Adoption England

regional adoption agencies working together

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Principles for arranging and managing adoption support services and therapies

Guidance for practitioners working in adoption support teams and providers of adoption related services

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INTRODUCTION

Adoption England has developed this guidance to support both practitioners arranging and managing adoption services and therapies and providers delivering those services. This guidance is not statutory. Each regional adoption agency (RAA) endeavours to implement the recommendations within the context of their local areas.

ADOPTION SUPPORT COMMISSIONING

Arranging and managing adoption support services involves everyone in the adoption support process. This includes individuals in strategic positions, procurement roles, social workers, and business support staff who help adoptive families access support and providers of adoption support services. Throughout this guidance, we will refer to the process of arranging and managing adoption as 'commissioning'

There are three stages to the commissioning process:

1. **Analyse and plan:** supporting families to identify their needs and the type of adoption support that would meet those needs.

2. **Implement:** identifying and engaging providers to deliver adoption support to meet the needs of adoptive families.

3. **Monitor and review:** monitoring the delivery, quality and impact of support.

These three stages form a continuous, cyclical process that drives the commissioning of adoption support services.

Key principles for commissioning adoption support services

- **Base decisions on identified needs of adoptive families:** Decisions should be based on the identified needs of adoptive families. This involves a collaborative and ongoing process with social workers, the adopted child and adoptive family, and other professionals.

- **Be outcomes-driven:** Commissioning activities should strongly focus on improving outcomes rather than just outputs. By agreeing on clear intended outcomes, a shared vision can be ensured for everyone involved in planning and delivering adoption support services. Outcomes measurement should be integrated into your monitoring and review processes.

- **Effective use of money:** Where necessary, commissioning processes should be used to decommission services which are inefficient, ineffective, inequitable, or unsustainable.

- **Use data effectively:** Strategically use demographic data, feedback from adoptive families, and outcome measurements across the commissioning cycle to base decisions on robust analysis and evidence.

- **Continuous quality improvement:** Establish a system for regular monitoring and review of services, seeking feedback from adoptive families to identify improvements for future commissioning cycles.

The feedback loop created by the Monitor and Review stage should inform the Analyse and Plan stage of each subsequent cycle, fostering continuous improvement in service delivery. This approach ensures that adoption support services are consistently enhanced to better meet the needs of families, as outlined in the *Blueprint for an Adoption Support Service by CoramBAAF.*

- **Promote cultural competence:** Recognise and respect the cultural backgrounds of adopted children and their families by commissioning culturally sensitive and responsive services that promote a sense of identity and belonging.
- **Be flexible and accessible:** Meet the varied needs of children and families by providing support in different formats, such as online resources, support groups, and personalised one-on-one support.
- **Foster collaborative partnerships:** Build collaborative relationships between social workers, commissioners, and service providers, engaging adoptive families in the commissioning process to align services with their needs through open and transparent processes.
- **Training and development:** Ensure those involved in commissioning have the necessary skills and knowledge to address the evolving needs of adopted children and their families.
- **Early intervention services:** Offer timely support to prevent issues from escalating and contribute to the long-term well-being of adopted children and their families.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES TO IDENTIFY NEEDS AND ADOPTION SUPPORT TO MEET NEEDS

Section 4 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, and Section 3 of the Adoption Support Services regulations (ASS regs) 2005 states that a local authority now a regional adoption agency must undertake an assessment of need upon request of any person specified in Section 3(1) as shown below:

Person being assessed	**Services they are entitled to**[1]						
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**
Agency adoptive child	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Adoptive parent of an agency adoptive child	■	■		■	■	■	■
Child of adoptive parent	■	■				■	
Birth parents or guardians of an agency adoptive child							
A relative (or someone with whom the local authority consider the child to have a beneficial relationship) of agency adoptive child		■				■	
Intercountry adoptive child			■	■	■	■	
Intercountry adoptive parent			■	■	■	■	
Birth sibling of an adoptive child		■				■	
Non-agency adoptive children, their parents and guardians						■	
Prospective adopters						■	
Adopted adults, their parent, birth parent and former guardians						■	
A relative (or someone with whom the local authority consider the child to have a beneficial relationship) of a non-agency adoptive child						■	

[1] **Key to services**

A. *Services to enable discussion of matters relating to adoption*
B. *Assistance in relation to arrangements for contact*
C. *Therapeutic services*
D. *Services to ensure the continuation of adoptive relationships*
E. *Services to assist in cases of disruption*
F. *Counselling, advice and information*
G. *Financial Support*

To be eligible for funding from the ASGSF, local authorities and RAAs must apply to the ASGSF within 3 months of assessing a family's adoption support needs. The assessment of adoption support needs is where the commissioning cycle begins with an analysis to identify the needs of adopted children and their families.

When families reach out for support the scope of any required assessment of adoption support needs will be determined with the family. In many circumstances families should be signposted to appropriate support services when a full adoption support assessment is not needed e.g. universal adoption support.

To support families, identify their needs and the type of adoption support required a few steps need to be taken. Section 14 ASS Regs 2025 promotes a holistic assessment that should have regard to:

a) the needs of the person being assessed and how these might be met.

b) the needs of the adoptive family and how these might be met.

c) the needs, including developmental needs, of the adoptive child and how these might be met.

d) the parenting capacity of the adoptive parent.

e) wider family and environmental factors.

f) in the case of a child who is, or was, placed for adoption or matched for adoption, the circumstances that led to the child being so placed or matched; and

g) any previous assessment of needs for adoption support services undertaken in relation to the person in question.

In completing the assessment consideration should be given to who should be interviewed and their views sought including the child/ young person, adoptive parents and any other child/ young person in the family. The assessment of adoption support needs should consider the needs of the child and family and how these can be met (S14ASS Regs 2025). The assessment can involve conversations with other professionals involved with the family e.g. education and or health providers.

A written report of the assessment must be prepared and shared with the adoptive parents. This should include recommendations and rationale for what services are identified as meeting the child and family's needs and how they can be sourced.

When an assessment recommends the provision of services an adoption support plan should be developed and be regularly reviewed. (s16 &17 ASS Regs 2025)

Things to consider in your RAA or pan region

- Feedback from adopters completing the Adoption Barometer evidences that there were concerns around the length of time it takes to get adoption support in place from the request for adoption support.

- Using standardised assessment templates can ensure consistency across the RAAs/ Local Authorities and helps gather comprehensive information. It is important to ensure that the assessment process allows families to share their unique experiences

- Visiting the child to hear their perspective is crucial in ensuring that their needs and experiences are central to the assessment. This is particularly important for adolescents and older teenagers when identify appropriate services to meet their needs.

IDENTIFYING AND ENGAGING PROVIDERS TO DELIVER ADOPTION SUPPORT

Identifying and engaging providers to deliver adoption support can be challenging due to capacity issues and long waiting lists. RAAs can use several strategies to help streamline processes.

Frameworks

A Framework is a system which creates an approved provider list from which individual contracts can be awarded using a 'call-off' process. Prices tend to be set at the outset. Frameworks under previous procurement regulations (PCRs 2015) are quite restrictive: providers can only join the framework when it is first put in place; once in place no additional providers can be added; frameworks can only operate for a maximum of four years. However, new regulations allow for greater flexibility and transparency.

Frameworks are often divided into 'lots' by product or service type, and sometimes by region. This means that providers offering certain kinds of specialist interventions or services, (e.g., DDP or specialist assessments) in a specific geographic location/pan-region, can bid to join the lot that best suits their offer.

Frameworks can give RAA practitioners greater confidence in the suitability of external providers to deliver services for families and in the value for money (quality and cost) of those services. This is because Frameworks provide a structured and consistent approach for the identification and assessment of providers. In order to join Frameworks, organisations are assessed in relation to things like relevant qualifications & experience, safeguarding policies and procedures, insurance, health & safety, financial viability and price.

Approved Provider List (APL)

An approved provider list is a list of providers of adoption support by speciality and location who have met specific quality standards set by the RAA or pan region to deliver adoption support services to adopted children and their families in the RAA or pan-region. **APLs can be very useful and flexible but tend to be less structured and robust than Frameworks.**

Spot Purchasing

Spot purchases are usually required when there is an immediate need for a service and involve awarding a contract directly with a provider without any competitive process for a single piece of work. A spot purchase can be put in place very quickly due to not needing to go out to the market. Many RAAs use a spot purchasing approach to access therapies and interventions

funded by the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF). This approach is often used in response to more complex or bespoke needs.

Over-reliance on spot purchasing can make it difficult for RAAs to manage costs effectively and ensure consistent quality. Use of spot-purchasing should be minimised in favour of more robust commissioning and procurement processes such as frameworks and block contracts.

Block Contracts

Block contracts are contractual agreements which may be awarded following a competitive tender process or directly (following a described and signed off process) if only one provider can deliver. These are where an organisation purchases a minimum or maximum volume (e.g. number of referrals, sessions, children) for a set price and then draws down on the agreement to utilise the service. RAAs or Pan-regions need to have a confirmed budget in place to award a block contract and a contractual agreement amongst the LAs.

Block contracts allow for meaningful and effective partnership working and relationship building between RAAs/LAs and providers. It may be easier and quicker for families to access the service as RAAs/LAs or the pan-region already have an agreement with a provider in place where access and waiting times are described. Less reliance on spot purchasing for individual packages of support should result in less work for social workers and other RAA/VAA adoption support staff in procuring contracts and free them up to directly support families and quality assure services with external providers.

Note that further, more detailed guidance on different commissioning and procurement arrangements are to be developed and made available separately.

Engaging and communicating with a provider

Several things need to be considered when identifying and engaging a provider to deliver adoption support:

- **Geographical and logistic considerations**: the location and accessibility of the provider, including transport, especially for families living in rural areas.

- **Choice and information**: families should be offered a choice of providers with detailed information on each, e.g. a summary of the therapy being offered, the therapists' qualifications and experience, the specific needs that will be addressed and the expected outcomes. Providing families with the information about the different therapies available and

the providers delivering the interventions can help them to make an informed choice and feel more involved. This should be balanced with professional guidance to avoid families being overwhelmed with the assessment and decision making.

- **Capacity issues**: one of the challenges in engaging providers relates to issues with capacity and long waiting lists. This should be clearly communicated with families to help manage their expectations and reduce frustration.

- **Due diligence**: does the provider have the necessary policies and procedures in place, are they financially viable, have they the necessary qualifications, experience and supervision? Due Diligence is the investigation, or exercise of care, that a reasonable business or person is expected to take before entering into an agreement or contract with another party. It supports good decision-making – understanding costs, benefits and risks.

When engaging a provider to deliver adoption support it is good practice to hold an initial planning meeting with the provider, family and the adoption support social worker. At this meeting a contract of engagement should be agreed which sets out:

- The therapy or intervention to be offered, what is it, what does it involve, how will it be carried out, and who will be delivering it.

- Clear roles and responsibilities for social worker, provider and family

- Dates for therapy reviews with social worker, provider and family

- Itemised breakdown of what will be delivered, e.g. number of sessions, hourly rates,

- Breakdown of provider costs, to be shared with families included hidden costs e.g. charges for cancellations

The needs, goals and outcomes set in the adoption support assessment and plan should be revisited, this is the basis of the support and how progress will be measured.

By implementing these strategies, the process of identifying and engaging providers can be improved, ensuring that families receive the support they need in an timely and effective manner.

Things to consider in your RAA or pan region

- Providers of adoption support face administrative challenges with time consuming commissioning processes. Consistency in administrative requirements and processes across different authorities and RAAs would greatly benefit providers working with multiple regions. The requirement to register and join different frameworks in the same pan-region is seen as burdensome, unnecessary and is a deterrent to registration.

- Providers of adoption support are advocating for a streamlined, central portal to reduce administrative burdens.

- Providers are in support of block contracting for better financial stability.

MONITORING THE DELIVERY, QUALITY AND IMPACT OF SUPPORT

Once a provider has been engaged to provide adoption support to adoptive families the support offered should be reviewed regularly to ensure families are receiving efficient and effective care to the agreed standards and targets agreed in the initial planning meeting or contract of engagement. Reviews should be focused on the adoption support assessment and plan.

The social worker, family and provider should be clear about:

- What will be delivered e.g. number of sessions. It is good practice to set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), with clear minimum targets where relevant. KPIs should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Realistic, Timely).
- What outcomes for the child or family the service or intervention is intended to achieve, using an Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) approach where we measure Quantity (how much), Quality (how well) and Difference Made or Impact (so what?)
- How progress and performance will be measured
- When the service or intervention will be reviewed to see how well it is delivering against what it is set out to achieve
- What information and data will be used
- What action will be taken to support improvements
- The indicators that will be used to show that the service or intervention is making a difference

Being clear about the above and having measures in place to monitor progress will help to:

- Track progress
- Demonstrate impact of services and/or interventions
- Meet the needs of adopted children and families, through the regular review and monitoring of outcomes.
- Assess and ensure value for money

Reviews should be undertaken at mid-point and end point involving the RAA/VAA, family and provider based on the contract of engagement or initial planning meeting and will include:

- Feedback from the family, child, social worker and provider on progress. It may be helpful to have a standardised review form or report that is completed by the provider or feedback form for family and child feedback.
- Review of outcome measuring tools that they are working with

- Identifying what is going well, any difficulties and any factors that have changed
- Review of progress being made against the adoption support assessment and plan
- Any extension to agreed sessions needs to be based on progress being made against agreed outcomes. Be clear about what is still needed and how will that be delivered.

Alongside this 'formal' review, led by the RAA/VAA, the family and provider can request a further meeting to ensure any issues are addressed promptly. This will ensure that families and providers know that they can contact their RAA/VAA at any time.

Things to consider in your RAA or pan region

- How a distinction is made between a therapy review and a review of the adoption support assessment and plan. Therapy reviews should feed into the adoption support assessment and plan review meeting.
- The monitoring process is a three-way relationship, with everyone having a valued voice and input. The social worker/RAA/VAA are ultimately responsible for ensuring the service is meeting needs (delivering intended outcomes) and is value for money (high quality, reasonable cost).
- Make use of the resources and support available through the Mott Macdonald Adoption and Special Guardianship Fund (ASGSF) on the Outcome Measurement Tools.
- Encourage your providers to sign up to receive the ASGSF Quarterly Round Up and to become members of the Provider-only Knowledge Hub.