



ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND

Adoption Authority of Ireland Strategic Plan 2022 - 2024

Adoption Authority of Ireland



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Foreword

Foreword

The Adoption Authority of Ireland are pleased to present the Authority's Strategic Plan for 2022-2024. The Strategy aims to assist the Authority in providing and overseeing the highest possible standards of adoption services, with the best interest of children as the first and paramount priority.

Building on a strong performance against the priorities and goals outlined in the previous Strategic Plan for 2019-2021, the Authority now looks to develop further as a robust, innovative organisation, in the face of an evolving legislative landscape.

In addition to a commitment to maintain, and further develop our current services and operations, this strategy outlines the preparations required for the implementation of the Birth Information and Tracing Bill. Extensive planning has already been undertaken in order to understand the future operational requirements for this implementation. We will look to progress this further, as well as support our partnering organisations in overcoming any challenges expected through its implementation. The Authority sees the enactment of the Bill as a significant opportunity, giving the organisation enhanced roles and responsibilities in delivering meaningful services.

The 2022-2024 strategic priorities demonstrate our commitment to being recognised as the centre of excellence and principal authoritative source of information on all aspects of adoption and as a provider and regulator of high quality adoption services in Ireland. The Authority will look to further enhance communication to the public, and those involved in the adoption processes to encourage an improved awareness and understanding around adoption. We will look to effectively support and adequately staff our recently established research unit, to produce and promote adoption research findings to influence informed debate on adoption issues.

A key focus for the Authority in this period will be supporting our people. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives, and influenced the way we think about our work. We are also anticipating an increase in workload, which will mean the organisation is likely to grow. In order to ensure that our staff feel fully supported, we will introduce initiatives around training and development and career progression, and look to continue developing a culture where staff are empowered to influence their ways of working, feel supported in their career ambition, and ensure they truly feel that they are contributing towards the success of the Authority.

Throughout the development of this strategic plan, we have reflected on past progress and challenges, with invaluable input from our stakeholder groups, including: the Authority's Senior Management Team and Board; Authority staff; TUSLA and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and a number of other key stakeholders within the adoption landscape. We would personally like to thank those who partook in the consultations for giving up their time and knowledge which has influenced the future strategic direction of the Authority.

We continue to value and acknowledge the support of the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and that of his Department in progressing the adoption landscape and provision of adoption services in Ireland.



Orlaith Traynor
Chairperson,
Adoption Authority of
Ireland



Patricia Carey
Chief Executive
Officer,
Adoption Authority of
Ireland



Executive Overview

Executive Overview



Introduction

The Authority is required, under Section 108 of the Adoption Act, to prepare and submit a Corporate Plan (Strategic Plan). Section 108(3) and (4) of the Act states that:

- (3) the Corporate Plan shall be prepared in a form and manner in accordance with any direction given by the Minister and shall specify:
 - (a) the key objective of the Authority for the three year period concerned and the strategies for achieving these objectives, and (b) the uses to which the Authority proposed to apply its resources; and
- (4) in preparing of the Corporate Plan, the Authority shall have regard to the policies of the Government or a Minister of the Government to the extent that those policies may affect or relate to the functions of the Authority.

In line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016, the Authority has prepared a three year Corporate Plan (Strategic Plan) and will operationalise this through Annual Business Plans. These plans will be reported and reviewed upon, in the form of the Authority's Annual Report and by updates to the Department's Adoption Policy Unit (APU).



Strategic Review

The AAI's previous Corporate Plan 2019-2021 was reviewed in relation to work progressed, and to gain an understanding of the suitability of the Authority's mission, vision, values, and appraise which goals and objectives should be carried forward and continue through the next strategic period.

The Authority undertook a comprehensive analysis of both internal and external reports and publications and conducted a series of stakeholder engagements. The focus of these engagements was to perform an analysis of the Adoption Authority of Ireland's performance against the previous Corporate Plan (2019-2021) and to identify strategic priorities, goals and implementation considerations for the next 3 years.



Stakeholder Engagement

The stakeholder consultation series consisted of over twenty five one-to-one consultations and themed workshops with identified key internal and external stakeholders, including:

- Members of the AAI Board, Senior Management Team and staff members;
- Representatives from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, TUSLA, the Ombudsman for Children, international adoption groups;
- Representatives from legal support services used by the Authority; and
- Representatives from accredited adoption agencies.



Strategic Direction

The findings from the strategic review and the stakeholder consultations were outlined in a SWOT and PESTEL analysis, and informed a number of strategic priorities which were appraised to form strategic goals.

Once strategic goals were agreed, feasible objectives and low level actions were developed in order to clearly identify a roadmap to deliver each goal.

This document provides the strategic framework for the implementation plan (separate operational document) which sets out to operationalise the strategic priorities and goals. Annual Business Plans should take direction from these documents when outlining organisational, unit and individual targets and performance plans for the upcoming year.



Executive Overview



Mission and Vision

The mission and vision of the AAI which will remain unchanged, were referenced and utilised extensively when designing and developing the key priorities and goals for the next three years, they are outlined below:

“To ensure the provision of the highest possible standards of adoption related services, throughout the lifelong adoption process, with the best interest of children as the first and paramount objective”

- Adoption Authority of Ireland Mission



“To be recognised as the centre of excellence and principal authoritative source of information on all aspects of adoption and as a provider and regulator of high quality adoption services”

- Adoption Authority of Ireland Vision



Principles and Values

In addition, the principles and values which underpin the AAI's mission, and vision, will remain unchanged and also were referenced extensively in the generation of the strategic priorities and goals for the next three years. They are outlined below:

- **Child-centredness:** Focusing on the best interests of the child as paramount throughout the adoption process with consideration of their lifelong needs. Ensuring that the authority is committed to hearing from children and young people and responding meaningfully in the adoption process.
- **Quality Services:** Provide the highest quality services in adoption based on law and best practice, alongside developing and retaining experts in the field (including commitment to continuous improvement of services).
- **Accountability:** Through Ethical Practice and Transparency: Modus operandi which is open to scrutiny, distinguished by impartiality and equity and guided by honest, proper, accountable and ethical adoption practice. Committed to delivering services in an effective and efficient manner to achieve value for money.
- **Respect:** Committed to treating all stakeholders in the adoption process or otherwise with dignity, respect and courtesy. Listening, learning and empowering organisation for all those working or affected by adoption services and listen and respect staff ensuring the Authority remains a good place to work.

Executive Overview



Strategic Plan 2022-2024

In order for the Authority to realise its vision, mission and values for the next three years, six key priorities with associated goals and objectives were identified and developed. These priorities and associated goals are outlined in the table below. A detailed breakdown, and underlying objectives and operational actions are found under the ‘Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024’ section of this document.

Priorities	Goals		
 <p>1. The child is the foremost priority and their best interests should be pursued in all adoption cases</p>	<p>1.1 The primary goal of all adoptions is that the best interests of the child / young person are heard throughout the adoption process and they are responded to in a timely and meaningful manner throughout. The Authority is currently developing a protocol that is committed to hearing from children and young people as part of its development.</p>		
 <p>2. Achieve the highest standards of adoption services</p>	<p>2.1 Ensure that all relevant parties can exercise their right to be heard throughout the full adoption process and support legal aid applications where required for parents.</p>	<p>2.2 Achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland.</p>	
 <p>3. Effectively implement legislative changes</p>	<p>3.1 Ensure that the Birth Information and Tracing Bill is successfully implemented and operationalised.</p>	<p>3.2 Develop an organisation that is ready to adapt quickly to changes in legislation.</p>	
 <p>4. Empower our people and deliver effective operations</p>	<p>4.1 Build and maintain a workforce that has the capability, capacity and adaptability to achieve their career ambitions, and meet the changing needs of the adoption landscape.</p>	<p>4.2 Develop and expand the Authority's organisation structure, its processes, and technology to enable the delivery of the Strategic Plan.</p>	
 <p>5. Attain robust governance and supportive stakeholder relationships</p>	<p>5.1 Develop effective and accountable governance, risk management and compliance arrangements.</p>	<p>5.2 Progress strong working relationship and collaboration with adoption stakeholders.</p>	<p>5.3 Improve awareness and understanding of the adoption process among stakeholders and the wider public.</p>
 <p>6. Foster a culture of innovation</p>	<p>6.1 Build and maintain innovative delivery methods to ensure world class adoption services are provided.</p>	<p>6.2 Extend and develop capacity of research unit to enable the AAI to show clear research leadership in its field.</p>	



Adoption Authority of Ireland Overview

Adoption Authority of Ireland Overview

Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI): Formation and Purpose

The Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI) is an independent quasi-judicial body under the aegis of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and was established on 1st November 2010 under the Adoption Act 2010. The Authority is also, in line with The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, the central authority for intercountry adoption in Ireland. The purpose of the Adoption Act 2010 is to improve standards in both domestic and intercountry adoption.

Legal adoption was first introduced in Ireland under the 1952 Adoption Act. The 1952 Act was enacted on 1 January 1953 and the Adoption Board was established under this Act. The Adoption Board had the sole right to grant or refuse to grant Adoption Orders. This right is now vested in the Adoption Authority of Ireland under the current 2010 legislation.

The functions of the Authority are set out in Section 96 of the Adoption Act 2010. These include functions of an operational, judicial and quasi-judicial nature in relation to the adoption process itself, as provided for under the Act, but also relating to the Authority's designation as the Central Authority for the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of intercountry Adoption. In addition, the Authority has registration, regulatory and research functions.

Areas of Work

The Authority's obligations span the following areas:

Domestic Adoption: where a child who is resident in Ireland is adopted by a person or couple who is/are also resident in Ireland.

Intercountry Adoption: where persons resident in Ireland decide to adopt a child who is resident in a country other than Ireland.

Information and Tracing: to support post-adoption information and tracing.

Social Work: review and monitoring of social work practice across adoption processes, as well as information, advice and support about any issue relating to adoption and providing mediation and counselling.

Accreditation: to assess and appropriately accredit adoption-related bodies and activities to comply with Irish adoption law.

Adoption Authority of Ireland's Customer Charter

The Adoption Authority of Ireland is committed to providing a professional, efficient and courteous service to all customers, in accordance with the twelve principles of quality customer service for government departments and public bodies.

Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

All public bodies in Ireland have a statutory duty to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect the human rights of their staff, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This is an obligation originated in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014.

Having regard to the current, and anticipated future size, functions and staff levels of the organisation, the Authority commits to reviewing its activities against the Human Rights and Equality Act 2014, (found in strategy Goal 5.1/action 5.1.1.6) and maintaining a register of any issues, and mitigating steps to address these issues. This register will be available to the public on request, and will be referenced in the Authority's Annual Report.

Birth Information and Tracing legislation

The proposed Birth Information and Tracing Bill, which will be enacted during the terms of this strategic plan, will have a significant impact on the strategic direction and priorities of the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

The purpose of the Bill is to enshrine into law the importance of an individual knowing their origins. The Bill proposes a right of access by adopted people and others (such as those who are the subject of illegal birth registration) to birth certificates, birth, early life and medical information and will provide assistance to people who have questions in relation to their origins and identity. The draft Bill also proposes the establishment of a comprehensive Tracing Service to be conducted by the Authority and Tusla and a Contact Preference Register to support people wishing to make contact with birth relatives or to share information.

The bill will have a significant impact on the capacity of existing staff and their workload, it will require the recruitment of additional staff to support the operationalising of this Bill and finally will require an expansion of existing facilities to cater for the storage of all adoption records that come under its stewardship.

In addition, the ability for the authority to continue to complete all adoption orders in a timely and efficient manner will need to be extensively considered as part of the staffing needs for operationalising this new Bill.

Adoption Authority of Ireland Overview

Governance and Organisational Structure

AAI Board

The AAI Board has seven members, appointed by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth, and is chaired by Ms. Orlaith Traynor. Five of these members were reappointed on the 1st November 2020, and two, Deputy Chair Sean O'Brien, and Board Member Sheila Greene, were newly appointed on this date. All seven board positions are incumbent until 31/10/2025.

It is recognised that a vital ingredient to the success of this strategic planning process and the plan's responsiveness and authenticity will be the central involvement of the current Board, where the new Chairperson and new Board members also have ownership of the process. The possibility of either the extension of the current board tenure or staggered board terms for each individual board member should be explored for future boards of the AAI. Each of the board members including their background is outlined below:



Orlaith Traynor, Chairperson

Orlaith has practiced as a Solicitor for over 45 years with a particular expertise in family law. Orlaith has vast experience in adoption having served as Deputy Chairperson to An Bord Uchtala and the Adoption Authority of Ireland for many years. Her thesis for her master's degree was on Birth Father's rights.



Sean O'Brien, Deputy Chairperson

Sean graduated in law from University College Cork in 1983 and has been in practice as a solicitor for over 30 years. In addition to his primary degree Sean is the holder of a masters of law degree, in Advanced Legal Practice (LLM) from Northumbria University. Sean's practice is primarily in civil litigation in which he has extensive experience. Sean has a particular interest in family law and has also, for many years, advised families of children with disabilities on the creation of Wills and Trusts. In addition, he has, since 2008, been an accredited Mediator with CEDR.



Mr. O'Brien has, over the years, been a member of a number of publicly funded Boards, most recently serving as Chair of Youth Theatre Ireland.

Sean's experience of adoption stems from the fact that he is an adoptive father.

Prof. Sheila Greene, Board Member

Sheila is a qualified clinical psychologist, Fellow Emeritus at Trinity College Dublin and former Professor of Childhood Research. She was Co-Director of the national longitudinal study of children in Ireland and the Principal Investigator on A Study of Intercountry Adoption Outcomes in Ireland, commissioned by the Adoption Board.



Judge Patrick McMahon, Board Member

Judge Patrick McMahon is a retired District Court Judge. He qualified as a Solicitor in 1966. He worked in the Land Registry for one year. He then went to Leyden in the Netherlands to study American law. He subsequently studied European law in the University of Amsterdam. After that he practiced as a solicitor until 2006 when he was appointed a District Court Judge. Since then he was appointed as the Garda Siochana confidential recipient. At present he is conducting an inquiry under the Garda Siochana Act 2005. He is also a lecturer in the Law Society. He is a presiding officer in the citizenship ceremonies. He is also the chair of the citizenship revocation committee. Recently he joined the board of Mísean Cara. Finally, he is also a practising notary public.



Paul Harrison, Board Member

Paul is a registered social worker with over 40 years of experience in children's services. He has held a number of practitioner and management positions in the areas of child welfare and protection, alternative care, mental health, homelessness, addiction and adoption.

Adoption Authority of Ireland Overview

Mr. Harrison previously served as Director of Policy and Strategy on the national management team of the Child and Family Agency where he held overall responsibility for the Adoption Service. He currently operates as an Independent Children's Services and Social Work Advisor.



Dr. Helen Buckley, Board Member

Helen is an Associate Professor in the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, where she lectures in child protection practice and policy. She has led a number of commissioned research projects on child protection and is the chair of the National Review Panel that investigates deaths of children who are known to child protection services.



Dr. Margo Anglim, Board Member

Margo is a retired child and adolescent psychiatrist. She was Director of St. Clare's Child Sexual Abuse Assessment and Therapy Service in Temple Street Children's University Hospital and the Clinical Director of the Liaison Mental Health Service in Temple Street for many years.

Governance and Organisational Structure

Board Committees

In accordance with the Adoption Act 2010, the Board may appoint committees to advise it in relation to the performance of its functions. There are currently two functioning Committees under the AAI's Board:

- 1) Risk and Audit Committee
- 2) Research Sub-Committee

Risk and Audit Committee (RAC)

The RAC is responsible for assisting the Board to monitor the internal control environment, risk and financial management and internal and external Audit activities.

Members of the RAC include:

- Ms. Claire Byrne, Chair of the RAC
- Ms. Tara McDermott
- Mr. Paul Harrison, Member of the Authority
- Ms. Orlaith Traynor, Chairperson of the Authority

Research Sub-Committee

The main functions of the Research Sub-Committee are to advise and recommend on matters related to research and to support the AAI's research officer and the SMT in all research projects related to adoption services.

Members of the Research sub-committee include:

- Dr. Helen Buckley, Chair, member AAI Board
- Ms. Orlaith Traynor, AAI Chair
- Professor Sheila Greene, AAI Board
- Ms. Claire McGettrick, UCD, External
- Dr. Richard Sullivan, Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia, External
- Ms. Patricia Carey, AAI CEO
- Dr. Judy Lovett, Secretary, AAI Research officer
- Dr. Margo Anglim, member AAI Board
- Mr. Darren Broomfield, Principal Social Worker
- Ms. Gordon Corrigan, AAI Head of Information & Tracing
- Mr. Mark Kirwan, AAI Head of Domestic Adoption
- Ms. Orla Bolger, AAI Head of Intercountry adoption

Note: A legal research element is proposed as a major function of this committee in this strategy. The current legislative framework has been in place for eleven years and a review and reform review should be completed.

Adoption Authority of Ireland Overview

Governance and Organisational Structure

AAI Senior Management Team

The day to day management and direction of the Adoption Authority of Ireland is the responsibility of the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) and the Senior Management Team (SMT). The CEO acts as a direct liaison between the Board and the SMT and is responsible to ensure that all members of the Board are kept informed of any activities and decisions related to the Authority. The Senior Management Team supports the CEO in the day to day running and management of all activities within the Authority.

The Senior Management team comprises five key members, including the CEO, these roles are outlined below:



Patricia Carey, CEO

Patricia became CEO of the Adoption Authority of Ireland in August 2014. Prior to this, she was Director of Services in St Vincent de Paul. She also worked in the community and voluntary sector and in the Department of Education and Skills. Patricia is passionate about building positive relationships with service users and in the collaborative development of all the services that the authority offers.



Tara Downes, Board Secretary and Director of Operations

The Secretary to the Board provides support to the Board and advises the Chairperson on all governance matters, ensuring compliance with all statutory and regulatory obligations.

The Director of Operations is responsible for the day to day running of the Authority, for leading the development of these operational capabilities, managing staff capacity and ensuring a successful delivery of the strategic plan.



Fiona Monaghan, Head of Human Resources (HR) and Staff Development

Fiona Monaghan is the adoption Authority's Head of Human Resources and Staff Development. Fiona has worked with the Adoption Authority since 2012. During that time she has held the position of Head of Compliance and Resources and has been at various times manager of the Domestic Adoption Unit, the Information and Tracing Unit and the Corporate Services and Accreditation Unit. Fiona has over 25 years civil and public service. Prior to joining the Adoption Authority she worked in the Courts Service, the Public Appointment Service and the Department of Social Protection.



Kate O'Hara, Head of Compliance

Kate has been working with the Adoption Authority since March 2019. Prior to joining the Authority, Kate was a Senior Strategic Crime and Policing Analyst with An Garda Síochána's Analysis Service. Kate has also worked in the NGO sector and in academia. In her role as Head of Compliance, Kate is responsible for all audit, risk and compliance requirements, as well as oversight of the Corporate Services and Accreditation function of the Authority.



Darren Broomfield, Principal Social Worker

Darren took the role of Principal Social Worker within the Authority in 2021 and will be key to the development of these services. Prior to this, Darren worked with the Probation Service as a Senior Probation Officer in the Service's victim services and young people teams. He also worked in the area of children with complex disabilities and palliative care needs, and as a substance misuse social worker.

Adoption Authority of Ireland Overview

Governance and Organisational Structure

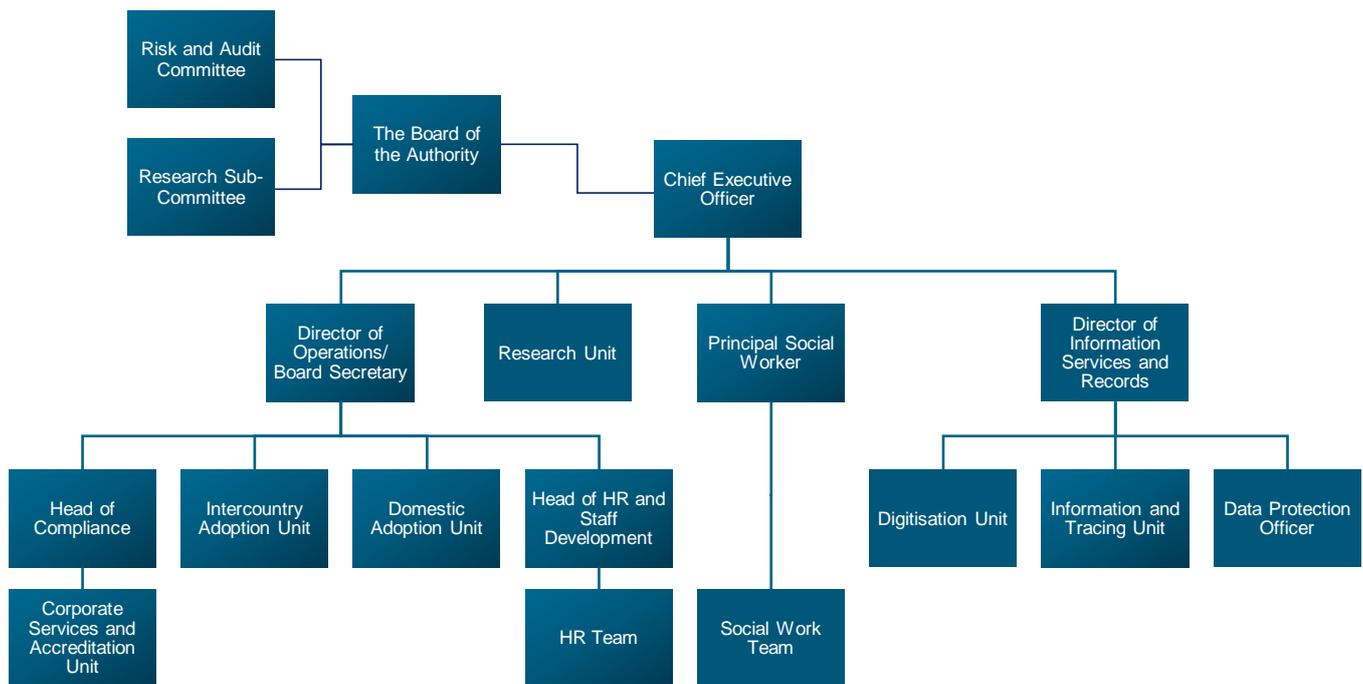


**Ross Higgins (appointed 01/02/22),
Director of Information Services and
Records**

The Director of Information Services and Records key responsibility will be to lead and manage the overall strategic and operational performance of the Authority's Information and Records function. A primary objective of this role will be to lead the operationalisation of proposed Birth Information and Tracing legislation across the Authority.

The current organisational structure of the Adoption Authority of Ireland is outlined below and highlights the significant change that has taken place in the structure since the last strategy was developed.

With the pending implications of the enactment of the Birth Information and Tracing Bill, we anticipate further changes in the staffing requirements across the organisation over the next 3 years.



- Current structure
- New position / Operational unit

A photograph of a group of people in a meeting. In the foreground, a woman with glasses is looking at a laptop screen. Behind her, a man is also looking at the screen. The background is blurred, showing other people in the room. The lighting is warm and indoor.

Progress of Corporate Plan 2019 - 2021

Progress of Corporate Plan 2019 - 2021

The AAI's Strategic Plan for 2022-2024 was informed by the Authority's performance over the period of the previous Corporate Plan 2019-2021. The summary of the progress made against the seven goals that formed that Corporate Plan, are detailed below. A high level commentary on current work/status has also been provided, in order to build a view of areas for further development and those required to successfully implement the new three year strategic plan.

 **Goal 1**
To ensure that the best interests of the children and young people are paramount and that the Authority remains committed to hearing from children and young people and responding to them in a meaningful manner throughout the adoption process.

 **Progress**
The authority is committed to hearing from children and young people and they are kept at the forefront of the AAI's dealings. In all board meetings with children and young people the authority ensured they were adequately heard.

 **Working towards 2024**

- The changing of legislation will dramatically increase the demand for the AAI's services; and
- It will be business critical to have adequate staffing capacity availability to respond to the increasing demands on services and maintain the same level of quality.

 **Goal 2**
To ensure all relevant parties to the adoption process are heard and their respective rights are balanced appropriately.

 **Progress**
The Board continues to be proactive and receptive to engage with any individual, even if not bound by legislation to do so.

 **Working towards 2024**

- One of the main constraints will be capacity; and
- As the demands for the service increase, it will be paramount that there is enough staff to engage with, and listen to all parties concerned with the adoption process and still meet order deadlines.

 **Goal 3**
To achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland.

 **Progress**
The highest standards are constantly strived for. Over the past 3 years, the regulatory function requirements have reduced. All statutory reports were filed on time.

 **Working towards 2024**

- No legislative basis for AAI to regulate the largest provider of adoption services; and
- Addressing this would bring conformity to adoption standards and services.

 **Goal 4**
To apply informed and balanced decision-making in adoption services, in accordance with national and international law and evidence-based best practice.

 **Progress**
All applications were reviewed in a timely fashion by the Executive and referred to the Board for a decision. All adoption decisions were made within the target timelines.

 **Working towards 2024**

- As the basis of much of the AAI's work is founded in statute and law, the expansion of the research strategy to include legal research could be extremely beneficial.

Progress of Corporate Plan 2019 - 2021



Goal 5

To inform adoption policy and service delivery by reason of a practical understanding of the operations of the legislation through the provision of a comprehensive information, research and communications framework.



Progress

AAI continued to support government in the development of adoption policy, including offering information around operationalising the Birth Information and Tracing Bill.



Working towards 2024

- The AAI would like to review and add commentary to the early stages of the policy development process to ensure input is considered around the feasibility of operationalising new government policy and legislation.



Goal 6

To plan and implement the changes required in organisation policies and operational procedures in line with emerging legislative changes.



Progress

Initial plans are in place to operationalise upcoming changes to legislation. A full understanding of these requirements will become apparent when the Bill is finalised.



Working towards 2024

- Having adequate staffing and capacity levels to deal with legislative changes, such as the upcoming Birth Information and Tracing Bill, is of critical importance; and
- Reviewing and updating plans, policies and procedures will be on an ongoing basis as operational requirements become apparent.



Goal 7

To be proactive and responsive to change and maintain an efficient, competent, accountable and learning organisation.



Progress

Adapting to the AAI's transition online during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging, the paper based nature did not aid their transition. However, the months which followed saw the organisation adapt successfully and the AAI are now in a better position to respond to change.



Working towards 2024

- Continuing to implement innovative IT solutions will be hugely beneficial to the efficacy of the AAI;
- Develop and implement training initiatives; and
- Continue to comply with the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, risk management policy and other compliance requirements.



Progress of Corporate Plan 2019 - 2021

During the review phase of the development of this strategy, a detailed SWOT (highlighting the Authority's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the current state of the Authority was completed. The high level themes from this exercise have been condensed into the figure below to further outline the current internal and external areas impacting the authority:



Progress of Corporate Plan 2019 - 2021

In addition to the SWOT analysis, a detailed PESTEL (outlining the potential Political, Environmental, Social, Technological, Economic and Legal influences) analysis was completed. This is an environmental scanning tool to identify key external influences currently impacting the AAI. The high level themes from this exercise have been condensed into the table below:

P

Political

- Political agenda, programme for Government.
- Brexit impacts.
- Intercountry government interactions and dealings.

E

Environmental

- Public Sector Energy Efficiency.
- Move from paper based to digital.
- Sustainability goals.

S

Social

- Working from home and changes to ways-of-working.
- Behavioural standards.
- Public awareness of AAI services.
- Service user expectations.
- Changing adoption practices.
- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

T

Technological

- System software upgrades.
- Covid-19 response innovation.
- Digitisation initiatives.
- Workflow management and case management.
- Measuring performance / key performance indicators.
- Cyberattacks.

E

Economic

- Government finances and adoption supports / grants.
- Requirements for business cases for future staffing needs.
- Building and facilities needs and costs.

L

Legal

- Birth Information and Tracing Bill.
- Adoption Act 2010 and 2017 amendment.
- DAHR & surrogacy legislation.
- Public sector guidelines and codes of practice.
- Public Sector Duty.
- Hague Adoption Convention.
- Children First Act, 2015.
- Overseas laws.
- GDPR and data protection.
- Employee's rights.
- Health and safety.
- Freedom of information.
- Protected disclosure.

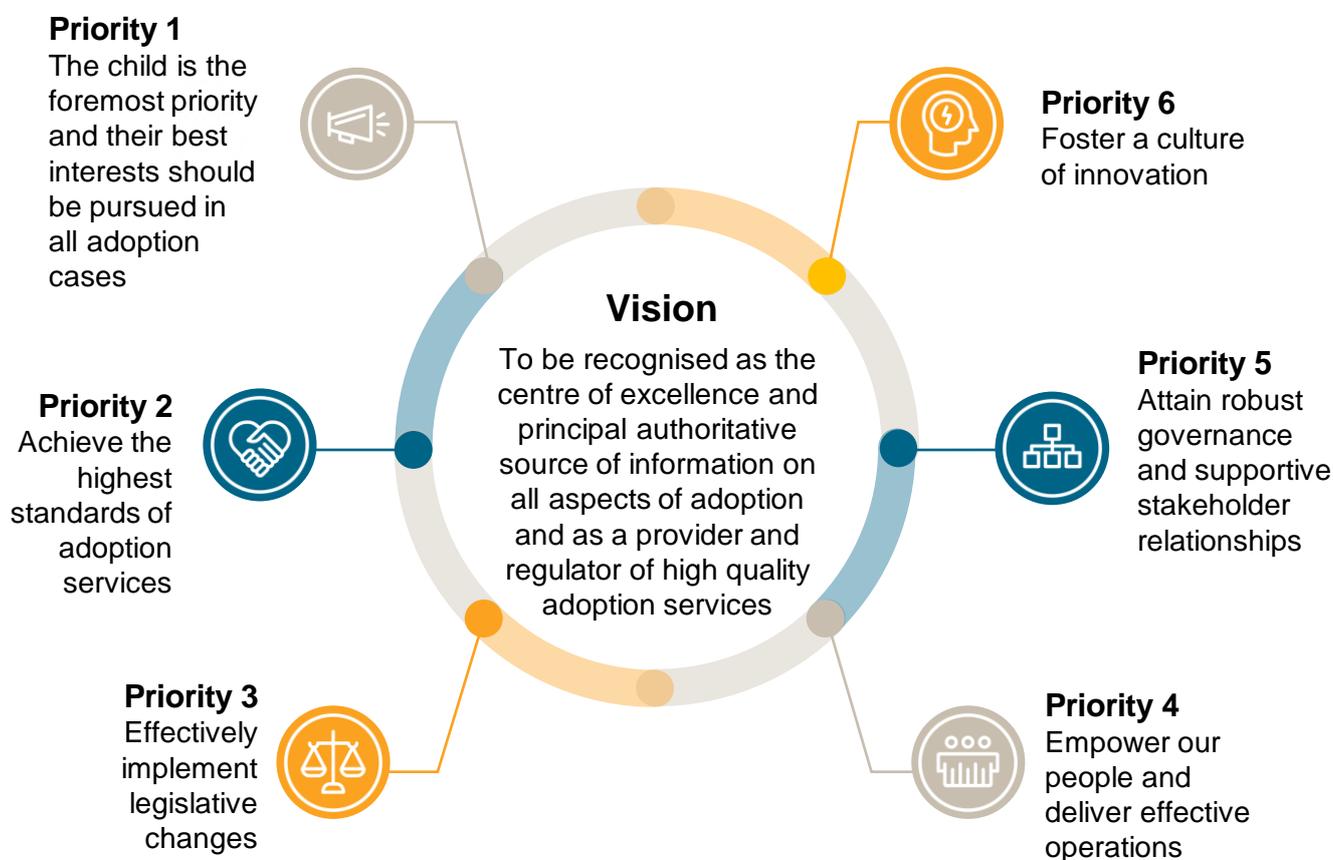
A close-up photograph of several people in business attire (white shirts and a blue tie) gathered around a table. Their hands are focused on signing a document. One person is using a blue pen to sign, while others have their hands resting on the paper. A watch is visible on one of the wrists. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an office environment. A semi-transparent blue horizontal band is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text 'Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024'.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024

The strategic plan that has been developed for 2022-2024 has been designed to ensure that the Authority's vision and mission for the next three years can be realised. This plan has been developed with the support, review and feedback of the AAI Board, Senior Management Team and all managers. Managers in turn consulted with their staff to ensure feedback was gathered from all staff in the organisation. As a result, the plan developed takes into account staff level concerns and develops buy-in to ensure the plan can be delivered over the timeframe.

Six key priorities with associated goals, objectives, and underlying actions have been developed in order to frame the delivery of this strategy. These priorities are a representation of the full range of services that the Authority provides, and all those who have contributed to its development are fully committed to ensuring the Authority meet these strategic goals within the three year timeframe. The six key priorities driving the strategic plan for the Adoption Authority for 2022 – 2024 are outlined below:



The strategic plan for 2022 – 2024 is outlined in the following sections. The format for the presentation of the strategic plan is firstly by each priority, then by the goals, the objectives to deliver each goal and finally the low-level actions that are required to fully deliver this strategy.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



1

Priority 1

The child is the foremost priority and their best interests should be pursued in all adoption cases

Goal 1.1

The primary goal of all adoptions is that the best interests of the child / young person are heard throughout the adoption process and they are responded to in a timely and meaningful manner throughout. The Authority is currently developing a protocol that is committed to hearing from children and young people as part of its development.

Ref.	Objectives	Ref.	Actions
1.1.1	Incorporate the views and interests of the child / young person in all stages of the adoption process, giving due weight having regard to the age and maturity of the child.	1.1.1.1	Continue to detail all interactions and consultations with the child / young person (i.e. hearing from children / young person) throughout their adoption case.
		1.1.1.2	Review and amend (if required), the Authority's policies and procedures to ensure that all adoption orders incorporate the views of the child, giving due weight to the age and maturity of the child.
1.1.2	Incorporate all requests from the child / young person to be heard as part of the adoption process.	1.1.2.1	Continue to detail all requests from the child / young person to be heard, by the Authority's Board.
1.1.3	Provide sufficient and appropriate information to enable the child / young person to make a free and informed decision regarding their adoption.	1.1.3.1	Review, refine and re-implement a set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to be 'used' in all interactions with a child/young person by the Authority staff.
		1.1.3.2	Develop and make readily available a set of frequently asked questions to guide interactions with a child / young person.
		1.1.3.3	Refine existing mechanism for data capture for all stages in the adoption process and make any necessary adjustments for additional data that needs to be captured.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



1

Priority 1

The child is the foremost priority and their best interests should be pursued in all adoption cases

Goal 1.1 (continued)

The primary goal of all adoptions is that the best interests of the child / young person are heard throughout the adoption process and they are responded to in a timely and meaningful manner throughout. The Authority is currently developing a protocol that is committed to hearing from children and young people as part of its development.

Ref.	Objectives	Ref.	Actions
1.1.4	Ensure consistency in practice when hearing from the child or young person.	1.1.4.1	Conduct an annual review and update if required of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's).
		1.1.5.1	Define an agreed schedule for formal meetings/interactions with the Department and Minister on a yearly basis.
1.1.5	Engage with the Department and Minister to support the process of hearing the child / young person in all adoption proceedings.	1.1.5.2	Complete any Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) updates required based on updated guidance from the Department and Minister on any interactions with child/young person in the adoption process.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



2

Priority 2
Achieve the highest standards of adoption services

Goal 2.1

Ensure that all relevant parties can exercise their right to be heard throughout the full adoption process and support legal aid applications where required for parents

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
2.1.1	Ensure that all relevant parties are fully informed of their right to be heard in the adoption process.	2.1.1.1	.
		2.1.1.2	Ensure that guidance on provision of legal aid support for parents is advised in all adoptions orders.
		2.1.1.3	Develop protocol with Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and Legal Aid Board.
2.1.2	Facilitate all relevant parties in their right to be heard during the adoption process.	2.1.2.1	Continue to detail all interactions with all stakeholders throughout their adoption case.
		2.1.2.2	Review and re-implement a feedback mechanism (e.g. via an online form), develop a lessons learned document based on responses received and seek to implement revisions to processes and procedures based on appropriately agreed feedback.
		2.1.2.3	Review and re-define where appropriate the service level agreements for acknowledging and responding to all stakeholder feedback.

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2

Priority 2

Achieve the highest standards of adoption services

Goal 2.1 (continued)

Ensure that all relevant parties can exercise their right to be heard throughout the full adoption process and support legal aid applications where required for parents

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
2.1.3	Ensure the Authority provides sufficient and appropriate information to enable relevant parties to make a free and informed decision regarding adoption.	2.1.3.1	Review, refine and re-implement a set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to be 'used' in all interactions with stakeholders by the Authority staff.
		2.1.3.2	Develop and make readily available a set of frequently asked questions to guide interactions with all stakeholders (see Action 1.1.3.2 for FAQ regarding child / young persons) of the Authority.
		2.1.3.3	Refine existing mechanism for data capture for all stages in the adoption process and make any necessary adjustments for additional data that needs to be captured.
		2.1.3.4	Ensure that guidance on provision of legal aid support for parents is advised when relevant.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



2

Priority 2
Achieve the highest standards of adoption services

Goal 2.2

Achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
2.2.1	Support and oversee the development of comprehensive, high quality and integrated adoption services.	2.2.1.1	Complete a Hague Compliance review against EU and worldwide adoption processes, incorporating lessons learned and best practice solutions, with a view to enhancing adoption services in Ireland.
		2.2.1.2	Engage with potential countries that may be added to the intercountry adoption list.
2.2.2	Maintain active oversight of all accredited agencies, including the re-accreditation and registration against approved regulations.	2.2.2.1	Conduct a review of the AAI's accreditation processes to determine any changes that need to be implemented.
		2.2.2.2	Review and refine (where appropriate) the processes and policies provided to accreditation agencies.
2.2.3	Maintain all statutory and non-statutory registers.	2.2.3.1	Define a schedule for the review and update of all registers.
		2.2.3.2	Any corrections to records and registers are prioritised and completed in a defined period.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



2

Priority 2

Achieve the highest standards of adoption services

Goal 2.2 (continued)

Achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
		2.2.4.1	Review all SLAs within the adoption process to determine if any need to be revised and re-implemented.
		2.2.4.2	Ensure declarations of eligibility and suitability to adopt are completed within the target timeframes.
		2.2.4.3	Ensure that all adoption orders are processed before the child / young person reaches their 18th birthday.
2.2.4	Make informed and timely decisions in all stages of the Adoption Authority's service processes.	2.2.4.4	Ensure that all routine and non-routine processing of the recognition of intercountry adoption orders are processed within the agreed target timeframe.
		2.2.4.5	Ensure that all Article 17 referrals are processed within the agreed target timeframe.
		2.2.4.6	Ensure that all routine and non-routine decisions to release personal, sensitive information to adult adoptees and birth parents are completed within the agreed target timeframe.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



3

Priority 3
Effectively implement legislative changes

Goal 3.1

Ensure that the Birth Information and Tracing Bill is successfully implemented and operationalised.

Ref.	Objectives	Ref.	Actions
3.1.1	Develop a detailed plan ahead of the enactment of the Birth Information and Tracing Bill to ensure a successful implementation.	3.1.1.1	Develop a project plan to track and ensure completion of all activities relating to the implementation of the Bill.
		3.1.1.2	Review current organisation structure in relation to future workload, capability and reporting requirements ahead of the implementation of the new legislation.
		3.1.1.3	Define any changes to the organisational structure as a result of the requirements of the implementation of the new Bill.
		3.1.1.4	Complete any business case templates for newly identified staffing requirements.
		3.1.1.5	Review all key internal processes and procedures to ensure that required changes are identified and implemented in advance of Bill implementation.
		3.1.1.6	Outline workforce plan for the medium to long term after implementation of the Bill.
		3.1.1.7	Outline requirements for temporary staff ahead of the forecasted peak in workload in the short-term in planning and implementing the Bill.
		3.1.1.8	Plan public relations activities in order to facilitate the media campaign associated with the implementation of the Bill.

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3

Priority 3
Effectively implement legislative changes

Goal 3.1 (continued)

Ensure that the Birth Information and Tracing Bill is successfully implemented and operationalised.

Ref.	Objectives	Ref.	Actions
3.1.2	Operationalise the Birth Information and Tracing Bill, tracking metrics and KPIs to ensure that implementation is effective and consistent.	3.1.2.1	Implement PR activities and media campaign plan (linked to action 3.1.1.8).
		3.1.2.2	Implement any changes to the organisational structure as a result of the recommendations from the Bill implementation organisational structure review (linked to action 3.1.1.2).
		3.1.2.3	Ensure effective implementation of the project plan to ensure that that all new policies, processes and procedures are being implemented effectively, adhered to consistently, and become business as usual in the Authority.
		3.1.2.4	Identify and track key performance metrics relating to the successful implementation of the Bill, reviewing the performance of the implementation plan against a defined timeline.
		3.1.2.5	Review and analyse the new Contact Preference Register ahead of BITB in order to assess: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current staff and skills availability• Staff capability and skills gaps• Readiness & Training plan for switchover

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



3

Priority 3
Effectively implement legislative changes

Goal 3.2

Develop an organisation that is ready to adapt quickly to changes in legislation.

Ref.	Objectives	Ref.	Actions
3.2.1	Work with the Government and policy makers to ensure that the Adoption Authority's commentary is considered in decision making processes for the development of adoption related policy and legislation.	3.2.1.1	Develop formal schedule of engagement with identified Government representatives and policy makers to ensure that the Authority is kept updated on any revised guidelines and regulations.
		3.2.1.2	Engage with Government and key related Departments to support the early stages of development and roll-out of future changes or enactment of changes in legislation when identified.
3.2.2	Develop a plan to respond to the implementation of possible Donor-Assisted Human Reproduction and Surrogacy legislation, and additional relevant legislation which may impact the remit of the Authority and its services and operations.	3.2.2.1	Conduct initial research exercises to develop an understanding of requirements and possible responsibilities which might be required by the Authority in response to future Donor-Assisted Human Reproduction and Surrogacy legislation.
		3.2.2.2	Develop high level implementation plans to address any immediate requirements from this research.

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4

Priority 4
Empower our people and deliver effective operations

Goal 4.1

Build and maintain a workforce that has the capability, capacity and adaptability to achieve their career ambitions, and meet the changing needs of the adoption landscape.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
4.1.1	Offer training and development opportunities to staff in a way that is readily available and fair, to allow them to achieve their career ambitions and align their work to support the implementation of the Authority's Strategic Plan.	4.1.1.1	Identify future capability requirements in order to successfully deliver the Authority's duties.
		4.1.1.2	Conduct skills gap analysis between current capabilities against future capability requirements.
		4.1.1.3	Review existing staff training plan and design and implement future training plan.
		4.1.1.4	Review and update staff handbook with updated training plans for all staff.
4.1.2	Implement a robust staff retention, development and succession programme to ensure continuity of services, knowledge retention and organisation development.	4.1.2.1	Develop as an immediate priority, a succession planning model for key management and technical roles.
		4.1.2.2	Identify and map staff career growth plan.
		4.1.2.3	Develop as an immediate priority, a staff retention programme across the entire organisation.
		4.1.2.4	Develop and implement flexible working / blended working policy and guidelines.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



4

Priority 4
Empower our people and deliver effective operations

Goal 4.1 (continued)

Build and maintain a workforce that has the capability, capacity and adaptability to achieve their career ambitions, and meet the changing needs of the adoption landscape.

<i>Ref.</i>	Objectives	<i>Ref.</i>	Actions
		4.1.3.1	Develop an organisational People Strategy (focusing on organisational culture, reemphasis of mission, vision and values and staff enablement).
		4.1.3.2	Roll-out People Strategy and emphasise the Authority's commitment to its implementation from the top down.
4.1.3	Create an environment in which staff can grow and contribute to the success of the Authority.	4.1.3.3	Ensure the staff retention program and People Strategy goals are outlined clearly in the staff handbook.
		4.1.3.4	Both documents clearly identify and implement initiatives to nurture staff collaboration and engagement that all contribute to enhancing a positive working environment.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



4

Priority 4
Empower our people and deliver effective operations

Goal 4.2

Develop and expand the Authority's organisation structure, its processes, and technology to enable the delivery of the Strategic Plan.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
4.2.1	Ensure that all of the AAI functions have the support, capacity and skills required to perform their duties to the highest standard	4.2.1.1	Review the roles and responsibilities of key staff, where it is perceived that the role and responsibility requirements may evolve in order to implement this Strategy.
		4.2.1.2	Complete a gap analysis of all AAI's current workforce, and identify requirements for future needs to ensure the Authority has the capacity to deliver this Strategy. (linked to action 3.1.1.6).
		4.2.1.3	Design and implement a detailed Workforce Plan for period 2022 to 2025. (linked to action 3.1.1.6).
4.2.2	Establish and progress the Information Services and Records Unit, a key component of operationalising the new Birth Information and Tracing legislation.	4.2.2.1	Recruit and on-board Director of Information Services and Records Unit. (Ross Higgins, appointed on 1 st February 2022)
		4.2.2.2	Establish Information Services and Records Unit and outline its aims and purpose for next 3 years.
		4.2.2.3	Outline comprehensive roles and responsibilities, reporting and internal ways-of-working for the new Information Services and Records Unit.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



4

Priority 4
Empower our people and deliver effective operations

Goal 4.2 (continued)

Develop and expand the Authority's organisation structure, its processes, and technology to enable the delivery of the Strategic Plan.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
4.2.3	Re-establish roles and responsibilities of functions and improve work allocation across the organisation to improve the efficiency of workflow and improve productivity.	4.2.3.1	Review the roles and responsibilities of organisational units not outlined above, where it is perceived that the role and responsibility requirements may evolve or change, in order to implement this strategic plan
		4.2.3.2	Identify workload imbalances, workflow inefficiencies and reengineer the allocation and flow of tasks among units and staff.
		4.2.3.3	Identify any additional staffing needs and review for appropriateness before business case creation and submission.

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4

Priority 4
Empower our people and deliver effective operations

Goal 4.2 (continued)

Develop and expand the Authority's organisation structure, its processes, and technology to enable the delivery of the Strategic Plan.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
		4.2.4.1	Review the workflow of all core organisational processes to identify inefficiencies and bottlenecks, and implement solutions in order to reduce these delays or bottlenecks.
		4.2.4.2	Ensure Procurement Plan is produced and approved by the RAC and Board as per required timelines.
		4.2.4.3	Establish a mechanism to ensure Procurement Plan is implemented effectively, and value for money is achieved in all procurement activities.
		4.2.4.4	Complete a review of existing facilities, buildings and systems and determine their suitability for the AAI.
4.2.4	Optimise processes and operations to ensure high quality provision of all services to the public.	4.2.4.5	Maintain efficient and effective management of facilities, buildings and systems including the upgrading of office and storage units where required.
		4.2.4.6	Develop and promote the Sustainability and Energy Efficient Strategy.
		4.2.4.7	Develop and Implement a Social Work Practice Framework.
		4.2.4.8	Develop clear policies and protocols for the delivery of social work in the AAI.
		4.2.4.9	Build a database for case management of social work interventions and assess the potential benefits and suitability of introducing a case management system in other sections of the AAI.

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4

Priority 4
Empower our people and deliver effective operations

Goal 4.2 (continued)

Develop and expand the Authority's organisation structure, its processes, and technology to enable the delivery of the Strategic Plan.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
4.2.4	Optimise processes and operations to ensure high quality provision of all services to the public.	4.2.4.10	Ensure full adherence of the Health and Safety protocols in place and review on an annual basis.
		4.2.4.11	Develop a robust and secure IT service delivery model to support business continuity and efficient operations.
		4.2.4.12	Conduct a review, and assess the effectiveness of all existing ICT systems, tools and technology.
		4.2.4.13	Identify the future organisational ICT requirements for effective delivery of the Authority's services.

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5

Priority 5

Attain robust governance and supportive stakeholder relationships

Goal 5.1

Develop effective and accountable governance, risk management and compliance arrangements.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
5.1.1	Ensure a robust and effective governance framework continues to be utilised and any refinements that are required are implemented. This will ensure that high quality leadership, governance and management teams remain in place and that the Authority continues to be compliant with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.	5.1.1.1	Review list of recommendations derived from the 2020 external Board Effectiveness Review (Sep 2020) and implement the recommendations.
		5.1.1.2	Document future skills, roles and experience requirements for the Board in line with this strategy and the expected future roles of similar public sector boards.
		5.1.1.3	Commence planning for new Board appointments in 2025 as a priority. Investigate the option to stagger board terms for each individual board member.
		5.1.1.4	Continue Board Effectiveness Review as and when required.
		5.1.1.5	Continue to perform Board activities and maintain the effectiveness of the AAI Board in its operational and governance capacity.
		5.1.1.6	Maintain a register noting the assessment of AAI's strategic goals, policies and activities in line with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014, and report on developments and achievements in this area in the AAI's Annual Report.

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5

Priority 5

Attain robust governance and supportive stakeholder relationships

Goal 5.1 (continued)

Develop effective and accountable governance, risk management and compliance arrangements.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
		5.1.2.1	Conduct an analysis of the current Risk Governance Framework to assess the Authority's level of compliance with the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.
		5.1.2.2	Identify and embed improvements from the findings of the Risk Governance Framework analysis.
		5.1.2.3	Maintain and review on a half yearly basis the current Risk Governance Plan.
5.1.2	Exercise robust risk management, data management and integrity, and GDPR compliance processes.	5.1.2.4	Conduct a review of the compliance function to determine any skills or process gaps and implement any findings from this review.
		5.1.2.5	Complete a compliance assessment to ensure GDPR requirements are currently met and any amendments that need to be made to ensure compliance (Access, Identify and Protect).
		5.2.1.6	Schedule regular GDPR governance assessments and audits and ensure that any failings / concerns are addressed and implemented (Govern and Audit).
		5.2.1.7	Review, enhance and strengthen the digital security across all of AAI's activities and systems.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



5

Priority 5

Attain robust governance and supportive stakeholder relationships

Goal 5.2

Progress strong working relationship and collaboration with adoption stakeholders.

Ref.	Objectives	Ref.	Actions
		5.2.1.1	Establish regular schedule to support and provide advice to the Department and Minister on all adoption matters.
		5.2.1.2	Develop, maintain and circulate meeting agendas, outcomes and issues log for each meeting held with the Department and its representatives.
5.2.1	Maintain consistent and meaningful engagement with the Department to inform and cultivate support for the work of the Authority.	5.2.1.3	Ensure all required reports are completed and provide to the Department as per agreed SLAs.
		5.2.1.4	Engage with the Department in relation to work on the whole of Government commitment to establish a National Memorial and Records Centre (action 7 of the Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions).

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



5

Priority 5

Attain robust governance and supportive stakeholder relationships

Goal 5.2 (continued)

Progress strong working relationship and collaboration with adoption stakeholders.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
5.2.2	Increase collaboration with Tusla and other service providers to create more streamlined and user-friendly adoption processes.	5.2.2.1	Review and redefine the expected roles and responsibilities for TUSLA and the AAI.
		5.2.2.2	Implement the revised set of roles and responsibilities via the responsible government department.
		5.2.2.3	Establish a regular schedule of meetings with representatives of TUSLA and other service providers with a goal of identifying and remedying cross-organisational areas for development.
		5.2.2.4	Develop, maintain and circulate meeting agendas, outcomes and issues log for each meeting held with TUSLA and other service providers.
		5.2.2.5	Work with TUSLA and other service providers to lead a review of cross-organisational processes and communications in order to streamline and improve effectiveness with the ultimate goal of improving the end-to-end adoption process.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



5

Priority 5

Attain robust governance and supportive stakeholder relationships

Goal 5.3

Improve awareness and understanding of the adoption process among stakeholders and the wider public.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
5.3.1	Develop a coordinated public relations and communications strategy to ensure the right messages are released, through the right channels and to the right stakeholders.	5.3.1.1	Develop an organisational external communications strategy, including a well-defined public relations plan (linked to action 3.1.1.8).
		5.3.1.2	Create a robust and structured internal communications plan to further ensure that all relevant parties in the organisation are heard in any proceedings. This will also seek to enhance decision making, innovation and engagement within the Authority.
		5.3.1.3	Provide regular communication briefings to key stakeholders on new and relevant adoption matters.
		5.3.1.4	Review and revise AAI website and staff intranet (linked to action 6.1.3.3).
		5.3.1.5	Examine Social Media Communications opportunities

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5

Priority 5

Attain robust governance and supportive stakeholder relationships

Goal 5.3 (continued)

Improve awareness and understanding of the adoption process among stakeholders and the wider public.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
		5.3.2.1	Work with adoption stakeholders to enhance awareness of adoption matters.
		5.3.2.2	Develop and strengthen links with international networks to facilitate the transfer of good practice and knowledge sharing.
		5.3.2.3	Identify target stakeholders that need to be targeted with Bill promotional and adoption services material.
5.3.2	Articulate and promote adoption research findings, analysis, and informed debate on adoption issues.	5.3.2.4	Produce public-friendly content developed from research findings and developments in the adoption sector.
		5.3.2.5	Ensure that relevant parties in government and industry are kept informed of research findings and the location of such material within the AAI.
		5.3.2.6	Identify and participate in national and international forums, workshops, seminars and conferences in collaboration with a range of stakeholders to share research findings and updates in adoption policies and practices.

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6

Priority 6
Foster a culture of innovation

Goal 6.1

Build and maintain innovative delivery methods to ensure world class adoption services are provided.

Ref.	Objectives	Ref.	Actions
6.1.1	Develop and implement an organisational Innovation Strategy.	6.1.1.1	Develop an Innovation Strategy and road map for implementation.
		6.1.1.2	Continue to develop and implement a paperless working environment with relevant policies and procedures.
		6.1.1.3	Digitise all remaining non digitised AAI files and documents.
		6.1.1.4	Develop and implement a 3-year ICT optimisation programme for Authority (linked to action 4.2.4.11 and 4.2.4.12).
6.1.2	Empower and encourage the Authority's staff to challenge ways of working, generate ideas for improvement and implement innovative ideas to improve internal operations.	6.1.2.1	Define initiatives/forums to empower staff to contribute with innovative ideas and suggestions for improvement.
		6.1.2.2	Further develop the 'Innovation' section on the intranet to increase staff engagement and awareness.
		6.1.2.3	Enhance staff awareness and understanding of the Our Public Service (OPS) 2020 framework.
		6.1.2.4	Define current staff digital literature skills and Identify developments needed to enhance AAI's delivery of services.
		6.1.2.5	Establish regular knowledge sharing sessions to harness first-hand experience of customer facing staff to identify areas for improvement.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



6

Priority 6
Foster a culture of innovation

Goal 6.1 (continued)

Build and maintain innovative delivery methods to ensure world class adoption services are provided..

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
6.1.3	Use innovative methods, approaches and technologies to improve user experience, especially for adoptees, vulnerable users and users with disabilities.	6.1.3.1	Review and develop the accessibility of user-platforms and the availability of digital content and services to the Public.
		6.1.3.2	Establish a forum for engagement with service users to gauge current user experiences.
		6.1.3.3	Further develop the Authority's website content to ensure stakeholder expectations are met.
		6.1.3.4	Regularly review all client interactions to ensure activities are consistent with our customer charter fundamentals.
		6.1.3.5	Design and roll-out internal initiative encouraging a digital data-centric approach to work within the Authority.

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024



6

Priority 6
Foster a culture of innovation

Goal 6.2

Extend and develop capacity of research unit to enable the AAI to show clear research leadership in its field.

Ref.	Objectives	Ref.	Actions
6.2.1	Progress and allocate appropriate staffing levels to ensure the continued development of the Research Unit.	6.2.1.1	Review existing research operations to map the current body of work completed.
		6.2.1.2	Identify future areas of research and build programs of work.
		6.2.1.3	Identify research staff requirements and necessary skills and capabilities to meet future requirements. (link with actions 4.2.1.2 and 4.2.1.3).
		6.2.1.4	Build a database for central storage of all research studies.
		6.2.1.5	Conduct benchmark analysis of similar research units nationally and internationally in order to gain learnings and inform the further development of the Unit.

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6

Priority 6
Foster a culture of innovation

Goal 6.2 (continued)

Extend and develop capacity of research unit to enable the AAI to show clear research leadership in its field.

<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Actions</i>
		6.2.2.1	Identify and develop networking and partnership development opportunities with key stakeholders both nationally and internationally to develop innovate research studies to enhance adoption activities.
		6.2.2.2	Facilitate working groups and consultations with stakeholders to identify areas of interest to outline potential topics for future research.
6.2.2	Identify additional progressive research areas in order to inform and influence national and international adoption.	6.2.2.3	Engage with established research units, and/or third level education organisations to develop cross-organisational research projects.
		6.2.2.4	Identify topics to introduce onto the future research strategy. Legal framework review and reform is one such topic.
		6.2.2.5	Review the feasibility, relevance and impact of each new topics onto the research agenda.



Implementation Roadmap

Implementation Roadmap

Implementation Roadmap

The following high level timeline outlines the implementation roadmap required to deliver the priorities and objectives identified in the Strategic Plan for 2022-24. A detailed implementation plan (separate document) including actions, owners, staffing requirements and timeline for completion of all of these activities is being managed by the authority.

Priority	2022	2023	2024
The child is the foremost priority and their best interests should be pursued in all adoption cases	The best interests of the child / young person are committed to be heard throughout the adoption process and they are responded to in a timely and meaningful manner throughout		
Achieve the highest standards of adoption	Ensure all relevant parties can exercise their right to be heard throughout the full adoption process and support legal aid applications where required for parents		
	Achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland		
Effectively implement legislative changes	Ensure that the Birth Information and Tracing Bill is successfully implemented and operationalised		Develop an organisation that is ready to adapt quickly to changes in legislation
Empower our People and Deliver Effective Operations	Build and maintain a workforce that has the capability, capacity and adaptability to achieve their career ambitions, and meet the changing needs of the adoption landscape		
	Develop and expand the Authority's organisation structure, its processes, and technology to enable the delivery of the Strategic Plan		
Attain Robust Governance and Productive Stakeholder Relationships	Develop effective and accountable governance, risk management and compliance arrangements		
	Progress strong working relationships and collaboration with adoption stakeholders		Improve awareness and understanding of the adoption process among stakeholders and the wider public
Foster a Culture of Innovation	Build and maintain innovative delivery methods to ensure world class adoption services are provided		
	Extend and develop capacity of research unit to enable the AAI to show clear research leadership in its field		

Implementation Roadmap

Selected Implementation Dependencies

The following selected implementation dependencies are an sample of the type of documents or items that will need to be completed in order to deliver specific goals of the strategy. The implementation plan, which is detailed separately, provides information on timelines, ownership, key performance indicators and any considerations to deliver the strategy.



Priority 1: The child is the foremost priority and their best interests should be pursued in all adoption cases

#	Goal	Selected Dependencies
1.1	The primary goal of all adoptions is that the best interests of the child / young person are heard throughout the adoption process and they are responded to in a timely and meaningful manner throughout. The Authority is currently developing a protocol that is committed to hearing from children and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder Interactions Report; Policies and Procedures Review; and SOP and FAQ Review.



Priority 2: Achieve The Highest Standards of Adoption Services

#	Goal	Selected Dependencies
2.1	Ensure that all relevant parties can exercise their right to be heard throughout the full adoption process and support legal aid applications where required for parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder Interactions Report; Implement stakeholder feedback mechanism; Revised service level agreements (SLAs); and SOP and FAQ Review.
2.2	Achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hague Compliance review; SLA Adherence Review; End to End Service Review; and Policy and Procedure Review.



Priority 3: Effectively Implement Legislative Changes

#	Goal	Selected Dependencies
3.1	Ensure that the Birth Information and Tracing Bill is successfully implemented and operationalised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Plan; Organisation Structure Review; Workforce Plan / Skills gap analysis; Process and Procedure Review; Communications plan (incl PR and Media plans); and Review and Revise KPIs.
3.2	Develop an organisation that is ready to adapt quickly to changes in legislation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal Schedule of Government engagement; and Research Agenda for next three years.

Implementation Roadmap

Selected Implementation Dependencies

The following selected implementation dependencies are an sample of the type of documents or items that will need to be completed in order to deliver specific goals of the strategy. The implementation plan, which is detailed separately, provides information on timelines, ownership, key performance indicators and any considerations to deliver the strategy.



Priority 4: Empower our People and Deliver Effective Operations

#	Goal	Selected Dependencies
4.1	Build and maintain a workforce that has the capability, capacity and adaptability to achieve their career ambitions, and meet the changing needs of the adoption landscape.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People strategy; • Training plan; • Succession planning; and • Staff retention program.
4.2	Develop and expand the Authority's organisation structure, its processes, and technology to enable the delivery of the Strategic Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Plan (Current and Future Needs); • Information Services and Records Unit Review; • Social Work Model Review; • Case and Workflow Management Review; and • Facilities and Building Review.



Priority 5: Attain Robust Governance and Supportive Stakeholder Relationships

#	Goal	Selected Dependencies
5.1	Develop effective and accountable governance, risk management and compliance arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Review; • 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies Gap Analysis; • Risk Governance Framework review; and • GDPR Compliance Assessment.
5.2	Progress strong working relationships and collaboration with adoption stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular engagement schedule with Department; and • Redefine all Roles and Responsibilities with stakeholders of AAI.
5.3	Improve awareness and understanding the adoption processes among stakeholders and the wider public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External communications strategy; • Internal communications plan; and • National and international forum participation.



Priority 6: Foster a Culture of Innovation

#	Goal	Selected Dependencies
6.1	Build and maintain innovative delivery methods to ensure world class adoption services are provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation Strategy; • Staff empowerment initiatives; and • Service user engagement forum.
6.2	Extend and develop capacity of research unit to enable the AAI to show clear research leadership in its field.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research database; and • Cross-organisational research projects.



Risks and Risk Mitigation

Risk and Risk Mitigation

Effective risk management supports good governance.

The Authority has a robust and proactive approach to risk management in all areas of the organisation. The risk management framework and policy is approved by the Authority's Board, and outlines a structured and consistent approach to identifying and managing a range of risk categories. This framework is championed by the SMT, the Risk and Audit Committee, and the Board.

The following risks have been identified as potential obstacles to the successful implementation of the Strategic Plan, with an proposed risk mitigation outlined.

 Risk	 Risk Mitigation
<p><u>Impact on the Authority of new Information and Tracing legislation.</u></p> <p>➤ Sub risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some goals are dependent on legislation being enacted, enactment dates are outside of the control of the Authority. • Changes in the role of the Authority due to the impact of new legislation. • Uncertainty around enactment dates. • Uncertainty about final version/wording. • Dependence on third party assistance and cooperation. • Medium to long term planning and budgeting by Authority cannot be definitive. • Future workload and therefore staffing requirements will not be fully understood until the new Information and Tracing Bill is finalised. • Large increase in enquiries to the Authority due to historical matters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close cooperation with the Department (DCEDIY) officials for updates and status of legislation. CEO engaging with DCEDIY in advance of new Birth Information and Tracing Bill; • Grace period (3 months +) after the new legislation being implemented before full operationalisation; • A workforce plan will be devised in line with the new strategic plan and revised as future requirements are understood; • Staff to be updated as and when updates are received from DCEDIY; and • Staff to examine in house procedures and suggest revisions to procedures and to formal documentation to comply with new legislation.
<p><u>COVID-19 results in budget cuts / operational pressures.</u></p> <p>➤ Sub risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency funding required by accredited bodies. • COVID-19 impacting on normal communications between Authority and stakeholders. • COVID -19 emergency situation slows operations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing consultation with the DCEDIY regarding COVID-19 expenses; • Ongoing consultation with accredited bodies in financial difficulty; • Ongoing oversight of accredited bodies in receipt of emergency funding; • Contingency plan in place if intercountry adoption mediation services agency closes; • Continued use of remote hearings; and • COVID-19 emergency plan being implemented and reviewed on ongoing basis.
<p><u>Challenging relationships with adoption stakeholders leading to limited communication</u></p> <p>➤ Sub risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on adoption process and cross-organisational process steps. • Late applications from Tusla continue to be challenging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal communication schedule to be outlined with key partners and reviewed on an annual basis; • Communications plan to be implemented; • Continuous engagement with TUSLA at senior level; and • Redefinition of roles and responsibilities.

Risk and Risk Mitigation

 Risk	 Risk Mitigation
<p><u>Discharge of respective duties and responsibilities ineffective or inefficient. Leading to the risk of failing to meet statutory obligations resulting in legal challenges and ancillary reputational impact, and an increase in legal spend.</u></p> <p>➤ Sub risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current legal structure of Board does not allow for Governance / Finance expertise • Senior Management Team over extended through increased workload and responsibilities • COVID -19 emergency increases pressure on the Senior Management Team • Staff absences increases pressure on the Senior Management Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular review and reporting of statutory obligations; • Review and implementation of recommendations from the independent Board Effectiveness review; • Board induction training to cover all required duties; • Code of Governance for the Authority updated to include specific roles and responsibilities for Board, Senior Management Team and Board Secretary; • Training provided during Board induction; • Dedicated Head of Compliance and dedicated Head of HR and Staff Development since October 2019; • Post Board meetings held with unit managers to discuss Board decisions and actions to be taken; • Setting up the new Information Services and Records Unit; • External review of the Board and its sub-committees to be completed as scheduled on a three year cycle; and • Governance Forum events.
<p><u>Loss of key staff and change of full Board Members, and therefore loss of knowledge and expertise</u></p> <p>➤ Sub risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of key staff and management leaving the Authority with limited contingency plan • The non-staggered Board rotation means the potential of losing all expertise from Board once term is expired. • Delays in replacing staff who resign /retire. • Skills gap in staff complement around archives and records management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore possibility of staggered Board terms; • Staff retention and culture initiatives; • Develop a succession planning model for Board, key management and technical roles; • Identify and map staff career growth plan; • Develop and implement flexible working / remote working policy; • Knowledge transfer initiatives; • Maintain schedule of competency and skills requirements of Board and report to the DCEDIY on same; and • Identify skills gap and tailor training programmes available to upskill workforce.
<p><u>ICT across the organisation not up to date, and limited innovation across the Authority</u></p> <p>➤ Sub risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited ability to identify and prioritise projects that are likely to be successful • Cultural barriers to changing processes and ways of working • No dedicated ICT staff • Interdependencies of a number of project on having adequate ICT provision e.g. Document management and digitisation of files 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outsourced ICT provision to address skills gap; • Innovation strategy to be finalised; and • Support for staff, including technical literacy made available.
<p><u>Compliance with GDPR requirements</u></p> <p>➤ Sub risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data transfer between jurisdictions post-Brexit • Sharing of data is not underpinned in statute • Complying with GDPR requirements • Large increase in subject access requests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full GDPR compliance review to be completed; • Ongoing liaison with Department officials; • Setting up the new Information Services and Records Unit; • Contingency planning ongoing; and • Any GDPR issues are brought to the attention of the DPO, DCEDIY and the Board immediately.

A photograph of a man and a young child. The man, on the left, is wearing a light-colored baseball cap and a plaid shirt with red, white, and grey patterns. He is holding a young child with blonde hair and blue eyes. The child is wearing a brown t-shirt and light-colored pants. They are standing in front of a blue tractor. The word "Appendices" is overlaid in white text on a semi-transparent blue background across the middle of the image.

Appendices

Appendix A: Acronyms

List of Acronyms used throughout this Document:

Acronym	
AAI	The Adoption Authority of Ireland
APU	Adoption Policy Unit
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
TUSLA	Child and Family Agency
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
NACPR	National Adoption Contact Preference Register

Appendix B: Bibliography reviewed in this Strategy

List of all Documents and other publications reviewed during the development of the Strategic Plan 2022-2024

A) The Adoption Authority of Ireland, Internal Documents and Publications

- *AAI Declaration on Public Service Innovation in Ireland (2020)*;
- *AAI Corporate Tracker 2019-2021 (Q1 2021)*;
- *AAI Risk Register (Q1 2021)*;
- *Annual Report (2019)*;
- *Annual Report (2020)*;
- *Board Effectiveness Review – Dec, 2020*;
- *Business Plan (2019)*;
- *Business Plan (2020)*;
- *Business Plan (2021)*;
- *Calendar 2021 Board Meetings Governance Dates (2021)*;
- *Celebrating 10 years of the Adoption Authority of Ireland*;
- *Code of Governance (2019)*;
- *Corporate Plan (2016-2019)*;
- *Corporate Plan (2019-2021)*;
- *Corporate Procurement Plan 2021 – 2023*;
- *Customer Action Plan (2018-2020)*;
- *Director of Information and Records Proposal (2021)*;
- *Financial Statements (2018 - 2019)*;
- *Internal Audit Plan (2020-2022)*;
- *Press Release AAI Birth Info and Tracing Bill 11052021 (2021)*;
- *Protected Disclosure Policy (Revised, 2021)*;
- *Research Strategy (2019-2022)*;
- *Review of Records Management for the Adoption Authority of Ireland (2021)*;
- *Risk Management Policy; and*
- *Sanction Request Director of Information Services and Records (2021)*.

B) Other (external) Documents and Publications

- *Adoption Act, 2010*;
- *Adoption Amendments Act, 2013*;
- *Adoption Amendments Act, 2017*;
- *Adoption Information and Tracing Bill, 2016*;
- *Amendments to the Constitution (Children) Act, 2010*;
- *Birth Information and Tracing Bill Draft Legislation, May 2021*;
- *Children Equality Act*;
- *Civil Service Code of Conduct, Dáil Éireann Debate, Feb 2019*;
- *FAQ's on Birth Information and Tracing Legislation and Illegal Birth Registrations Legislation*;
- *Hague Convention information Booklet*;
- *Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014*;
- *Ireland's ratification of the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption*;
- *Irish Human Rights and Equality Act, 2014*;
- *2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies*;
- *Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation, Oct 2020*;

Appendix B: Bibliography reviewed in this Strategy

List of all Documents and other publications reviewed during the development of the Strategic Plan 2022-2024

B) Other (external) Documents and Publications (continued)

- *AAI Opening Statement Pre-legislative scrutiny by the Joint Committee on Children, Disability, Equality and Integration Birth Information and Tracing Bill Statement to Oireachtas (2021);*
- *Briefing Session for Stakeholders on Birth Information and Tracing Heads of Bill (2021);*
- *Draft Heads and General Scheme of Bill (2021);*
- *Press Release Minister O’Gorman publishes Proposed Birth Information and Tracing Legislation (2021);*
- *Annex to the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies: Annex on Gender Balance, Diversity and Inclusion (2020);*
- *Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour;*
- *Guidelines on Compliance with the Provisions of the Ethics in Public Office Acts 1995 and 2001; and*
- *Signed AAI Oversight Agreement with Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2020).*

Appendix C: Declaration on Public Service Innovation in Ireland

Declaration on Public Service Innovation in Ireland

In order to better serve our people, the Irish Public Service needs to be highly innovative. Innovation does more than simply drive economic growth. It has the potential to solve some of the most pressing challenges that Ireland faces now and in the Future.

ADOPTION AUTHORITY OF IRELAND declares to take the following actions to build a culture of innovation in our Public Service. We will:

Further endorse innovation as the responsibility of every public servant;

Enable, support, inform and equip our public servants to innovate in their roles;

Cultivate new partnerships and involve diverse views in problem solving and designing and delivering our public services;

Generate multiple options for existing and potential problems through exploration, experimentation, iteration and testing;

Provide insights into our experiences, best practices and lessons learned with other public servants in Ireland and abroad;

Share knowledge and data with citizens in an open and transparent way.

Innovation, experimentation and openness require constant effort and a certain degree of risk. As public servants, we must be ambitious, agile and collaborative to achieve meaningful and durable results. In doing so we should be open to progressive thinking in order to create a new and better future for all inhabitants of the State.

To solve difficult problems, we must rely on the diversity, ingenuity and creativity of the public and our fellow public servants. We must also be open to blue sky thinking in order to create a new and better future for our people. In times of considerable change and uncertainty, our greatest risk is refusing to take chances and try new things. We need a culture of innovation.

Innovation is now the benchmark in most scientific, business and social sectors. Embracing and enabling innovation is equally important in delivering services and building inclusive, sustainable communities.



CEO Patricia Carey
ADOPTION AUTHORITY OF IRELAND