley
Due Diligence Questionnaire for the Selection of Host Authority for RAA**

Dimensions of the Service:

- Adopt Thames Valley will be a regional adoption agency which will serve the geographical areas of the following local authorities: *Bracknell Forest; Oxfordshire; Reading; Royal Borough Windsor and Maidenhead; Swindon; West Berkshire; Wokingham*
- Approximate FTE of existing staff who will transfer to the service (excluding support staff): 60fte (actual numbers of people will be higher)
- Approximate budget of the combined existing services: £5m
- Possible future changes to the service: *possibility of more authorities joining; move to an independent organisation (e.g. Local authority based trading company or joint venture)*
- Proposed implementation date: *June – September 2017*

Due Diligence Questionnaire: To be completed by each authority, wishing to be considered as host for the new RAA. The answers to these questions will be treated confidentially and only used by the project for objective of selecting the host authority.

Political/Leadership	
How have you/will you secure the support of your DCS/Chief Executive/Lead Member to the hosting of this service?	<p>There is firm commitment to hosting the RAA in Oxfordshire. The DCS and directorate leadership team, County Director (CE equivalent) and County Council Management Team, Lead Member for Children and Cabinet members have been fully briefed on the progress of the RAA project and have given approval to bringing the proposal to Cabinet in November 2016.</p> <p>A 'task and finish' group has been set up within the authority to manage the practical implementation of the transfer to a RAA. Membership includes the Family Placement Service Manager who is the Oxfordshire ATV lead and management representatives from Children's Commissioning, HR, ICT, Finance and Legal. Should Oxfordshire be approved as the host, the ATV Project Manager will be invited to join this group in order to work closely with the authority to achieve the implementation within the target timeframe.</p>
How does this fit in with the political and strategic priorities for your authority?	Oxfordshire has a commitment to adoption which fits with its Council and Children's Trust priorities.
Do you already have political sign off for hosting the RAA; if not, how long will it take?	Cabinet is booked for 22 nd November 2016.
Are there any planned or known changes in your authority in the medium term, which could affect your ability to continue hosting the service?	<p>Should the proposal to host the RAA be approved, the legal entity and employer will be Oxfordshire County Council.</p> <p>On 20th September 2016 Cabinet decided to:</p> <p><i>(a) Consider the evidence set out in the PwC and GT reports, and the opportunity both reports present to save £100m over five years by moving to a single unitary for Oxfordshire, and the need for local structures within that;</i></p> <p><i>(b) Having regard to the recommendations of Performance Scrutiny, ask officers to work with stakeholders, including the public, to develop proposals for a single Oxfordshire unitary council, and in particular further explore the proposal set out in</i></p>

	<p><i>the Grant Thornton report known as option 6, whereby local areas within the county could make decisions for their own area, within an overall budget and policy framework set at the strategic level.</i></p> <p>The Adopt Thames Valley Board has been identified as a stakeholder.</p> <p>A single unitary council could be created with approval of the Dept for Communities and Local Government and would replace Oxfordshire County Council and its local District Councils. It is not anticipated that a new council could be brought into effect before 2020.</p> <p>The unitary proposal will include the continuation of a county-model for children’s services and the capability to host the RAA on behalf of the ATV Board.</p>
<p>What are your specific corporate priorities for adoption; how are these monitored at political and senior officer levels?</p>	<p>Oxfordshire has a commitment to adoption which fits with the Council Corporate Plan objective to: <i>Safeguard vulnerable children and meet their eligible care needs, through:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Stopping abuse and neglect, and giving children in our care a good start in life.</i> • <i>Backing evidence-based early interventions which prevent more challenging problems arising in the future.</i> <p>The Oxfordshire Children’s Trust (strategic partnership chaired by the lead member for children) has the following vision for children: <i>We want Oxfordshire to be the best place in England for children and young people to grow up in, by working with every child and young person to develop the skills, confidence and opportunities they need to achieve their full potential.</i> <i>We want Oxfordshire to be a ‘thriving Oxfordshire’. This means a place where people can work to achieve a decent life for themselves and their family, a place alive with vibrant, active communities, and a place where people can enjoy the rewards of a growing economy and feel safe.</i></p> <p>The Council’s corporate priorities are aligned with those of the Children’s Trust:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring children have a healthy start in life and stay healthy into adulthood • Narrowing the gap for our most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups • Keeping children and young people safe • Raising achievement for all children and young people <p>The Council’s performance is monitored by the County Council Management Team reporting on a regular basis to the Performance Scrutiny Committee. The Children’s Trust reports to the Oxfordshire Health & Wellbeing Board, which is chaired by the Council leader.</p> <p>The Council’s performance as a corporate parent is monitored by the Corporate Parenting Panel, chaired by the lead member. The panel is made up of members, senior officers, partner agencies, foster carer reps and reps from the Children In Care Council. The panel receives regular reports on adoption and permanence.</p>
<p>Do you already host a</p>	<p>No</p>

shared service (if so, please give details)?	
Do you already participate in a shared service (if so, please give details)?	<p>Yes. HR, finance and procurement services are delivered using self-service tools through the Integrated Business Centre (IBC), in partnership with Hampshire County Council.</p> <p>Oxfordshire has a MASH (multi-agency safeguarding hub) and a specialist child sexual exploitation team; both are run by the County Council, Thames Valley Police and Oxford Health Foundation Trust.</p> <p>Pooled budgets between the County Council and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group support a wide range of jointly delivered adult services.</p> <p>School Governor Services and the Control Centre for the Fire Service are both delivered through shared services run jointly with neighbouring local authorities.</p>
Organisational	
What terms and conditions do you have for social work staff; are these likely to change in the medium term?	<p>Staff pay and terms and conditions of employment are set by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services and are contained in the "Green Book".</p> <p>There are no proposals that these will change in the medium term.</p>
Do you anticipate structural changes in Children's Social Care in the next two years that will have implications for adoption and permanence services?	<p>Early Help, Children's Social Care 'front door' and Family Support services are currently undergoing a restructure, with a completion date of 28/02/2017. This has not directly involved Adoption and Permanence services.</p>
Have you managed TUPE of staff before, either into or out of the organisation? If so, how many and for what service?	<p>The Council has managed a large number of TUPE transfers, both into and out of the organisation. These have involved the commercial, education, public service and charity sectors. TUPE transfers have taken place across most, if not all services within the Council.</p>
<p>Please give specific details about how you would manage the following support functions for the new service:</p> <p>Procurement/contract management (do you have a dedicated team to do this currently and how many staff)</p> <p>Complaints (including how many adoption complaints you currently deal with per year)</p> <p>Finance functions</p> <p>Payroll/Pensions (including how many fte in your organisation the</p>	<p>Below is a summary of our current support functions and how these are delivered by Oxfordshire County Council. We anticipate that these functions will service the RAA. The Task and Finish group will work with the ATV Project Manager to develop a business plan setting out what we propose in terms of costs, service standards, location, etc. and we would need to negotiate a partnership agreement setting out the terms of the shared service – to include arrangements for decision making</p> <p>Procurement/contract management/performance analysis:</p> <p>OCC has a dedicated Joint Commissioning service covering procurement, contract management and performance as well as commissioning, policy and engagement. The purpose of the team is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand current and future social care, health and wellbeing needs of children, young people and adults in Oxfordshire; • Respond to these needs by working across children's and adults' services with partner organisations and the broader community • Ensure that a safety net is provided for the most

<p>service currently provides for)</p> <p>Admin/support services</p> <p>IT/telephony (including the provision of new bespoke IT systems and IT hardware and support)</p> <p>HR functions Vivien/Andrew please can you assist with this?</p> <p>Office Accommodation (for the service manager and approximately half the fte of the service)</p> <p>Legal services</p> <p>Performance analysis</p> <p>Communications: internal/external</p>	<p>vulnerable people.</p> <p>Within the Joint Commissioning team, the Procurement team is responsible for the tendering of services, carrying out commercial negotiations with suppliers, operating the procurement portal and overseeing the contract award process. The team includes Principal Procurement Manager and four Strategic Procurement Officers.</p> <p>The Contracts and Quality team ensures that contract management and monitoring promotes the well-being, health and quality of life for those who depend on Council services. They manage all contractual relationships in line with the Council's Contract Management Framework to ensure that performance monitoring is effective and that contract outcomes are being met or exceeded. They also promote quality, health and safety and safeguarding across the system. The team includes a Quality and Contracts Manager and 3.8 FTE Quality and Contracts Officers focussing on children's contracts.</p> <p>The Complaints and Information Team brings together the work of the Comments, Compliments and Complaints services in both directorates (Children and Adults), and aims to use what we learn from complaints and compliments to help shape commissioning intentions, strategies and service-delivery. The team also co-ordinates the two directorates' responses to Freedom of Information requests. The complaints team oversees the management of statutory complaints and provides advice and consultation to managers responding to complaints at each stage of the process.</p> <p>In the past two years, the Adoption service has received a total of 7 complaints. Two of these were made by prospective adopters, two by approved adopters, two by Special Guardians and one by a birth parent in relation to letterbox contact.</p> <p>Finance</p> <p>We have a dedicated Finance team that supports the CEF directorate. The LA finance team has significant experience in joint working as it hosts a number of pooled budgets with the Oxfordshire CCG. These amount to £330m.</p> <p>Payroll/Pensions</p> <p>Payroll provides for around 13,000 contracts (approx. 8150 FTE) plus casuals. Some of the 13,000 are part-time or have more than one job.</p> <p>Pensions provides for approximately 10,100 (approx. 3250 FTE) some with more than one pension pot.</p> <p>Admin/Support Services</p> <p>The CEF directorate's administration service is currently run as a discrete service providing and managing administrators in teams and services, including Oxfordshire's Adoption service (see below</p>
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in information about how the adoption service is managed). The administration service enables the flexible deployment of staff to meet areas of pressure/need as they arise, subject to the overall budgetary constraints of that service. Where there are tensions between demand and budgetary constraints decisions are made on the basis of prioritisation. If Oxfordshire became a host for the RAA, that element would be deemed a priority service.

ICT/ telephony (including the provision of new bespoke IT systems and IT hardware and support)

The Council has a new standard package for staff which is based on agile working such that staff should have access to the resources they need whether they are working from a fixed office location, from multiple sites, in the field or from home.

All Council sites have corporate and public Wi-Fi and reciprocal arrangements are in place with the NHS in Oxfordshire to allow staff from each sector to work from all locations.

A new standard staff package which is being rolled out now through to May 2017 includes secure remote access, laptop (or surface device), and Windows smartphone. A range of tools including Skype for Business are included in this roll-out.

All staff have access to a dedicated ICT service desk and this will be supplemented by a range of self-service facilities through to July 2017.

There is a commitment to re commission our current Integrated Children's System with a target date of Autumn 2017. The manager responsible for ICT services has confirmed that strong adoption business processes enjoyed by other local authorities may be considered as part of the re-commissioning process.

HR Functions

Oxfordshire County Council operates a Corporate HR Service, with a dedicated HR Business Partner supported by an HR Business Adviser for each directorate. The Corporate Service covers a wide range of advice to managers and employees across the Council, including:

- Terms and conditions;
- Employee Relations;
- Recruitment;
- Legal and contractual advice and entitlements;
- Development of HR policies, practices and procedures;
- Change Management;
- Performance Management;
- Health & Wellbeing;
- Job Evaluation and Pay;
- Learning & Development;

- Workforce initiatives;
- Management data and information;
- Staff Engagement;
- Workforce Planning.

Payroll and transactional HR are processed via Hampshire County Council through a partnership agreement which has been in operation since July 2015. All staff are required to manage their own personal data using a self-service portal. Managers are required to process and authorise employee and establishment requests through the portal.

The council has a vision for a workforce which is:

“Flexible, well-skilled and engaged in taking a proactive role in the development of new ways of working for the benefit of the residents of Oxfordshire.”

Three principles underpin the service and support that HR offers to the organisation. These are:

- Understand and be responsive to the needs of our customers (managers & staff), and provide high quality advice;
- Make the most of our people and physical resources to be flexible and agile;
- Treat staff with dignity and respect in changes that lead different ways of working or working for different organizations

Facilities Management/property procurement

Delivery Team

The delivery of day-to-day Property & Facilities Services is managed in partnership with Carillion Capita. The Corporate Facilities Management Service oversees areas such as premises health and safety, management of meeting rooms, management of cleaning standards/site management standards, site security/access control cards and office waste management.

The Facilities teams provide a face to face reception service and also:

- Postal services
- Managing meeting rooms across the county, including video conferencing
- Equipment and MFD management

Strategy Team

Responsibilities include:

- Promotion and acting as Corporate Landlord
- Defining policy in respect of the council’s assets
- High-level feasibility and options appraisals

Programme Office

The Programme Office act as the portal for new work and monitor, prioritise and ensure that resources within Property &

Facilities are optimised working in partnership with Carillion Capita.

Performance Analysis

The Performance team is responsible for performance and information for the Children, Education & Families Directorate. The team provides performance reports, intelligence and analysis in line with strategy to mitigate risk and enable and support services to improve. They collect and analyse a wide variety of information in order to meet statutory requirements, monitor performance and assist the Council, its partners and directorates in planning. The performance team supports the adoption team with collation of data for the ALB and Adoption Scorecard. They also assist with any request for data relating to FOI enquiries.

Communications: internal and external

The Council has a dedicated Fostering & Adoption Recruitment Team but is able to draw on support from the Council's Communications team in areas such as:

- media relations
- internal communications
- marketing and consultations
- design
- digital communications and social media

Legal Services

Legal Services provides key legal and corporate governance advice to all directorates of the council. There are four main legal teams, each led by Principal Solicitors. Of relevance to the RAA are the following:

Childcare

- Provides legal advice and support on child protection and youth justice.
- Attends and advises on legal proceedings before the Family Court.
- Provides specialist advice on adoption and fostering.
- Provides specialist advice on criminal injuries compensation claims.

Conveyancing

- Advises on legal aspects of all property matters including property management affairs, joint-use agreements, leases and licenses.

Litigation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represents the council in all courts and tribunals. • Education (special educational needs tribunals, judicial review, school attendance issues). • All aspects of employment law (including TUPE). • Civil proceedings. • Prosecutions (including Trading Standards and the Fire Service issues). • Debt collection. • Community care (general advice and conduct of judicial reviews). • All aspects of adult services and mental health issues (except for contracts). • Data protection. • Freedom of information, environmental information regulations and information re-use regulations.
Are you planning to outsource any of the above functions in the medium term?	There are no plans to outsource any further functions in the medium term.
Financial	
What is your actual budget for children's social care in 2016/17? What key headings do you include in this (e.g. early help, children with disabilities)? Is this an increasing or decreasing budget over the previous years?	<p>The budget is £70m.</p> <p>This includes, Children's Social Care, Early Intervention services, Safeguarding, Services for Disabled Children, Youth Offending Service and a proportion of Central admin and overheads. The budget for this area has been increasing year on year over the past couple of years.</p>
What proportion of this is for adoption services?	£1.8m.
How much over or underspent was your children's social care budget in 2015/16 (compared to your forecast budget)?	£3.4m overspent
Are you expecting to have to make cost savings in children's social care over the next three years; if so, what percentage of the children's social care budget is this and how much is this in actual terms?	Yes, the CEF directorate and Children's Social Care strand is expecting to have to make savings over the next 3 financial year's in line with funding reductions to the Local Authority as a whole.

<p>Is the authority as a whole expecting to make cost savings over the next three years; if so, what % of the budget is this?</p>	<p>Based on the 2016/17 Net Budget of £417.460m and savings of £61m to be made over the next 3 years the percentage of savings to budget is 14.6%. Gross budget is £798.005m – 7.6% of savings to budget.</p>
<p>Does your authority have financial reserves and, if so, to what level is this?</p>	<p>Financial reserves as at 01/04/2016:- Earmarked Reserves (excluding schools reserves) £85.478m. General Reserves (General Balances) £18.984m. Expected to reduce to £28.221m (earmarked reserves) and £17.500m (general balances) by 31/03/2020. (25% for net budget and 13.1% of gross budget).</p>
<p>Performance</p>	
<p>What was the date of your last Children’s Social Care inspection and what was the outcome?</p>	<p>In March 2016 Oxfordshire's Children's Social Care was inspected as part of a Joint Targeted Area Inspection. Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, HMI Constabulary and HMI Probation undertook a joint inspection of the multi-agency response to abuse and neglect in Oxfordshire. This inspection included a 'deep dive' focus on the response to child sexual exploitation (CSE) and those children missing from home, care or education. A narrative outcome was published on 10 May 2016. This is an excerpt: <i>'Oxfordshire now has a highly developed and well-functioning approach to tackling exploitation. The local authority Strategic Lead for Child Sexual Exploitation provides clear direction and the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (OSCB) effectively oversees this through its CSE sub-group.'</i></p> <p>Both our children’s residential homes are regularly inspected and are currently GOOD with excellent examples in practice and outcomes.</p>
<p>What was the outcome of your last Ofsted inspection which included Adoption; what date was it?</p>	<p>The last Ofsted inspection report (Single Inspection Framework for LA Children’s Services) which included Adoption was in June 2014. The overall judgment was GOOD. All key areas, including Leadership & Management and Adoption, were judged to be GOOD. <i>'Oxfordshire’s adoption service operates with a clear emphasis on quality and timeliness. It uses the National Register to identify potential placements and has increased the number of family finding staff. It has a knowledgeable, committed and enthusiastic workforce. These factors contribute to good outcomes for children.</i> <i>Oxfordshire places a high priority on securing permanent homes for children. The drive to increase the number of adoptive placements has proved effective. In 2013–2014, Adoption Orders were made for 44 children. This is an increase of 38% on the previous year. The local authority has identified the need to increase the number of adoptions of children over 5 years and, as a result of effective targeting and recruitment, 13 adoptive placements were made in 2013–2014 for children aged 5 years and over.</i> <i>Where there are potential delays in the adoption process they are carefully monitored, and the reasons understood. Most such</i></p>

	<p><i>cases are of children with particularly complex needs. The local authority prioritises the need to find the right placement for children with complex needs even when this impacts upon overall timeliness statistics.'</i></p>
<p>Describe how your adoption service is currently managed</p>	<p>The Corporate Parenting Manager has overall responsibility for the Adoption Service (approx 30 members of staff). The Principal Social Worker and Service Manager for Children with Disabilities share the role of the Agency Decision Maker. The Service Manager (Adoption, Permanence & Fostering) provides the operational management of the service. The Adoption Advisor manages the work of the 3 Adoption and Permanence Panels run by the county and, in addition, has responsibility for developing policy and managing outside contracts with providers of services for adoption. The Adoption Team is managed by 2 managers. One is primarily responsible for recruiting and assessing prospective adopters and one is primarily responsible for family finding and matching children with prospective adopters, both within and outside Oxfordshire. The Team keeps approved adopters informed about children needing placement and supports them in finding 'good matches.' The Adoption and Permanence Support Team has a Team Manager who has the role of Adoption Support Service Adviser (for post order support), and manages all aspects of adoption support including the Adoption Helpdesk, the Birth Relative Support Service and the Letterbox Service. The Recruitment Team, which is shared with the Fostering Service, deals with enquiries from the public and the first stages of the application process for adopters. This team also organises marketing and recruitment campaigns to encourage local people to apply to adopt and to recruit adopters for specific children. Non Agency and Step Parent Adoption Services are currently provided by sessional workers and Adoption team staff. Sessional Social Workers undertake some adoption home studies when required. Administrative support staff includes a full time specialist adoption panel administrator, together with team administrators. The Adoption and Permanence Support Team has a full time specialist administrator who provides administrative support to the Letterbox Service. The Children's Social Care Teams, taking advice from the Adoption Team, provide services for children: assessing their needs, planning and preparing children for adoption.</p>
<p>What are your authority's key development & performance objectives for adoption over the next three years?</p>	<p>The aims, objectives, principles and values of Oxfordshire's Adoption Service are set out in the Statement of Purpose 2016/17. A copy of the Statement of Purpose may be found at https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/what-adoption</p> <p>An annual report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the Adoption Service is completed each year to demonstrate whether the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users. This is presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel in April of each year</p>

	<p>with a six monthly interim report in October of each year. A copy of the annual report may be found at</p> <p> Adoption Service Annual report 2015 1</p> <p>The key objectives for the Adoption Service for 2016/17 are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit more adopters for children aged 0-5 years, given the increased number of children in this age group with adoption plans • Continue targeted recruitment of adopters for sibling groups, disabled children and children from BME groups • Continue to approve more adopters with dual approval with a view to offering at least 4 Fostering-For-Adoption placements. • Undertake a review of policies and procedures at Stage 1 of the adopter assessment process to improve timescales for completion • Review the child’s pathway with the children’s teams to facilitate closer and earlier family finding • Continue work to make full use of the Adoption Support Fund • Continue to grow and develop adoption support services in relation to demand and recent changes in legislation • Continue to work with other local authorities/VAAAs, with a view to forming a Regional Adoption Agency.
<p>How are these monitored and reported?</p>	<p>Adoption managers meet monthly where managers report on progress against objectives. Managers produce quarterly reports on key areas of performance (recruitment, family finding and Adoption and Permanence Panel activity). The Adoption Service reports to the Corporate Parenting Panel every 6 months.</p>
<p>What is your authority’s escalation and resolution policy</p>	<p> resolution_and_escalation_pro.docx</p>
<p>What partner organisations do you routinely work with in adoption services and what have been the outcomes of this work?</p>	<p>Adoption South Central Consortium: Oxfordshire is a member of The Adoption South Central Consortium. This is an initiative between 10 local authorities and two voluntary agencies. (Oxfordshire, Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex, Brighton and Hove, Portsmouth, Southampton, Reading, East Sussex, the Isle of Wight, PACT and Cabrini) The aim of the Consortium is to share resources and expertise, particularly around family finding for children and widening the choice of prospective adopters earlier and more streamlined inter-agency work. We had also been exploring a broader collaboration, considering sharing of places at preparation groups and other adopter training events, and whether we could bring together and streamline adopter recruitment. The initial fruits of this endeavour were very encouraging, with a significant rise in</p>

interagency placements amongst these agencies for children who would have usually waited longer for adoptive placements. The agencies which are part of this Consortium are now focussing on the Regionalisation plans, but there remains good contact and co-working over family finding. Recent feedback by one of the agencies was *"I just wanted also to thank you for your support of (prospective adopters); they have found it a very positive experience working with you. I also felt that our good working relationship helped them as I was able to say very honestly how confident I was in Oxfordshire. I hope we will be able to work together again at some point."*

Adoption Link: We work with Adoption Link (Link Maker) and were one of the first agencies to subscribe - we strive to be one of the agencies who respond in the requested timescales usually at 100% , compared to the average of 75%

We have many placements made through adoption link, reaching a peak (53 children placed) in 2014-15. We have matched 21 children since April this year.

Medical Advisors to Oxfordshire's Adoption and Permanence Panel

We have very good working relationships with this group who provide very thorough and helpful medical reports. Six monthly meetings are held with medical, legal and Adoption staff to discuss practice issues. Medical advisors often go the extra mile to meet with prospective adopters and will do their best to prioritise urgent requests for medicals.

The **Designated Nurse for Looked After Children** provides a medical service to children with adoption plans until their adoptions are finalised. The **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)** and Primary CAMHS provide specialist mental health services for adopted children and their families.

The Adoption Team also works with a number of key internal partners, as follows:


Legal Advisers in the County child care team provide advice and support to staff and Adoption Panels on all aspects of adoption. They are a stable team with significant experience, interest and expertise in adoption. Some solicitors have lead responsibility for adoption and represent the legal team at meetings such as the legal and medical adviser meeting.

Oxfordshire's Virtual School supports the educational needs of children being placed for adoption.

Oxfordshire's Attach Team (Attaining Therapeutic Attachments for Children) works with adopted and looked after children and their carers in order to strengthen attachments and prevent disruption. It provides advice to adopters and therapeutic interventions for children and their adoptive families if required. The team includes clinical psychologists, a family therapist and a specialist senior practitioner.

The **Residential and Edge of Care Team** is available to provide intensive hands-on support if adopters are experiencing

	<p>extreme difficulties in their relationship with their child or are dealing with complex behaviour that may lead to family breakdown.</p> <p>The Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care Programme (MTFC) MTFC may be involved in some cases of Looked After Children with adoption plans who are placed with specialist MTFC foster carers before their placement for adoption. MTFC is part of the Oxfordshire fostering service, offering a specialist foster care treatment programme for children aged 3-11. The programme aims to enable a small number of children who have the most complex emotional, behavioural and developmental needs to be placed in short term treatment foster care placements where they will learn the skills needed to live in families on a permanent basis, either returning to live with birth families or moving on to permanence through adoption or fostering.</p> <p>When children who are on the MTFC programme are placed for adoption, their new adopters may continue to receive the services of the MTFC team in the transitional period after their move.</p> <p>SECUG: Oxfordshire is a member of the South East Group of Local Authorities which meets quarterly to discuss policy and practice issues in Adoption. This has been a very helpful forum to assist us in keeping abreast of developments in the field and networking opportunities.</p>
<p>Do you already have contracts with third parties/voluntary agencies for the delivery of adoption services? If so, please state, for each:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service contracted out and name of organisation • The value of the contract • The length of the contract • How the contract is managed, including an example of KPIs 	<p>Inter-country Adoption Oxfordshire County Council commissions a service from IAC Adoption Agency for those who wish to adopt from overseas. IAC also carry out adoption welfare supervision on behalf of the County in respect of children from overseas placed with adopters in Oxfordshire, until an Adoption Order is granted.</p> <p>The value of the contract is for 1 year (to 31/03/17). The annual fee for the service is £5,564.83 plus VAT for general subscription and assessment services and a fee of £270 per application. The Centre for Adoption (registered as Inter-country Adoption Centre).</p> <p>Adoptive Parent & Special Guardian Buddy Scheme The value of the contract is £4920 for one year (to 31/03/17).The provider is responsible for the provision of one to one peer support to adoptive parents within the county, which includes responsibility for coordinating the scheme and providing training, supervision and telephone support to buddies. The provider is also responsible for matching buddies with adopters. The contract is managed via regular meetings; evaluation reports and service user feedback</p> <p>Provision of Adoptive Parent Education & Training scheme The provider is responsible for the delivery of training to prospective adopters as follows: Parenting skills for adopters x 3 (20 hours); Reflection workshops x 5 (20 hours total) The provider is also contracted to provide training to approved adopters as follows: Coping with teens (general and advanced 26 hours total) ; Dealing with Anger (10 hours total) and Let's</p>

	<p>Play (4 hour workshop) The value of the contract is £20,550 for one year to 31/03/17 The contract is managed via regular meetings; evaluation reports and service user feedback.</p> <p>Consultancy Services (in the form of an Independent Adoption & Permanence Panel Chair) The value of the contract is up to £19,500 per year based on sessional payments for chairing Panels and attendance of other meetings as required. The contract is for one year (until 31/03/16) Adoption Panels are held 3 x per month and the provider is responsible for chairing all three panels. The contract is managed by the Adoption Panel Advisor who oversees the running of Panel and receives feedback from Staff and adopters/foster carers.</p>
<p>What would be the line management arrangements for the service manager of the new service; what capacity do you have to do this?</p>	<p>If Oxfordshire were to host the Regional Adoption Agency the Service Manager would report to the Corporate Parenting Manager</p> <p>Current structure chart:</p>  <p>Corporate parenting structure chart 30 09</p>
<p>Reputational</p>	
<p>How aware are your lead members about the RAA agenda and how supportive are they about the approach taken?</p>	<p>The lead member for Children’s services and other county councillors have been briefed about the RAA agenda at the Corporate Parenting Panel and will be kept informed about progress on a regular basis. Further stakeholder events will be taking place in the autumn and councillors will be invited to these.</p> <p>Councillors are proud of Oxfordshire’s performance in achieving good outcomes for children through adoption. They are supportive of the principles informing the Government agenda to reduce delay in placing children for adoption where this is the desired outcome. However they will require reassurance that the high standard and quality of work currently achieved in Oxfordshire will be sustained following the formation of an RAA.</p>
<p>How stable and experienced are your managers at DCS, AD and service manager level?</p>	<p>The DCS has been in post since 2011 but will be leaving his post in March 2017. The process to recruit a successor is under way. The Deputy Director responsible for Adoption is one of two deputy directors and has been in post since 2015. She was promoted within Children’s Services having worked in a number of senior manager roles in Children’s Social Care.</p> <p>The Corporate Parenting manager has been in post since 2012. The Service Manager has managed the Fostering Service since 2009 and took on additional responsibility for the Adoption Service in 2012 having previously held the post of Service Manager for Looked After Children in Oxfordshire.</p>
<p>How do your customers view your current adoption service – what evidence do you have of customer satisfaction?</p>	<p>Oxfordshire Children’s Social Care is committed to providing good quality services and welcomes feedback about services it delivers and purchases. For example, a recent complaint highlighted delays in stage one of our adoption process. As a result of this the Adoption Advisor undertook a review of timescales for stage one assessments of adopters approved in 2015/16. This highlighted some areas for improvement and an</p>

action plan has been put in place to improve timescales for completion of stage one assessments.

The following feedback was received in the year 2015/16:

Adopter feedback on the Adoption process:

"I wanted to let you know that I spoke to someone yesterday who was enquiring about adoption. She said she had contacted several Local Authority agencies but had decided to apply to Oxfordshire because she had found Emma (enquiry officer) very friendly and helpful in her initial telephone contact - much more welcoming than the responses she had received elsewhere. She added that she had been to several Information Evenings and found ours to be the most informative; she liked the fact that it was friendly and informal and she said it was great to hear an adopter tell their story. "

"We have no comparison to other local authorities, but we are so grateful we went through this process in Oxford."

"From our first introductory meeting and right the way through to this final point, we have been truly blessed with some of the best support, advice and experience."

"We would like to thank all of you at Oxfordshire Adoption Team. There are not enough adjectives in the Oxford dictionary to fully express our praise and gratitude. "

"We wanted to take a moment to thank you formally for supporting us through our home study period. We have truly enjoyed the experience; you are beautifully articulate, warm, genuine and real. We will never forget you and will always be grateful for your incredible contribution. We know you will say 'it's my job' but it's more than a job; your words and amazing ability to communicate could potentially/will hopefully change our lives".

Feedback from those attending the Adoption & Permanence Panel (this includes feedback from workers as well as applicants, adopters or foster carers); comments have included:

"Panel was a very positive experience. Panel members and Chair put us at our ease which really helped to calm the nerves."

"We are glad we attended, even though it was nerve-wracking. It was excellent, welcoming, knowledgeable and thoughtful."

"We felt the whole experience was positive and were very glad we went."

"There was a full house of panel members which is always daunting, especially for the size of the room."

"The distance and traffic made Panel a 7 hour trip – is Skype or something similar possible?"

Preparation and training

"M feels the Preparation group and process of becoming an

adoptive parent is changing him. He stated he was firstly adverse to meeting birth parents but now thinks there are many positives."

"I am learning how I can be positive re-building a child's life".

"The training has changed my thinking, a real education about adoption".

Post Adoption Support

Annual Adoption Picnic The 2016 picnic in early June was attended by 131 adoptive parents and 102 adopted children - some continuing to drive several hours to this popular event - and was supported by many staff members from across the Adoption and wider Children's teams.

"Thank you all so much for such a wonderful Fun Day on Saturday. The atmosphere was lovely and we really enjoyed ourselves."

"It was our first Adopt Fun Day and our new son (aged 5) had a ball and loved being with other forever children and families!"

"All the face painting, bouncy castles, calm bottles, art, dancing etc. added to the excitement!"

"Massive thanks to you and your colleagues for giving up your time to plan and run such an amazing event. You were all so friendly and welcoming and we had the best time!! I am genuinely looking forward to next year (presuming of course we're invited!)"

AdOpt Programme OCC took part in an evaluation programme in 2015-16, which necessitated running 2 AdOpt programmes.

"I used the 'breaking things to do' module on Friday night as it was S & P's sleepover party so it was excellent and I used it for all their friends too explaining what needed to be done rather than saying "now get ready for bed"....this course is brilliant!"

"I used all the positive techniques for everything - the transformation has been amazing ...there is also lots of difference with how much calmer they are with us noticing and commenting on what good things they keep doing and praising them - they are relishing it!" (adoptive parent)

"I spoke with C, who loves the programme... she said it has been (almost) life changing! She advised me that you may be running an evening programme and I was wondering if you could you let me know the dates etc" (adoption professional).

"They put me in touch with Oxfordshire County Council who run a special course for adoptive parents, which has been so helpful" (information taken from VAA website)

Adults Affected by Adoption

"Thank you very much for the information about my adoption...It was particularly helpful to have the support of a professional with experience of adoption matters and I now feel buoyed by the information about my birth father and his background and family. I feel more grounded in a way, and I hope that I can

now move forward and feel less uneasy about my past" (adult adoptee).

Support for Birth relatives

"Thank you for arranging the meeting for us. It was managed very smoothly and was just the right length of time. G was very pleased to see her grandparents and it was a positive meeting for her."

Support from specialist teams Some children are in a Multi Treatment Foster Care placement prior to an adoptive placement. The ATTACH team may also have already been working with the child prior to an adoptive placement. The expertise within the MTFC team and the ATTACH team have greatly contributed towards the transitions these children needed to make.

Feedback:

"I have needed considerable support since the placement of my child, and cannot fault the support I have received".

Individual work with adopters and adopted children:

"We now have a correct Life Story book which is really well written and T consulted with me throughout the writing of this. She helped me secure a place at a great school once we moved out of area. We moved to get a better school for our children's needs and this has been achieved really quickly and both girls will benefit from being in a smaller school where everyone knows them. The support we had was excellent from T."
(adoptive parent)

"Also, just wanted to let you know this is the happiest I've been in a long, long time. I have both families in my life now ... I also want to thank you for everything you've done for me because without you who knows where I'd be? I know I was going off the rails before I met you and you put me back on the right track and now everything in my life is good and I don't have to worry about anything anymore. I think if I try hard I'll have a really good future. Thank you so much for everything you've done. I really do appreciate everything!" (16 year old adoptee)

Buddy scheme Oxfordshire has a scheme to link adopters with a buddy and also with an adopter for peer support.

Feedback:

"Having J as a buddy helped me through one of the most difficult periods in my life. I've gained a few more grey hairs, but have also gained a belief that I can get through even the most challenging of times, and this is something I hope I can draw on in the years ahead. She helped me stay on the right side of sanity (well mostly!) and without judging or lecturing, gave me thoughtful advice and the benefit of her own hard won experience. I hope that in some small way, I have also helped her in her journey through family life and that she and the other buddies continue their brilliant work" (adopter)

Feedback from court/other professionals:

	<p><i>"The family finders work closely with the children's social workers and with foster carers, and are often called upon to give evidence in the Care Proceedings, which is much appreciated"</i></p> <p><i>"Just to let you know that the court made the placement orders for the girls today. Many thanks for your help. Your evidence in court was brilliant". (LAC Team Manager)</i></p> <p><i>"I just wanted to say thank you for this morning. One of the most useful things for me was hearing you (Birth Relative Support Worker for Oxfordshire) talk. I will certainly consider contact arrangements for siblings closely when submitting final care plans for the court in future" (county solicitor)</i></p> <p><i>"I felt it important to acknowledge the exceptional working relationship that has developed between Adoption Support and REoC, specifically from my perspective the relationship with the move on team. My staff felt both included and supported in trying to achieve sustainable objectives for the young people and families they have been working with. It has felt very positive the way the team has embraced the REoC offer."</i></p> <p><i>In the meantime I wanted to pass on to you and your managers that I received positive feedback about the high quality of your social work, written work and oral evidence from the barristers at this hearing.</i></p>
<p>What do your staff think of working for you – what evidence do you have of staff satisfaction?</p>	<p>In 2016 a staff survey was carried out with all county council staff. The response rate was 45%, which is very high.</p> <p>The key findings were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 85% believe that they can make a difference in their role ➤ 85% are clear about what is expected of them at work ➤ 76% feel that their manager listens to and values your opinions and ideas ➤ 75% feel that finding ways to do things differently or better is encouraged in their team ➤ 71% feel their manager takes an active interest in their personal development <p>Peter Clark (County Director)'s response to the survey was as follows: <i>"What that tells me is that on a team level, we know our business, we feel supported and we are achieving good outcomes for people. I am heartened by your level of commitment and positivity, especially during these difficult times, and I would like to thank you all".</i></p> <p>Adoption staff feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I feel very well supported and listened to. I enjoy being encouraged to find solutions and ways to improve our practice and I feel valued as a team member.</i> • <i>I came to Oxfordshire in 2012, having been employed in a previous local authority for a number of years. I found the Adoption teams and all the staff to be incredibly welcoming the managers very clear about work expectations and supportive; I have felt very valued for the experience I brought into the job and trusted to get on with it!! The quality of social work practice and supervision I have experienced has been of a very high</i>

	<p><i>standard. Oxfordshire in my experience has a very innovative and creative Adoption Service and can think outside of the box! The adoption practitioners all work well together to make sure the best outcomes for children. I work within an adoption support service that has a very dedicated and experienced team of staff who are willing to share their knowledge with each other and colleagues in other teams. I have always felt part of the organisation and feel very fortunate to be employed here.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I have been in the Adoption Team since December 2014. It is a very positive and supportive team where everyone shares advice and expertise so I feel I have learned a lot in the relatively short time I have been in the team. I have really appreciated the supervision I receive from my Manager. I learn a lot from discussions in supervision and even between supervision sessions I know can seek advice whenever any issues arise. I also feel able to seek advice from senior practitioners and from colleagues in the team either during team meetings or just on a day to day basis, so there is a real sense of being part of a team. It helps to know that there is a lot of experience and expertise within the team and in the other teams who are on hand to discuss issues, eg the Adoption Support Team, the Birth Relative Support Worker and Attach. I enjoy the variety of the work - adopter assessments, family finding and delivering training to adopters.</i> <i>I have been a social worker with Oxfordshire County Council since 2009. I therefore know a lot of colleagues from Looked After Children, Family Support Teams and Fostering Teams which helps when liaising with colleagues. I think it is very positive that I know the Area Manager and Corporate Parenting Manager; I feel able to approach them directly if appropriate and I feel that they have very good knowledge of the work of the Adoption Team.</i> <p><i>"OCC encourages development and creativity and ensures staff are supported to achieve good outcomes for children and adoptive parents".</i></p> <p><i>What has been good about working for Oxfordshire adoption team: The team allows all workers to build on their strengths and interests; this ensures that as a team we bring a wide variation of skills and therefore high quality services for all service users.</i></p>		
<p>What are your vacancy and staff turnover rates in your children's social care service and in adoption teams?</p>	<p>Children's teams: Please see information below.</p> <p>Adoption Teams: Recruitment and retention of Adoption staff is good. We have an experienced, stable staff group, low vacancy rate and very low turnover rates in the Adoption team. In the past year 2 team members have resigned from their posts. This was for family reasons; in each case, due to relocation.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="754 1998 1401 2040"> <tr> <td data-bbox="754 1998 1157 2040">Children's Social Care</td> <td data-bbox="1157 1998 1401 2040">Adoption</td> </tr> </table>	Children's Social Care	Adoption
Children's Social Care	Adoption		

		Teams	Teams
	Vacancy Rate	13.84%	4.98%
	Turnover Rate	17.89%	2.65%
Do you have a stable workforce in Adoption?	We have a very stable workforce in the Adoption Service.		
What percentage of your staff are agency staff in children's social care and the adoption service?	<p>We currently have 19% casual and agency staff in Children's Social Care.</p> <p>We have no agency staff in the Adoption Service.</p>		
Please add any further information which you think may be of assistance			