Adopter Development Co-ordinator Strategy

Report Title: **How to create Adopter Led Services within One Adoption**

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Summary:

1. The Adopter Development Co-ordinators (ADC's) are roles funded by One Adoption to engage adopters in the region and ensure their voices are heard in the development of the new agencies, in the practice development within these agencies and in the ongoing provision of support for adopters in Yorkshire and Humber.
2. The three posts (one for each, North & Humber, West and South) were appointed in February 2017 and are in place until February 2018, each working 15 hours a week.
3. This report sets out the main outcomes these roles are to achieve.

1. Background:
    1.1. Initial research into what adopters in the region want from adoption agencies has been conducted as part of the regionalisation programme and previously through the Adopter Voice Forum.
    1.2. This has consisted of focus groups of adopters working with service staff to plot out the customer journey and identify key issues that adopters feel are important for services to address (In North and Humber) This could be replicated in the other regions. We are also getting families to come forward to conduct case studies for further research purposes. Further more we are able to draw on research from the timeline, workshops and ongoing case studies.
    1.3. This can then be mapped against social workers and the service views which need to be considered.
    1.4. In addition, the three Adopter Development Co-ordinators through engagement with their local community of existing adopters have established what the wider cohort of adopters would like to see from their roles and the agencies.

2. Main Issues:

2.1. The research and engagement discussed in section 1 (shown in part in appendix 1) shows that adopters in the region would like to see:

    2.1.1. An **Adopters Charter** for adoption agencies to sign up to, guaranteeing a common minimum service standard across the region.

    2.1.2. Establishment of a **Peer Mentoring** scheme to provide additional support for adopters beyond the current offer.

    2.1.3. Easier Access to **Adoption Support**, with a better focus on communication and relationships.

    2.1.4. **Adopter Led/engaged Training,** more training throughout their journey.

2.2. While it may not be possible to fully realise the above before February 2018 the ADC posts can conduct further, fuller, research and engagement with adopters in the region to feed into the development of these work streams and provide a conduit for the regional agencies to engage with adopters on these and other issues.

2.3. This research and engagement will require a commitment from local authorities, the hub, voluntary and regional agencies to provide appropriate support. Particularly with communications to existing adopters and those in the process of approval.

2.4. The ADC's should establish a cohort of adopters for data collection through survey work and focus groups

2.5. With only 9 months of the current funding remaining and the project being time sensitive it is vital that the work commences swifty. Ideally the ADCs will begin fuller engagement with adopters before the summer holiday season with the aim to have data to report back to regional board by January 2018.

3. **Recommendations**:

3.1. Board are asked to approve the outline aims for the ADC's to February 2018 as:

    3.1.1. Engage with adopters in the region to establish a viable research cohort

    3.1.2. Carry out research and surveys with adopters to provide data for service development

    3.1.3. Interpret information collected and make recommendations based on this for key areas including – peer mentoring, an agency charter and the adoption support offer ahead of February 2018.

    3.1.4. Pilot a new secure login area for the One Adoption Website which will serve as a focus for adopter engagement, research and data collection.

    3.1.5. Provide the framework to agree a pilot of the peer support model in one of the agencies to begin post March 2018.

4. Benefits

There are a number of potential business benefits which could be realised, providing the ADC's are able to work with the agency to ensure the peer support and adopter training and delivery becomes part of the service provision (see appendix 2 for outline evidence of business benefit that has been realised in other agencies).

5. Risks

The ADC's are not given access to adopters, in order to conduct the research.
15 hours per week over 9 months is a very short time for the ADC's to conduct this work and provide full business benefit to the RAA.

Timescales

May-August Draft Charter for consultation & Research carried out.

Sept – Nov Secure Login Website Area Pilot & Gather Data.

Dec -Feb Peer Support Pilot & Training Pilot Plan agreed.

Adopters Charter Agreed. Adopter led services to be piloted.

Appendix 1

This is from the research from North and Humber Adoption Journey interviews.
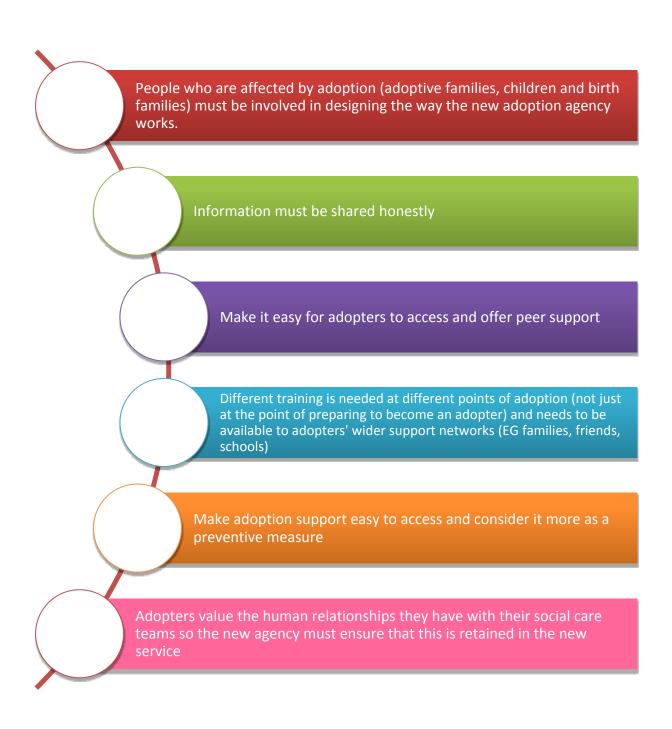
What Adopters Said

Adopters told us about the things that work well and the things they feel need to be improved. A small sample of comments shows this:

Council websites mind boggle me

We thought [the authority] were quite good at getting back to us

Like adopters were there [at the information event] to give us a 'glossy' picture

Wonder whether there ought to be subsequent training once you've got your child – you don't realise some of the issues until you've got the child

Didn't find it [first home visit] invasive at all

That's where your social worker gets to know you and you have to gel

It felt like shopping for children

Felt a bit nervous and a bit excited. You want to move it on by that time {at panel]

Needs to be pre-emptive, not reactive – don't wait until you've got problems, in crisis

Just having that chance to sit and talk to people in exactly the same situation is a massively big deal

Themes

While every family is unique, a number of recurrent themes emerged from the interviews. This highlighted some key areas that are important to adopters, and must be addressed as part of the new Regional Adoption Agency.

People who are affected by adoption (adoptive families, children and birth families) must be involved in designing the way the new adoption agency works.

Information must be shared honestly

Make it easy for adopters to access and offer peer support

Different training is needed at different points of adoption (not just at the point of preparing to become an adopter) and needs to be available to adopters' wider support networks (EG families, friends, schools)

Make adoption support easy to access and consider it more as a preventive measure

Adopters value the human relationships they have with their social care teams so the new agency must ensure that this is retained in the new service

Appendix 2

Harnessing the Power of the Peer: An Analysis of Structured One to One Peer to peer Mentoring in Adoption

A new issue that has arisen as a result of the increased number of approved prospective adopters and the reduction in the number of children with an adoption plan, is that of how to support and assist waiting approved adopters to cope with the wait for a child. Mentoring has, for many proved to be invaluable in this situation, ensuring that they have someone to discuss their frustrations with in an open manner and without fear of censure as part of the confidential mentoring relationship. In these situations, mentors are able to guide prospective adopters on how to be proactive while waiting.

Informational support tends to be given at times of stress and is also support with problem solving. For many the process of being assessed as an adopter is inherently stressful, it takes place over a considerable period of time and there may be challenges along the way. The role of the mentor at times of stress was clearly valued by the mentee families. Specific issues where the mentor assisted were in relation to understanding the process, dealing with perceived bureaucracy and 'red tape' or coping with challenges such as minor conflict with social workers or adoption panel concerns.

I was deferred at panel and having someone to talk to who had been through the whole process was great. The guidance tips and advice were fantastic and I use them to continue my road to adoption."

"During the waiting periods it was helpful to talk through the holdups and be reassured of what we could be/should expect/be doing."

- Using mentors to support adopters offers the opportunity to release social worker capacity – allowing social workers to focus on the aspects of the adoption process that only they as practitioners can do.