



Statement of Purpose 2023/2024



Introduction

This Statement of Purpose sets out the vision, values and principles and objectives of the Regional Adoption Agency; Adopt Coast to Coast. Durham County Council and Together for Children / Sunderland City Council have been working together as a Regional Adoption Agency since Adopt Coast to Coast's launch on the 1st April 2021. Together for Children was established on the 1st April 2017 to deliver children's services on behalf of Sunderland City Council. Together for Children is owned by Sunderland City Council but controlled by an independent board to ensure operational independence. The launch followed an extended period of development and Adopt Coast to Coast previously included Cumbria County Council.

The delivery model for Adopt Coast to Coast is a partnership one based on a collaborative "hub and spoke" model.

Under the model, Durham County Council and Together for Children have agreed to collaborate in relation to the performance of their statutory adoption functions through a legally binding RAA partnership agreement.

They are jointly operating a central RAA "hub" for collaboration purposes which comprises a joint Governance Board (which will be responsible for "key" RAA decisions), a regional joint RAA Head of Service and other relevant central services.

Both authority adoption services continue to operate at a local "spoke" level, under the day-to-day co-ordination of the Head of Service and implement the agreed joint plans, policies and strategies as approved by the Governance Board.

This Statement of Purpose describes how the vision, values, principles, and objectives will be met in partnership across the statutory services operating in the 2 local authority partners as well as with carers, children, young people, and their families. It also explains the facilities and services of the Hub and each of the local authority adoption spokes, which are delivered in accordance with adoption legislation and regulatory frameworks including:

- Children and Adoption Act 2006
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (revised 2011)
- The Adoption Minimum Standards 2014.
- Adopters Charter 2011
- The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments)
- Regulations 2012
- Action Plan for Adoption Tackling Delay 2012.
- Statutory Guidance on Adoption 2013
- Children and Families Act 2014.

This document will be made available upon request for inspection by:

- any person working for the purposes of Adopt Coast to Coast
- children who may be adopted, their birth parents and guardians
- person wishing to adopt a child
- adopted persons, their parents, natural parents and former guardians.

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed at least annually and amended as necessary and published on the Adopt Coast to Coast webpage. It will also be updated to accommodate changes in legislation, practice, policies and priorities as required.

Vision

The vision for Adopt Coast to Coast is that children will achieve their full potential within a loving and secure family, and everyone affected by adoption will receive a high-quality innovative and sustainable service.

The overall objectives for Adopt Coast to Coast are to:

- Provide child-centred services
- Deliver a high-quality accessible service to adopters and potential adopters
- Provide an accessible independent service for birth families affected by adoption
- Create strong partnership working with Local Authorities, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and universal services
- Offer a service which is high-quality and provides good value for money

Like other Regional Adoption Agencies, Adopt Coast to Coast has significant challenges to overcome:

- An increasing number of Children Looked After
- A high number of Adoptions
- An increasing complexity of Adoption needs
- Ability to recruit sufficient Adopters

Adopt Coast to Coast places great emphasis on working with children and their families/carers to promote and maintain stability, safety and security for children. Children have a right to a family life where they can be claimed as family members, form and maintain effective relationships, fulfil their potential and achieve their potential within a loving, caring and positive environment.

Those children who need to be cared for by the Local Authorities are likely to be the most vulnerable and in need of help and support. They may have experienced neglect, abuse, trauma and disruption in their childhood and could have complex needs as a result of their experiences.

A primary consideration in meeting such a child's needs for permanence is, wherever possible, to maintain or return them to their family of origin, including extended family. However, where this cannot be achieved an alternative permanent placement outside their birth family will be required. For some children their current and future needs will be best met through adoption.

Values and Principles

Adopt Coast to Coast is committed to maintaining the values and principles in accordance with the Adoption Minimum Standards 2014.

There is commitment from both organisations to work together as partners in a single RAA across the geographical area, to achieve:

- A culture of early permanence planning in order to identify suitable adopters for children at the earliest possible stage during the care planning process to ensure the timeliness of the child moving in with their adoptive family.
- Marketing activity and recruitment of prospective adoptive families to meet the needs of the range of children, including groups of brothers and sisters.
- Assessment and training of prospective adopters to a consistently high standard.
- Development of services across the range of adoption functions in the RAA through the capturing of stakeholder views and best regional and national practice.
- 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 quality of service across the RAA area.
- Effective and easily accessible Birth Family support.
- Access to consistent quality and responsive Intermediary Services.

Services in Scope

Included within the scope of the Regional Adoption Agency are:

- Early Permanence planning
- Marketing activity and recruitment of prospective adopters
- Assessment and training of prospective adopters
- Tracking, Linking and Matching
- Pre and Post Adoption Support
- Birth Family Support
- Intermediary Services

The expectation would be that all adoption functions as currently carried out by Durham County Council and Together for Children or commissioned by them would be in scope of the new RAA. The commissioning of interagency placements as undertaken currently would continue.

The following services are not in scope:

- Special Guardianship assessment
- Special Guardianship post order support
- Fostering

Commitment to Adopters

Adopt Coast to Coast is committed to reflecting the spirit and intentions of the Adopters Charter 2011.

Objectives

The overall objectives for Adopt Coast to Coast are to:

- Provide child-centred services.
- Deliver a high-quality accessible service to adopters and potential adopters.
- Provide an accessible independent service for birth families and others affected by adoption.
- Create strong partnership working with Local Authorities, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and universal services.
- Offer a service which is high-quality and provides good value for money.

We will deliver our objectives by:

1. Providing child-centred services through:
 - Placing the child at the centre throughout their adoption journey, including into adulthood.

- Securing early permanence to prevent delay and achieve the best possible outcomes.
- Recognising the child's voice in permanence planning and ensuring communication is effective to enable them to understand their life narrative.
- Creating a sense of belonging for the child, in a secure permanent family and in the wider adoption community.
- Ensuring access to support at the level and time that it is needed.
- Ensuring sufficient adopters to promote the best possible match for the child.

2. Giving a high-quality accessible service to adopters and potential adopters through:

- Ensuring applicants receive a sensitive, flexible and welcoming service.
- Responding to enquiries from potential adopters in a timely manner.
- Giving prospective adopters clear, realistic and timely feedback at all stages of their enquiry and application.
- Ensuring that adopters fully contribute to an evidence-based assessment, approval and matching process.
- Providing consistent quality of adoption support that is relevant to individual adopter family's needs.
- Identifying and progressing potential matches at the earliest possible stage.
- Providing qualified, skilled and experienced staff to support and guide adopters throughout their journey.
- Offering consistent, high quality, up to date training throughout, to enable adopters to understand the lifelong impact of adoption.

3. Providing an accessible independent service for birth families and others affected by adoption which will include:

- Support for birth family members whose children have a plan of adoption and enabling them, at any point, to contribute to the child's understanding of their life story.
- Intermediary services to birth family members and adopted adults.
- A letterbox service to facilitate ongoing positive contact between birth families and children.
- Facilitation of direct contact where this meets the child's needs.

4. Creating strong partnership working with Local Authorities, Voluntary Adoption Agencies and universal services by:

- Working with Voluntary Adoption Agencies in the delivery of Adopt Coast to Coast services.
- Sharing learning and striving for evidence-based best practice.
- Commitment to achieving best outcomes through the continual development and delivery of a range of high-quality services via a combination of 'in-house' provision and in partnership with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies.
- Ensuring consistent and long-term sustainability of service delivery and funding to the Voluntary Adoption Agencies for the benefit of children.

5. Offering a service which is high-quality and provides good value for money through:

- Demonstrating consistently excellent practice which results in excellent outcomes for children.
- Ensuring consistency of quality-of-service provision across Adopt Coast to Coast.
- The efficient, effective and innovative use of resources.
- Effectively commissioning and reviewing appropriate services.
- Developing and implementing clear minimum standards.
- Continually learning from stakeholders, best practice and adapting services accordingly.

Adoption Services

Adoption Services are provided to:

- Children and young people who are to be adopted
- Birth Parents of children being placed for adoption.
- Prospective and Approved Adopters including those who are seeking to adopt children from overseas
- Children and their adoptive families who require adoption support services
- Adopted adults and members of their birth families.

Hub Staff

Name and Address of Adopt Coast to Coast's Head of Service

Paula Gibbons
C/O Children and Young People's Services
Ground Floor
Durham County Council
Spectrum 8
Seaham
County Durham
SR7 7TT

Head of Service (Full Time) Qualifications & Experience

- Diploma in Social Work – 1994
- BA (Hons) in Social Work Studies – 1995
- Practice Teachers Award – 2001
- PQ1 – 2003
- Postgraduate Certificate in Management Studies – 2005

- North Tyneside Council (1994)
- North Tyneside Council: Social Worker Family Placement Team (2002)
- North Tyneside Council: Senior Social Worker Family Placement Team (2003)
- North Tyneside Council: Team Manager, Fostering Service (2003)

- North Tyneside Council and Northumberland County Council: Service Manager Jointly Commissioned Fostering Service – (2011)
- North Tyneside Council: Service Manager, Fostering and Adoption (2011)
- North Tyneside Council: Service Manager, Adoption Service (2018)
- Adopt North East: Family Finding Team Manager (2018)
- Durham County Council: Adoption Team Manager (November 2019)
- Adopt Coast to Coast: Head of Service (September 2020)

Communications and Marketing Manager (Full Time)

- VACANT

Business Support Officer (10 hours)

- BTEC HND Business and Finance (International marketing) (1994)
- BA Hons Business Administration (Marketing) (1995)
- Marie Curie Cancer Care: Fundraising Administrator (1995)
- Weston Spirit – Communications Officer (2000)
- National Blood Service – Donor Relations Marketing Co-ordinator (2001)
- Durham County Council Administration Officer for Operations Manager (2015 to present)
- Durham County Council Marketing and Recruitment officer (18 months secondment) (March 2017 – September 2018)
- Durham County Council Admin Officer (Additional Hours) (March 2020 – November 2020)
- Durham County Council Administration Officer for Hub (November 2020 to present)

The Hub has access to a number of support services such as Performance and Finance.

The Head of Service is registered with Social Work England.

Governance Arrangements

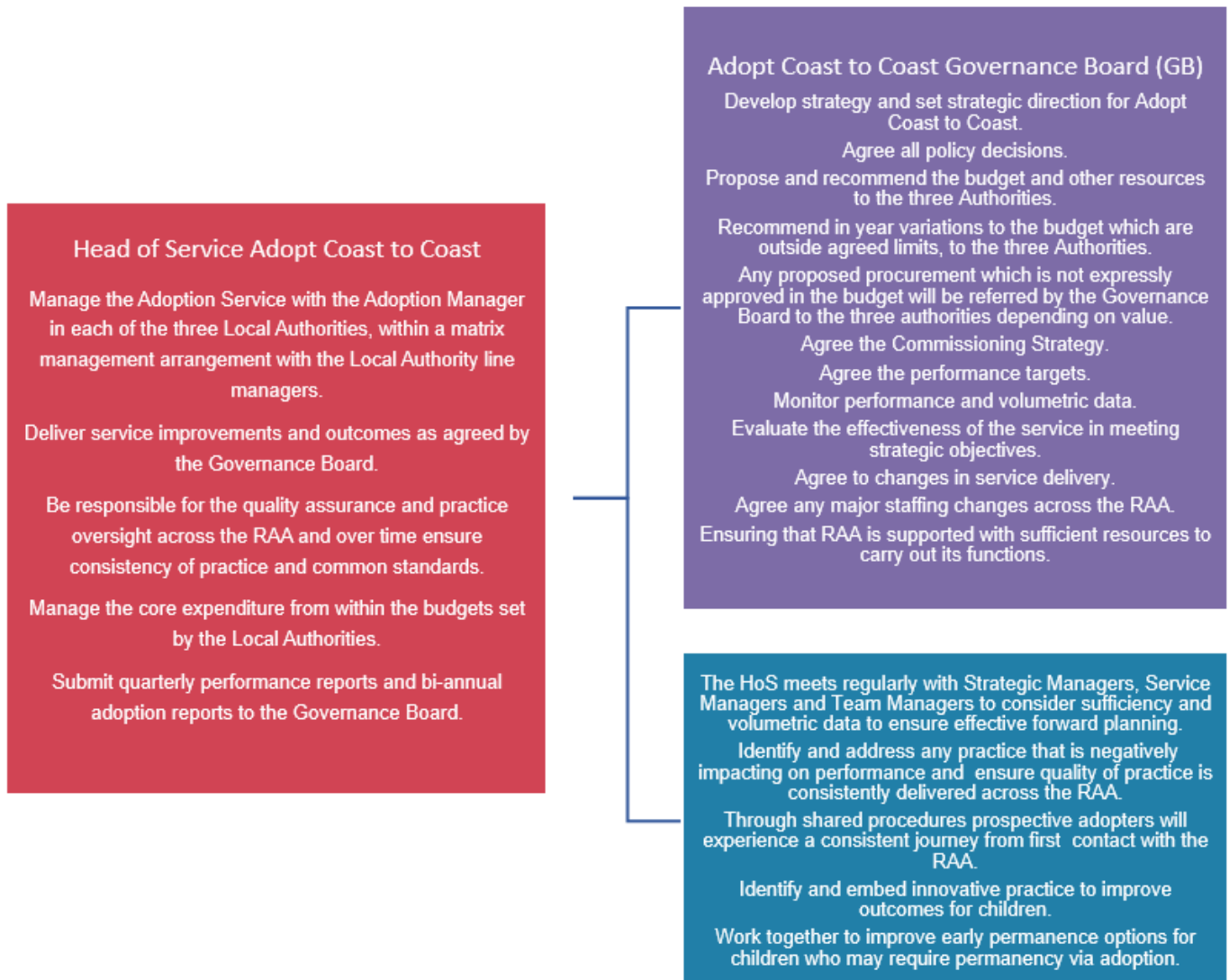
The Head of Service is accountable through a matrix management arrangement for the performance, service improvements and delivery of the agreed outcomes across the 2 spokes as detailed under the partnership arrangements. As lead for quality assurance across all aspects of adoption practice the Head of Service will ensure the development of consistent practice to a set of agreed standards.

The Head of Service is accountable to the Governance Board and this accountability will be monitored through the receipt of quarterly performance reports and bi-annual adoption reports on behalf of the RAA.

The Head of Service will provide whole system leadership, influencing, leading and oversight of resources, (for example interagency spend) to deliver improved outcomes for looked after children with a plan of adoption in the spokes.

The Head of Service will have a formal matrix management arrangement with the lead adoption person in each spoke and their line manager.

The Head of Service will have delegated authority to co-ordinate the activities of other Local Authority Officers who have identified responsibilities which support the partnership. The Head of Service through the Adoption Manager will hold these officers to account for the discharge of their roles and functions in relation to the partnership, as prescribed by the Governance Board.



The Governance Board will meet every 3 months (as a minimum) and membership will consist of:

- Directors of Children's Social Care or their nominated officers
- Head of Service
- Voluntary Adoption Agency representative

The Governance Board will develop strategy and set strategic direction for Adopt Coast to Coast as detailed above.

Local Authority Members have a key role in ensuring that the RAA delivers good outcomes for Children and Young People. Their involvement and oversight will be as follows:

- Lead Members will meet with the Governance Board bi-annually to receive an update on progress and outcomes.
- Lead Members will receive regular briefings from their Directors of Children's Services.
- Corporate Parenting Boards will receive updates on the progress and outcomes of the RAA.
- Scrutiny panels will have oversight of the RAA as appropriate.

The Local Authority Strategic Managers Meeting will be held 10 weekly and required membership is the strategic manager with responsibility for adoption.

The Adopt Coast to Coast Service Managers Meeting will be held on an 8 weekly basis and required membership is the service lead for adoption in both local authorities and the Communications and Marketing Manager. The meeting will be chaired by the Head of Service.

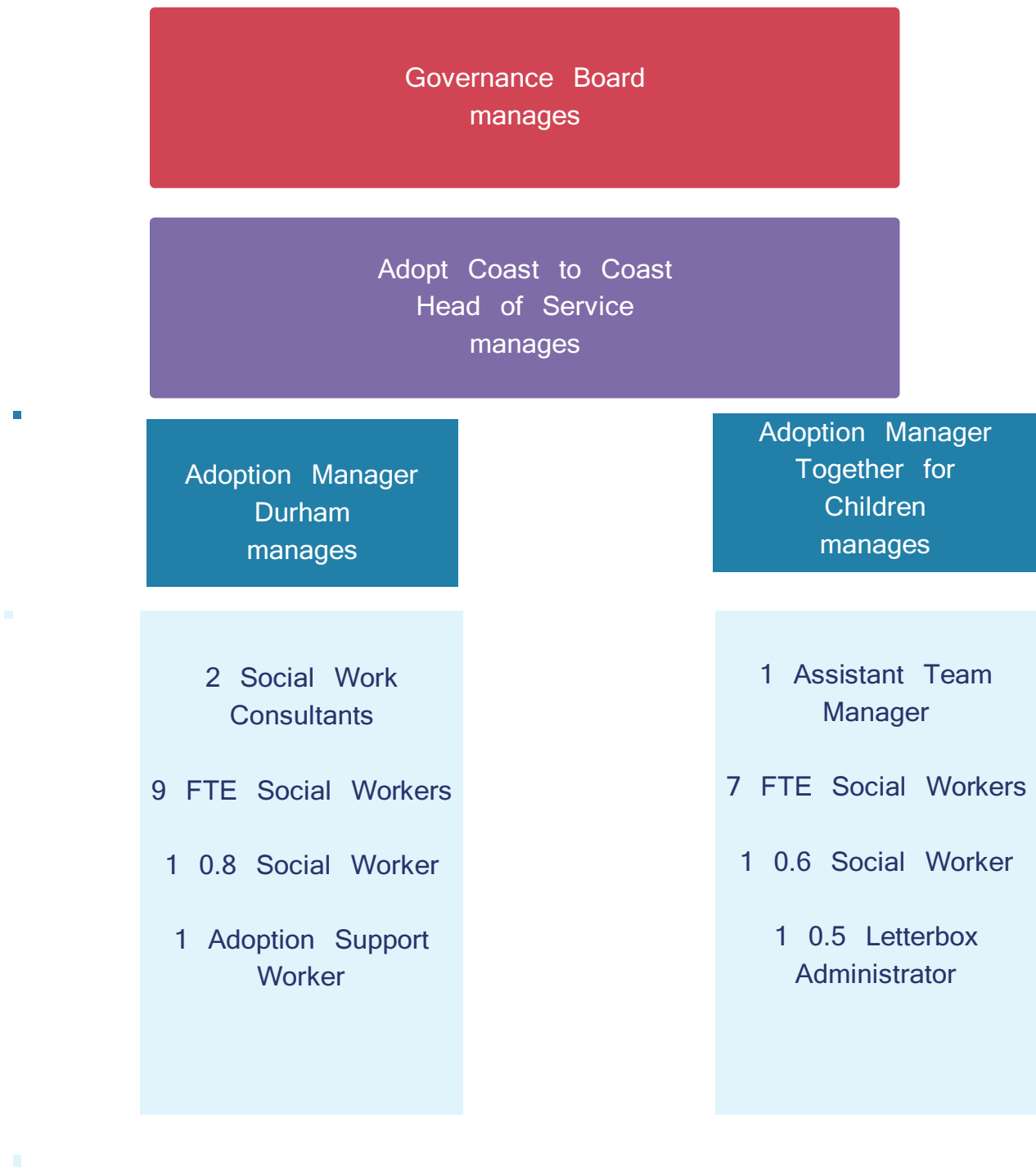
Invitations will be extended to others for example, IT/Performance as per agenda.

The Adopt Coast to Coast Team Managers will meet on a 6 weekly basis and required membership are the Adoption Team Managers for both spokes and the Communications and Marketing Manager. The meeting will be chaired by the Head of Service.

Invitations will be extended to others for example, Adoption Assistant Team Managers/Social Work Consultants, IT or Performance as per agenda.

On a 6 monthly basis the Strategic Managers will host a meeting with the Service Managers and Team Managers across Adopt Coast to Coast to review progress and discuss the priorities for the next 6 months.

The Head of Service will meet with the strategic leads for the VAA(s) who have successfully tendered for interagency providers on a minimum of a 6 monthly basis to facilitate open and frank conversations about the practice and requirements in supporting Adopt Coast to Coast.



Recruitment of prospective adopters

Adopt Coast to Coast's hub is responsible for all the marketing and recruitment activity on behalf of the spokes. The budget is set annually by the Governance Board and this work will be led by the dedicated Communications and Marketing Manager.

Adopt Coast to Coast will utilise management information on children, (numbers referred, gender, ages, sibling groups, children's needs etc.) to inform, prioritise and target recruitment to meet the needs of children requiring adoption across our geographical footprint.

Adopt Coast to Coast's website includes detailed information that those considering adoption would want to know. It also has an on-line registration of interest form that automatically sends the enquiry to the spoke based on the enquirer's postcode.

An experienced team of call handlers within Durham County Council respond to telephone enquiries.

An information pack is available electronically to provide advice to enquirers on a full range of adoption issues and support services which are available throughout the adoption journey.

Adopt Coast to Coast recognises the value in attracting applicants from diverse backgrounds. Advertising material and written information are designed to highlight children's needs for safe and stable parenting whilst emphasising that enquiries and applications are encouraged from people from a wide variety of backgrounds.

The marketing approach to adoption recruitment seeks to raise public awareness of the needs of children and the rewards and challenges of adoptive parenting. The timing of advertising is planned to facilitate a professional and speedy response to enquiries and is co-ordinated with planned preparation groups. Recruitment activity, preparation groups, assessments and the staffing required to facilitate a smooth transition for applicants through these processes are planned on an annual basis.

Adopt Coast to Coast spokes offer virtual information events. These events take place on an evening and weekend morning twice a month to ensure they are accessible to as many people as possible. Information events provide opportunities for enquirers to talk to experienced adoption social workers and adoptive parents. Enquirers can book a place on the most convenient date for them directly through the website.

Concurrent Planning and Fostering for Adoption

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. Adopt Coast to Coast is focused on developing and maintaining 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 prospective adoptive family as early as possible. Recruitment and marketing strategies are in place to target recruitment of families who can best meet the needs of the children for whom we are seeking families.

Together we use our combined expertise to support staff who prepare children to move to their new families and as an RAA identify and deliver bespoke adoption support to meet the individual needs of the child and their prospective adoptive family.

Early Permanence will include:

- Fostering for Adoption
- Concurrency

Adopt Coast to Coast will work across the Local Authority partners to create a culture of Early Permanence planning in order to identify possible suitable prospective adopters for children at the earliest stage during the care planning process. Earlier placement supports the best outcomes for children.

What this means in practice:

- Each Local Authority will have an Early Permanence Strategy which will include all children regardless of route to permanence.
- Adopt Coast to Coast will support the embedding of early permanence thinking within each Local Authority, so this practice is integrated into the culture and practice of the organisation with senior managers and legal teams supporting the principles and the benefits of early permanence.
- We will do this by ensuring that early permanence is a fundamental part of social work practice.
- This will be achieved by:
 - Ensuring effective leadership around early permanence.
 - Constant raising of awareness – through meetings and other engagement opportunities.
 - Effective and ongoing training for all staff – recognising the turn-over in children's care planning teams.

Early Linking and Matching

A central focus for Adopt Coast to Coast is securing earlier links for children who have a plan of adoption. The solution is within Link Maker where Adopt Coast to Coast has a dedicated portal. All prospective adopters entering stage 2 are asked to add their profile to Link Maker which allows the Family Finders in both spokes to consider them for children once the respective local authority has identified the child as requiring a plan of adoption.

The partnership with a VAA provides exclusive access to their prospective adopters for 4 months (stage 2) for Adopt Coast to Coast. Where a child is considered likely 'to wait longer' the VAA prospective adopters will be considered at the same time as the Adopt Coast to Coast prospective adopters. Longer to wait refers to children aged 5 years or older, groups of 3 or more brothers and sisters, BAME children and children with complex health needs and/or a disability. For all other children Adopt Coast to Coast will consider their own prospective adopters before the VAAs. This in-house search will be completed very quickly so children are not delayed unnecessarily.

Functions

Function	What	Responsible
Communications	Brand, Website and Marketing	Hub
Communications	Events, Campaigns and Information Sessions	Hub/Spokes
Prospective Adopter Recruitment	Enquiries	Hub/Spokes
Prospective Adopter Assessment	Training, Stage 1 (ROI/Statutory Checks), Stage 2 (Assessment) and Administration of Panels Panel	Spokes
Prospective Adopter Assessment	Agency Decision Maker (ADM)	Locality
Early Permanence (EP)/Permanence planning	Early tracking, Consideration if EP placement and ADM/Child Should be Placed for Adoption	Locality/Spokes
Tracking, Family Finding and Matching	Early Tracking, Centralised Tracking, Activity Days, Family Finding and Linking and Matching	Hub, Spokes, Localities and VAA
Placement Planning	ADM for the Match, Placement planning and Introductions, Placement, Court and Life Story Work	Locality/Spokes
Post Adoption	Post Box, Adoption Support, Management of Adoption Support Fund and Administration and	Spokes

	review of financial support for adoptive families	
Support for those affected by adoption	Birth Records and Intermediary work and Independent service for birth families	Spokes
Other RAA Core Functions	Sufficiency Planning Performance, Management and Returns and Governance Board Finance and Budget monitoring	Hub, Spokes, Localities and VAA

Monitoring, quality assurance and complaints and Ofsted

Adopt Coast to Coast is committed to providing services that comply with National Regulations, Guidance and Standards. Monitoring and quality assurance is undertaken by the following methods:

- Staff are provided with monthly supervision and an annual Professional Development Report where the quality of work and practice is monitored, and training and professional development needs are identified.
- Adoption Team Meetings in each spoke are held regularly and provide opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of adoption systems, processes and practice issues.
- Family Finding meetings supplement Link Maker to ensure each child who is likely to have a plan of adoption will have their needs considered at the earliest opportunity.
- Monthly performance information is provided to the hub by both spokes and the analysis will be utilised in various meetings in both the hub and spokes.
- Performance Reports are produced 3 monthly that includes information on key adoption data are analysed by the Head of Service.
- Learning from disruptions, complaints and compliments are standing agenda items for the Team Managers Meetings.
- Six monthly reports on the activity across Adopt Coast to Coast will be produced by the Head of Service for the Governance Board and internal sharing in each spoke.

Performance Measures and the Performance Management Framework are set out in appendix 1.

Adopt Coast to Coast will utilise a range of means to gather service users' feedback during different stages of the adoption process. This information will be analysed and reported in the bi-annual and annual reports.

Comments, Compliments and Complaints

Each spoke has established procedures and information leaflets in relation to any representation from service users. In respect of issues related to the Hub these should be directed to Durham County Council. Information for the public on the Complaints procedure is available via the [Children's Services complaints PDF](#).

Durham County Council maintains centralised records and management information in relation to corporate complaints and their outcome. Children and Young People's Services maintains centralised records in relation to statutory (social care) complaints and their outcome.

Ofsted

Each Local Authority will continue to be inspected by Ofsted under the ILACS framework and will be evaluated on the effectiveness of the recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters. As partners in Adopt Coast to Coast each Local Authority must demonstrate how the hub and spoke arrangement complies with their statutory responsibilities to meet the needs of their local children. In respect of the hub functions the inspectors will look at each Local Authority's arrangements to assure itself that the hub is meeting the needs of local children. To support the inspection processes the hub will need to provide the necessary information for each Local Authority.

Appendix 1

There will be two types of performance measures:

1. Primary Measures – Balanced Scorecard as reported to Governance Board (set out below)
2. Secondary Measures – providing additional performance information to support wider business improvements

Primary Performance Measures

Resources (R)

1. Interagency budget targets are achieved.
2. Budget targets/savings achieved.
3. Effective commissioning of services.
4. Application to Adoption Support Fund (% of successful applications).
Monitoring of numbers of externally provided workforce (agency staff).

Business/Performance (B)

1. Adoption scorecard performance measures.
2. Improved timeliness for children moving to adoption (measured at each stage in the process).
3. Maintain the percentage of children who cease to be looked after by adoption.
4. Improving the outcomes for siblings who need to live together, harder to place and older children.
5. Ensure placement sufficiency for children who need an early permanence placement via Fostering for Adoption and Concurrency.
6. Monitor the number of disruptions pre and post-order using learning to improve practice.
7. Increase recruitment of prospective adopters from all sectors of the community.
8. Ensure statutory timescales for assessments of adopters are met.
9. Contribute to good Ofsted outcomes for Children's Services in the three Local Authorities.
10. Develop measures to demonstrate impact and effectiveness of Adoption Support.
Case Audits (number of case audits, judgement on quality of case recording).

Employees (E)

1. Employee satisfaction levels (via survey).
2. Number of team development/whole service days – feedback.
3. Sickness and capability levels.
4. % employees who have an annual appraisal (e.g., leading to shadowing to meet service objectives).
5. % of employees who have access to Supervision (monthly).
6. Training – satisfaction – meets service needs and PDP needs.
7. Timeliness of successful recruitment and appointment to first time advert.
8. Staff turnover.
9. Monitoring of numbers of externally provided workforce (agency staff).

Customers (C)

1. Monitor number and nature of complaints.
2. Ability to meet assessed need.
3. Customer satisfaction measures:
 - a. Adoptee
 - b. Adopter
 - c. Birth Parent
4. Partner Local Authority Children's Social Care satisfaction.

[How: questionnaires, Panel Member feedback, mystery shopper, user groups, feedback from Children's Social Work Teams, IRO's].

Performance Management

Performance Management Framework

Adopt Coast to Coast has a clear set of performance indicators which will help it to assess how well it is performing against its objectives. The indicators should give a balanced picture of performance that reflects all aspects of the service. Adopt Coast to Coast will use the Balanced Scorecard approach to make sure it has a rounded picture of performance.

The scorecard covers four key aspects of performance:

- **Customers** – this looks at the impact of Adopt Coast to Coast in terms of the community, services users and customers. It involves looking at how well Adopt Coast to Coast has met the needs of service users and the perception of the organisation from the viewpoint of the community / service user which will include outcome indicators like customer satisfaction, and other feedback from users such as review, compliments and complaints.
- **Business** – this focuses on how well the processes which are critical to effective service delivery are working and will include all the Adoption Scorecard measures. This encourages managers to identify what the key business processes are, to look at performance in carrying out those processes and to establish targets for improving performance.
- **Resources** – these indicators focus on how well Adopt Coast to Coast's resources are being used and might include finance, equipment or other physical assets.
- **People** – indicators in this aspect focus on actions or initiatives intended to deliver service improvements, these might for example include employees training and development.