



Department  
for Education

## Regional adoption agencies 2015-16

### Expression of Interest Form

If you have any problems editing this form, please email [adoption.reform@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:adoption.reform@education.gsi.gov.uk)

#### Section 1

##### 1.1 Contact details

Lead contact	Graham Pellew	Southgate Court, Buckfast, Buckfastleigh, Devon TQ11 0EE
Organisation and position	Deputy Chief Executive Families For Children Trust	
Email address	gpellew@familiesforchildren.org.uk	
Phone number	01364 645480	

##### 1.2 Who is involved in your Regional Adoption Agency?

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Number of children placed for adoption by organisation in 2013-14 (if applicable)</i>	<i>Lead contact for each partner, (address, telephone number and email)</i>
Families for Children Trust, Voluntary Adoption Agency	39 children placed with FFC adopters, 11 of whom were in the Wessex area.	Graham Pellew, Deputy Chief Executive Families for Children Trust, Southgate Court, Buckfast, Buckfastleigh, Devon, TQ11 0EE  ☎ 01364 645480 ✉ gpellew@familiesforchildren.org.uk
Bournemouth Borough Council	30 Bournemouth children plus 9 interagency placements with Bournemouth assessed families	Lisa Green, Service Manager, Planning for Permanence Services. Town Hall, St Stephens Road, Bournemouth, Dorset BH2 6DY  ☎ 01202 452766 ✉ lisa.green@bournemouth.gov.uk
Dorset County Council	18 plus 5 interagency placements with Dorset assessed families	Penny Lodwick, Senior Manager, Family Support East. Dorset County Council Social Services, Victoria Road, Penny's Walk, Ferndown BH22 9JY  ☎ 01202 868222 ✉ p.lodwick@dorsetcc.gcsx.gov.uk

Borough of Poole	16 plus 11 interagency placements with Poole assessed families	<p>Kendra Bell, Principal Manager, Children in Care, Care Leavers, Adoption and Fostering.  Children &amp; Young People's Social Care  14a Commercial Road,  Poole  BH14 0JW</p> <p>☎ 01202 735046  ✉ k.bell@poole.gov.uk</p>
Somerset County Council	50 plus 5 interagency placements with Somerset assessed families	<p>Suzanne Lyus, Operations Manager – Child Placements &amp; Resources.  C1, C Block,  County Hall,  Taunton  TA1 4DY</p> <p>☎ 01823 357146  ✉ SSLyus@somerset.gov.uk</p>
<b>Have you worked together before? Yes</b>		<p><i>If yes, in what capacity?</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All five adoption agencies in this proposed Regional Adoption Agency are members of the South West Adoption Consortium (SWAC) and the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) South West group. Somerset has been the lead authority managing and supporting the South West Adoption Consortium since it was set up in 2000.</li> <li>2. Bournemouth Borough Council, the Borough of Poole, &amp; the voluntary adoption agency, Families for Children, have undertaken joint adopter recruitment and marketing activities as the Wessex Adoption Group. We have a joint website as the Wessex Adoption Group for enquirers to gain easy access to all three agencies.</li> <li>3. We have been running joint adopter preparation courses between the adoption services of the Borough of Poole, Bournemouth Borough Council and Families for Children, since July 2013.</li> </ol>

4. Joint adoption support groups have been run between Bournemouth Borough Council, the Borough of Poole, Dorset County Council and Families for Children since 1997. These include groups for children and young people, groups for adopters, and social events for adoptive families.
5. Families for Children have their headquarters in Devon, but also an office base in Dorset and one in Somerset.
6. A group for birth parents has been run between the adoption services of Bournemouth Borough Council and the Borough of Poole since 1997.
7. Three jointly run Activity Days have been commissioned from BAAF by Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council, the Borough of Poole & Families for Children since 2013.
8. Adoption Exchanges are held quarterly via SWAC, which all five adoption agencies participate in.
9. Local Adoption Exchanges have also been run quarterly since 2013 and are organised by the Bournemouth Borough Council Adoption and Permanence Team. The adoption services in the Borough of Poole, Dorset County Council & Families for Children have regularly attended.
10. There has been joint commissioning of an independent birth relative support service from Families for Children by Bournemouth Borough Council & the Borough of Poole since 2004. Originally Dorset County Council also commissioned this service but withdrew in 2011.

11. Families for Children and Somerset County Council have previously worked together to provide a therapeutic support service to adopted children and families.
12. There have been interagency placements between all five agencies over many years, with subsequent joint working with regard to post adoption support for individual adoption placements across geographic boundaries.

*The word counts included in this form are suggested maximum word limits. You do not need to write up to the word count for any of the questions if you can answer the question clearly using fewer words.*

## Section 2

### The design of your Regional Adoption Agency

<p><b>2.1 What geographical area is covered by your proposal?</b></p>	<p>The proposed Regional Adoption Agency would encompass the local authority areas of Somerset County Council, Dorset County Council, Borough of Poole and Bournemouth Borough Council.</p>
<p><b>2.2. How many adoptive placements do you expect to do annually?</b></p>	<p>If placements are made in line with the last two years, over 100 children annually will be placed by a merged regional group.</p>

**2.3 What is your proposed model for the Regional Adoption Agency? (500 words)**  
*What are your main aims?*

The proposed Regional Adoption Agency as outlined above will bring together two unitary authorities, two county authorities and a voluntary adoption agency working across the same geographic region, building on existing relationships and developing new ones to work as one.

Families for Children, a voluntary adoption agency, will be the lead agency in this stage of the project, which is focussed on scoping, stakeholder involvement and options appraisal. The local authorities forming the Regional Adoption Agency will take support roles in agreed areas of work. The lead agency role in our bid means leading on the project and does not predetermine any future discussions and decisions about, for example, the employment of staff.

The key aim in combining services will be to achieve better outcomes for all children with adoption plans in the region. There will be more targeted **recruitment**, a wider pool of prospective adopters to choose from in **matching**, and shared specialist **adoption support** services including scope for broader commissioning arrangements. The aim is that more children will be placed quicker in placements which best meet their emotional and physical needs.

Combining services will provide an opportunity to spread best practice from each of the partners to raise standards across the region. External judgements and service user feedback

have evidenced existing outstanding practice in the agencies involved in this regional grouping, which can be built on to develop an ambitious, creative and innovative Regional Adoption Agency.

The vision for our Regional Adoption Agency is that:

- Assessments of children and prospective adopters will be even more timely, holistic and evidence based.
- Children will be well prepared for moving on to permanence, with high quality direct life story work undertaken with the child, and the best practice in creating life story books disseminated as standard across the region.
- There will be a single 'front door' for enquiries from prospective adopters across the region. The Regional Adoption Agency recruitment strategy will be targeted to meet the needs of children with adoption plans, particularly 'harder to place' children, such as sibling groups and older children.
- There will be a wider pool of prospective adopters which will result in more effective, timely, and successful matching, with more prospective adopters within the region to choose from for individual children.
- There will be greater opportunities to promote and make Early Permanent, fostering to adopt and concurrent placements, with more prospective adopters to choose from, and existing good practice in the region with regard to such placements shared.
- The creation of joint adoption panels, supported by dedicated agency advisers, will lead to improved timeliness, efficiency savings and consistency of practice across the region.
- There will be more planned, coordinated, creative and innovative adoption support services, moving away from reactive spot purchasing, with economies of scale leading to efficiency savings.
- Families will be well supported post Adoption Order by teams of social workers and family support staff working in integrated teams with colleagues from health, education and CAMHS.
- There will be greater opportunities to commission services and stimulate the market to increase the number and range of providers of adoption support services for children and their families. This will support successful applications to the Adoption Support Fund.
- The region will aim to become a centre of excellence with regard to training and accreditation in therapeutic interventions for post Adoption Order support, creating opportunities for trading high quality services to other Regional Adoption Agencies and to education and health providers.
- There will be a combined quality and assurance management system which supports best practice and improves outcomes for children.
- Services to adopted adults and birth parents, individually and in groups, will be combined, leading to economies of scale and the dissemination of best practice.

### *How will your RAA be constituted, structured and governed?*

The detail will be part of the initial scoping between October 2015 and April 2016, but the aim is to combine and provide scrutiny for a merged service under a Management Board consisting of senior managers within Children's Services in each of the local authorities, and the Chief Executive or Deputy Chief Executive of the voluntary adoption agency. The Board will be accountable to the elected members or trustees in each agency.

Families for Children will be the lead agency for this phase of the project. There will be a need to establish:

- A new management structure
- A decision making and accountability framework
- New working arrangements and agreed conditions of service for staff
- Revised policies, procedures and protocols to include safeguarding
- Premises for staff
- Staff training and development across the region
- A single IT system, with access to mobile working.

A Project Board will be set up, along with separate work streams to look at the different statutory functions which local authorities have to provide to include:

- The recruitment, assessments and training of prospective adopters
- Family finding, matching and placement
- Permanency planning, agency decisions for children, and adoption panels
- Post order support to include letterbox and direct contact, adult adoption counselling and support, birth relative support, also financial support post order, in order to standardise provision.

Work will also have to be undertaken to ensure the new organisation can operate effectively and efficiently. This will include establishing work streams to manage-

- Information Governance including consideration of archiving arrangements pre and post merger.
- IT systems to ensure web sites, email and other systems are accessible as required.
- HR and organisational development to implement optimum team structures, workforce development and ensure any TUPE transfers are properly carried out.
- Legal support to ensure the new organisation is properly set up and compliant with relevant adoption legislation.

### *How will partners work together?*

There are already established collaborative working arrangements and practices as outlined above across the five adoption agencies in this proposed Regional Adoption Agency, and the aim will be to build on these, bringing together best practice from each agency to form one regional agency.

There will be one lead agency, which will be Families for Children in this phase of the project, with the other agencies taking key support roles co-ordinating local authority resources as

needed to develop the more detailed delivery model. The implementation plan will include the setting up of a Project Board and work streams as outlined above. Any assistance from the Regional Adoption Board would be welcomed, as would support from our coach if the bid is successful.

There is existing experience in the region of combining services across local authority areas such as Tricuro, which provides social care services to adults across Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole. Another example would be the pan Dorset Youth Offending Service, which is a statutory partnership between the same three local authorities, Dorset Police, Dorset Probation Service and health. Somerset County Council also has similar experiences, for example, setting up and co-locating First Response services with the police and health services. There is also experience of setting up Public Health Dorset across the pan Dorset local authorities and transferring functions and staff from two NHS organisations in order to provide services across three local authorities. We will learn from the experience of setting up these and similar organisations to develop a constitution, structures and governance for our Regional Adoption Agency.

The aim is to work in partnership with Families for Children, who are taking on the role of lead agency in this phase of the project. In the longer term, legal advice and advice from our coach as to how best to integrate the role of a voluntary agency with 4 local authorities with statutory adoption responsibilities will help us to define how to make this partnership work within our Regional Adoption Agency.

#### *Who will play what role?*

Families for Children will be leading on the scoping, stakeholder involvement and options appraisal in the first phase of the project. The Deputy Chief Executive of Families for Children will be seconded to the project for 2 days a week. This does not predetermine any future decisions about, for example, employment of staff.

All of the partners will play an equal part on the Project Board based on each partner's strengths and capacity. Different strengths will be identified and utilised as we move forward.

#### *How will recruitment, matching and support functions be carried out (regional agencies are expected to deliver all three functions)?*

All three functions are part of the plans for our Regional Adoption Agency, with the details of how these will be combined to be determined in the scoping and options appraisal phase during 2015-16, distilling the best practice from across all five agencies. The option currently under discussion would include:

- A centralised management structure
- A single 'front door' for recruitment
- Combined adoption panels and dedicated agency adviser role
- Regional hubs of teams and staff specialising in recruitment and assessment, family finding, matching and placement, and adoption support. At the same time, priority will be given to maintaining close links with the social work court teams across the region in order to ensure early identification of children who might be moving to adoption. This will ensure appropriate preparation of the child and more timely and successful matching.

#### *Will you be doing anything else beyond adoption?*

At this stage, there are many exciting ideas from all of the partners which we will need to distil

through the Project Board in the initial scoping exercise between October 2015 and April 2016. Decisions about the inclusion within the Regional Adoption Agency of permanence options other than adoption, in particular the development of a permanence hub to include special guardianship support, will be part of these discussions.

*Who will be accountable for what?*

A Project Board will be set up, chaired by the lead agency, to include a project manager to manage timescales and to drive the project forward, adoption leads from each agency, HR, legal, finance, CAMHS, and service user representation.

Work streams for specific tasks will be set up to look at the range of adoption functions. The work streams will report back to the Project Board, who in turn will report back to the Management Board.

## **2.4 What practice improvements or innovations will you implement or spread via the Regional Adoption Agency? (500 words)**

*How will your new model help you to achieve or spread practice excellence?*

The first phase of the project will be able to collect data and scope out best practice in each agency, to ensure that outcomes for children and other service users are enhanced by the merger. Feedback from stakeholders, to include adopters, adopted adults and children, birth parents, social workers, panels, health, education, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services (CAFCASS), will be part of the initial scoping exercise and will inform and shape the implementation plan.

The following features of the proposed model are being considered for inclusion:

- All of the local authorities have well established collaborative working arrangements with the child care teams, and the adoption services in the unitary authorities are currently co-located with them. The plan is to develop a regional agency which ensures that this continues, with dedicated family finders with direct links with court social work teams. This will allow for early identification of children likely to have adoption plans, and the holistic assessment of their needs to inform family finding and matching.
- Combined panels, replacing the existing panels in each agency will be set up. Agency advisers will work across the region as advisers both to panel and to the Agency Decision Makers in each local authority with regard to adoption decisions for individual children, will also spread consistency of practice. This is in relation to the core functions of assessments of prospective adopters, adoption decisions for individual children and matching and placement.
- The importance of the preparation of children for moves to permanence is well established in research on outcomes including research on adoption disruptions. This includes direct work undertaken with children prior to, during and immediately after the move, and the preparation of high quality life story books. A combined regional agency will allow for the best practice in this area to be spread across the region.
- The further development of Early Permanence Placements including fostering to adopt and concurrency across the region as a means of reducing delay and minimising placement moves for children.
- The Regional Adoption Agency aspires to become a centre of excellence with regard to

adoption support services building upon the expertise of workers across the region, many of whom already have specialist training in, for example, Dyadic Developmental Psychology (DDP) and Theraplay. There are already well developed multi-disciplinary services among the partners in this area of adoption work, including clinical psychologists based in adoption teams.

- There is also an opportunity to build on existing commissioning work in relation to adoption support. A stakeholder event has already been held in Somerset and one is planned across Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole using the recently launched Adoption Support Fund as a platform to stimulate the market of private providers able to offer therapeutic services to adopted children and their families. This will increase the range of choice available.

*What new ways of working do you want to develop, spread and embed?*

Post placement adoption support services, with consideration to be given to the inclusion, during the scoping phase, of other permanence options such as special guardianship support services, will be developed in regional multi agency hubs, to include social work staff, family support staff, education, health, and CAMHS workers, including clinical psychologists co located with adoption social work teams. Combining as one Regional Agency will provide the opportunity for the region to become a centre of excellence for the provision of multi disciplinary adoption support services.

The existing skill base of staff working in post placement support will be developed to include level 2 Theraplay and DDP qualifications and accreditation, and Non Violent Resistance training and accreditation. By combining and focusing services, there is the opportunity for the region to become a centre of excellence for such services, setting the benchmark for and delivering these services to others outside the agency, for example, across health and education.

Commissioning appropriate health and therapeutic interventions in order to support matching and successful adoptions is a key priority. It is planned to use existing mechanisms including existing Joint Commissioning Boards and Clinical Commissioning Groups to maximise opportunities for strategic commissioning of health services for children with adoption plans and adoptive families. In addition to this, new commissioning opportunities will also be explored to offer maximum choice and flexibility to adopted children and their families.

Evidence based practice in the proposed Regional Adoption Agency is seen as a strength to be built on, with opportunities to be taken to further existing links with independent researchers, research bodies at universities, and organisations such as Research in Practice and Coram/BAAF.

*Will you be redesigning processes and practices? If so, how and why?*

Regional data is already being collated as a priority, to inform the scoping exercise and the redesign of service provision and staffing needs. Data on children placed and adopters approved, and the current management and staffing structure of adoption services within each agency has already been shared between the partners.

This will inform the development of our Regional Adoption Agency recruitment strategy to focus on the profile and needs of children waiting locally, and also nationally. It will also help to determine the likely workload of individual workers, managers, adoption panels, the agency adviser role, and the current demand for adoption support services across the region.

Non agency adoption work, such as partner adoptions and intercountry adoption work will be reviewed, with a view to renegotiating current case management and commissioning processes to ensure consistency of practice and best value for money.

Working across four local authorities, a wider geographical area and the structural reorganisation and merger of services from five different agencies will require a thorough systems review of all current processes and practices, which currently vary between the agencies. We will distil the best practice in each area of adoption work as we do so.

As a result of the merger, all policies, procedures and protocols will need to be rewritten, though a commonality between all four local authorities is the commissioning of the same external agency to produce and update these. Input will be needed from the different Local Safeguarding Children's Boards to ensure consistency of safeguarding practices across the service.

The transfer of staff will require the involvement of legal services and HR for all of the participating partners.

## **2.5 What are the outcomes you want to achieve? (300 words)**

### *What will change for children being adopted?*

A wider pool of prospective adopters, recruited in a targeted way across the region, will provide greater choice of placement for children, particularly those more difficult to place, such as sibling groups and older children. Greater choice of placement should lead to improved timeliness in the matching and placement of children and fewer reversals of adoption decisions because placements cannot be found. More local placement opportunities keep children within the wider geographic region they were born in, and help with introductions and the move to an adoptive placement.

A regional merger will also enable the pooling of expertise and the spread of good practice across the region, for example with regard to the assessment of an individual child's needs, the preparation of that child for a move to a permanent placement and the quality of life story books. Another example would be in relation to sharing best practice and building on opportunities for increasing the number of Early Permanence placements including fostering to adopt and concurrent placements across the region. This would also improve timeliness with regard to more children being placed at an early stage in the planning process in their permanent placement, with consequential improved outcomes for individual children.

Adoption support services will be combined in multi agency hubs, developed to greater effect with wider choice of service provision. By combining, focusing and commissioning services, there is the opportunity for the region to become a centre of excellence for such services, setting the benchmark for and delivering them to others outside the agency. Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved, and adopters, adopted children, adopted young people, and adopted adults will all need ongoing support over the years to achieve and maintain emotional good health. High quality adoption support services should be reflected in fewer placement breakdowns.

*How will your new model embed and spread excellence?*

As can be evidenced in Ofsted inspections, Adoption Leadership Board data, and the adoption scorecards, all of the agencies in this regional grouping have services, existing areas of expertise and good practice in adoption, and skilled and experienced staff which they will be able to share by working as part of a combined regional agency. The aim is to distil the very best practice from across the region and ensure it is the foundation we build the new service on.

Additionally, a larger group gives enhanced career opportunities improving retention of the best staff. The proposed changes to policy and procedure will create an opportunity to include the latest research, evidence and thinking and provide the required catalyst to drive implementation across all staff. A common workforce development service, including training, will help share and extend best practice.

*What impact will your proposal have on value for money?*

The initial scoping exercise and review of services provided across the region will allow for the most cost effective services to be retained, with the combined strength of a larger regional grouping able to provide or commission services more effectively. Efficiencies of scale are likely to produce savings over time as well as improved service provision. For example, combined panels will lead to efficiencies of scale and will also ensure that approvals and matches are considered in a timely way, with more panels on a monthly basis across the region to choose from. There are also likely to be reduced management costs as a result of merging services.

Targeted recruitment and wider placement choice will lead to children being placed more quickly for adoption, and fewer reversals of adoption decisions because placements cannot be found. This will result in better outcomes for the children themselves, but also savings for the local authority by removing children from the care system.

The review of current processes with regard to non agency work including partner adoptions and intercountry adoption work will provide an opportunity to provide or commission more cost effective provision due to the economies of scale.

In addition to the information provided above it is anticipated that a centralised and streamlined management structure for the region will deliver savings in the long term. Information will be more co-ordinated and easily available, supporting efficiency and timeliness.

*What are the most important things to measure so you know you're being successful?*

The success of the new model will be measured via service user feedback, and external measures such as the data provided to the Adoption Leadership Board on a quarterly basis, adoption scorecards and Ofsted inspections. The number of placements made, the number of reversals of adoption decisions, and the numbers of placement disruptions will be monitored, along with data on adopters approved, and the timeliness of assessments, matching and placements. Financial spend will be carefully measured, with regular monitoring against a baseline of current spend, to evidence the expected efficiency savings.

Local authority partners in the South West have Director level interface, share improvement models, and also provide challenge and peer review.

## Section 3

### Making it happen

#### 3.1 Implementation (500 words)

*What do you need to do to set out the vision outlined above in:*

*(a) 2015-16 (we need a fairly detailed outline of the activity you have in mind for this year)*

- Application for funding from the DfE by 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015.
- Decision re funding by the end of September 2015.
- Appointment or secondment of project manager, person in the lead agency to drive the project forward, adoption lead from each agency, and marketing, data and performance manager by the end of October 2015.
- Management Board and Project Board terms of reference agreed and Boards set up by the end of November 2015.
- Development of a Regional Adoption Agency Project Initiation Document and Risk Register by the end of November 2015.
- Data collection during October and November 2015.
- Scoping best practice, options appraisal November 2015 to January 2016.
- Working groups to be defined and set up, September to December 2015, including a work stream to define how to set up a single front door for enquiries from prospective adopters.
- Stakeholder involvement November 2015 to January 2016, including engagement days with staff to both learn from and inform.
- Proposed structure and implementation plan agreed by Management Board January – March 2016, with priority focus on a centralised recruitment strategy, in order to set up a single front door for prospective adopter enquiries.
- Regional Adoption Agency identity, logo, branding, in place by April 2016. Redesign of the website commissioned.
- HR and legal involvement to advise on process and identify a timeline for the transfer of staff

*(b) Beyond 2015-16 (we need a high level idea of your longer term plan)*

- Ongoing data collection and analysis
- Redrafting of policies, procedures and protocols between April 2016 and April 2017
- Creation of joint panels across the region April 2016-April 2017
- Review of non agency adoption work across the region April 2016- April 2017.
- Ongoing HR and legal involvement re the transfer of staff within agencies April 2016 to April 2017
- Development of combined services and teams, including the single front door for recruitment, combined family finding services and adoption support services April 2016 to April 2017.

### 3.2 How much will it cost in 2015-16? (150 words)

*What are your best estimates on the overall costs needed over 2015-16? Please include headline figures here and a breakdown of costs on the final page of this form. We know that some costs may be unknown or may vary but please provide your best estimates.*

The estimated costs for the 6 months to April 2016 total £169,500 to cover the costs of :

- Appointing a full time project manager.
- Appointing a marketing, data and performance manager.
- Backfill for the person heading up the project from the lead agency.
- Backfill for the adoption leads in the other agencies.
- Legal, HR and financial support.
- Administrative support to the Project Board.
- Developing a common identity, website, logo and marketing materials.

*Please also give an indication of what you expect to need beyond 2015-16, if you can.*

- Ongoing funding for the project manager, adoption leads, commissioning and procurement, and the marketing, data and performance manager to April 2017.
- Funding for a policy and performance officer.
- Ongoing mentoring from the project coach, if available.
- Ongoing legal and HR support re the transfer of staff.
- Support with regard to financial management and monitoring.
- Funding for staff training & engagement.
- Funding for premises and mobile working infrastructure for staff.
- Funding for linking IT systems between agencies.
- Ongoing costs to develop marketing and recruitment materials, website, social media, and a common media identity.
- Funding for the revision of policies, procedures, protocols.
- Continuing involvement of the political decision making processes in each local authority and of the management structure of the voluntary adoption agency.

### 3.3 What non-financial support will you need? (150 words)

*What practical support do you need to make this happen? How will you make use of your coach? Is there any regulation, statutory guidance etc that is creating a barrier? Are there any other barriers that will need to be addressed for you to make this happen?*

It would be helpful to have input from a coach linked in with others nationally undergoing the same transformation to share best practice and to learn lessons from each other. Any learning points from the establishment of the National Adoption Service in Wales would be welcomed. We would want to take full advantage of any input from the coach to help to scope options, analyse data, develop our thinking and ideas, and to formulate the new model in terms of structure. This will need to take into account the geographical spread of the proposed Regional Adoption Agency, and the processes and procedures and legalities of establishing a new organisation, including the transfer of staff. Help will also be needed from the coach and legal services to define the longer term role of the voluntary agency included in this bid in a combined agency.

### **3.4 What don't you know yet? (200 words)**

*It's ok not to know everything at this stage. What things do you still need to work out about your proposal and/or how to make it happen? What support might you need to do this?*

Access to funding, appointing or freeing up relevant staff as soon as possible to lead on this project are key to moving forward with our proposals. Undertaking the benchmarking, data collection and detailed appraisal of structural options are the next steps in this process. We need accurate information and data in order to firm up our plans. For example, with regard to the number of panels we will need, and where they will need to be situated based on the pattern of work across the region. This will also inform any decisions about whether it is feasible to have just one agency adviser or whether 2 or even more will be needed. We also do not know at this stage how many staff will be needed across all areas of work and how they will need to be distributed across each area of adoption work or the region.

The governance arrangements will be complicated but we are confident that our experience of joint working and in other similar projects such as Tricuro will help us to move forward successfully.

We will need help from our coach, if the bid is successful, and legal input to help define how we can best work in partnership in the longer term with the voluntary adoption agency involved in this bid.

### **3.5 What are the biggest risks to achieving your aims? What might you do to overcome or mitigate them? (400 words)**

*Please include an assessment of how you will mitigate the risks to children created by transitioning to your new model.*

The project will need to be carefully staged. We are aware that such a major reorganisation of adoption services in the region may have an impact on service delivery to children and adoptive families in the short term. A key task for both the Management Board and Project Board will be to ensure the impact on service delivery is minimised.

It will be an anxious time for staff. The engagement of staff directly involved in the delivery of adoption services, and the involvement of current service users will be essential to this process, as will maintaining and strengthening the working relationships with child care social work teams and other colleagues across Children's Social Care Services and across other agencies.

It will be essential to collect and interpret accurate data from across all five organisations in order to monitor the impact on the service and ensure that children or other service users affected by adoption are kept safe and disruption is kept to the minimum.

Merging five partners, one of whom is a voluntary adoption agency with different responsibilities, funding and governance, will be challenging. There is also different political leadership in the four local authorities, which may have an impact on how the Regional Adoption Agency develops.

A further risk is with regard to ongoing funding for these changes if none is available from Central Government beyond April 2016. Given the pressure on local government budgets, there are risks of insufficient money being available locally to implement all of the plans.

## FURTHER DETAILS ON COSTS FOR 2015-16

*Please include a breakdown of costs for 2015-16. We know that some costs may be unknown or may vary, but please provide your best estimates.*

The estimated costs below are for the 6 months to April 2016

Project Manager (full time) Oct 15-Mar 16	£32,500
Marketing, Data & Performance Manager (full time) Oct 15-Mar 16	£16,000
Lead agency backfill for specialist adoption knowledge	£15,000
Backfill for adoption leads in the other 4 agencies	£20,000
New logo/identity/branding	£8,500
Legal/HR/Finance transition & project support	£50,000
Website build and development	£20,000
Administrative support (0.5 FTE Oct 15-Mar 16)/venue costs/mileage	£7,500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£169,500</b>

## Submitting the form

### By submitting this expression of interest form you commit to:

- Working openly with DfE officials and our programme delivery agents.
- Being open to working in new ways and being supported to develop the skills and capacity to do so. If your proposal makes it on to the short list of early adopters then this will include working with an allocated coach and other agents.
- Participating in a rigorous learning process and co-operating fully with visits made by DfE officials and their agents and agreeing to DfE sharing learning from your process publicly.
- Providing the necessary documentary evidence, if required by DfE.

Before submitting this form, please ensure you have included all of the evidence you wish to be considered. Please also remember that we may need to request additional information at short notice from the contact named in section 1.1.

**Please submit this form by 7 September by email to: [adoption.reform@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:adoption.reform@education.gsi.gov.uk)**

Once you know that you plan to apply, please contact the DfE team for an early discussion, using the email address above. **Please do this before the end of July.**