



To: Education and Children Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date:

Subject: Creation of a Regional Adoption Agency

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To provide Scrutiny with an overview of the proposal to create a Regional Adoption Agency via a shared service arrangement with Solihull Metropolitan Council, Warwickshire County Council and Worcestershire County Council. This new Regional Adoption Agency to be known as Adoption Central England (ACE).
- 1.2 Cabinet will be asked on the 31st October 2017 to approve that Coventry City Council enters into a shared service arrangement alongside the three other local authorities to undertake the majority of functions of the City Council relating to adoption.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Service Scrutiny Board (2) is asked to consider the proposals for a creation of a Regional Adoption Agency and to make any recommendations to Cabinet.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 A policy paper from the DfE in January 2013 – 'Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes' identified the need for the re-organisation of the existing adoption system based as it is on each local authority delivering an adoption service as well as a voluntary adoption sector. The DfE's 'Regionalising Adoption' paper published in June 2015 spelt out the governments expectations with all local authorities being part of regional agencies. In April 2016 the DfE published a new policy document "Adoption: A vision for Change" in which the government committed to deliver radical, whole system redesign by regionalising adoption services by ensuring all local authorities were part of an RAA by 2020 or had delegated their functions to an RAA.
- 3.2 The clear impetus of the regionalisation of adoption work is to create a system wide redesign that operates at a larger more efficient and effective scale with consistent quality, that sees collaborative working between local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies and delivers adoption services with a focus on innovation and practise.

Having a system that is fragmented in this way reduces the scope for broader, strategic planning, as well as specialisation, innovation and investment. Large numbers of small agencies render the system unable to make the best use of the national supply of potential adopters; they are more vulnerable to peaks and troughs in the flow of children, and are less cost effective. The two areas where the current

system structure creates the most problems are in relation to how quickly children and adopters are matched, and the provision of adoption support services.

Adoption: A vision for Change DfE 2016

4 The Adoption Service

- 4.1 It is the duty of every every local authority to establish and maintain within their area a service designed to meet the needs, in relation to adoption. These services maintained by local authorities may be collectively referred to as “the Adoption Service”, and a local authority or approved adoption society may be referred to as an adoption agency.

5 ACE (Adoption Central England) RAA

- 5.1 In response to the Governments regionalisation agenda ACE launched on 24 November 2015 as a ‘Scope and Define’ Project. The three neighbouring Local Authorities of Coventry City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Council and Warwickshire County Council with strong relationships and a history of partnership working came together to collaborate on the project. They were later joined by Worcestershire County Council and the local authorities have been working together to create their vision for a “better than the best” adoption service.
- 5.2 The partners have recognised the opportunity to use innovation and practise to create a Regional Adoption Agency that achieves positive outcomes for families whilst achieving efficiencies and savings through economy of scale. Key to achieving their vision is stakeholder and practitioner engagement; including using the experience of adopters in co production and service design.
- 5.3 It is envisaged that approach being proposed will achieve the following for children with adoption plans:
- Increase in number of adopters
 - Speedy and higher quality assessments
 - Larger pool of adopters creating choice and improving timeliness to achieve matching
 - Targeted recruitment focus
 - Improved support reducing placement breakdowns
 - Reduction in timescales for children waiting for adoption
 - Increase the number and range of fostering to adopt placements thereby allowing very young children to be placed with their prospective permanent family from the earliest possible opportunity
 - By extending local placement choice and through a joint tracking and information/intelligence sharing process between the agencies the model will reduce delay between adoption decision and placement matching – this will ensure that children are placed quickly and have improved adoption stability as indicated through the most recent adoption research
 - DfE timescales will be met and partners will be mutually responsible for each other’s performance
 - The standardised tracking process will be able to inform adopter recruitment activities and assist in the prioritisation of adopters assessments

- Expertise in adoption will be developed across the sub region, from evaluating current practices but also applying new and emerging learning from practice and research
- Establishment of a sustainable and cost effective adoption support service that is both flexible and creative in its approach to providing the best possible support to adoptive families
- Robust performance tracking systems.

5.4 ACE has also been working with Coventry University to ensure the project is underpinned by research and practice knowledge and an evaluation process integral to the development.

6 Functions

6.1 It is the intention for ACE to provide the following functions

- The recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters
- Providing post adoption to families and assessing their support needs
- Providing support to relevant Special Guardians
- Providing support and information to adults who were adopted.
- Undertaking assessments and approval for non agency adoptions including overseas adoptions
- Supporting early placements using “Fostering to Adopt”
- Providing birth parent support
- Providing specialist knowledge, consultation and advice on adoption
- Sourcing matches for children with potential adoptive families and recommending these matches to the child’s social worker
- Holding effective adoption panels to scrutinising applications from prospective adopters
- Ensure concurrent planning for children by tracking children alongside the local authorities to avoid delay in children achieving permanency.

7 Delivery Model

7.1 The Executive Board of ACE, attended by the Directors of Children’s Services for each authority, considered the options around different types of delivery structures and the preferred option recommended was a partnership host model (with Warwickshire County Council acting as the host authority). This was approved as the preferred model to take forward for engagement and consultation by Cabinet on 3rd January 2017.

- 7.2 This model will operate as a partnership contractual arrangement with staff seconded into the host authority, Warwickshire County Council. The Executive Board will set the budget and strategy with the contractual agreement covering the nature of the financing and sharing at an operational level.
- 7.3 A period of engagement on the proposed new service took place between the 11th of July to the 11th of August 2017
- 7.4 It is proposed that ACE will be governed by an Executive Board made up of senior representatives from each of the local authorities who will have voting rights. In addition there will be Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) representation. The aim of the Executive Board is to deliver an effective “Better than the Best” adoption service and will provide strategic direction and oversight.
- 7.5 The Executive Board will be supplemented by a Practice and Stakeholder Panel whose primary function will be to operationalise and deliver an effective “Better than the Best” adoption service with responsibility for developing practice and joint partnership working between the local authorities and stakeholders

8 Staff implications

- 8.1 There are approximately 53 staff in scope across the local authorities and approximately 63 posts within the proposed ACE structure. The Executive Board has agreed to a secondment arrangement in order that staff maintain their current terms and conditions.
- 8.2 From the indicative staffing preference exercise the majority of staff can be accommodated within their first choice.
- 8.3 There is no expectation of redundancies and indeed there will be opportunities within the structure for promotion. Following Cabinet approval formal consultation will be undertaken and arrangements progressed to confirm staff within the new structure.

9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 From the 1st of February 2018 to 31st March 2019 each local authority would contribute proportionate funding according to its current in-scope costs:

Transitional Funding (to 31/03/2019):

Parties	Maximum Per Annum Funding Contribution (£)
Coventry City Council	£923,500
Solihull MBC	£445,000
Warwickshire County Council	£943,000
Worcestershire County Council	£1,065,500
Total	£3,377,000

This maximum contribution is based on existing in-scope costs (as-is position).

9.2 From 1st April 2019 onwards the funding is based on a cost sharing methodology with an in principle fixed cash limit, the 2019/20 cash limit being £3,272,500, the cost sharing data and methodology being reviewed every two years.

On-going Funding (from 1 April 2019):

Parties	Cash Limit Funding Share (%)	2019/20 Maximum Financial Contribution (2017/18 prices) per Annum (£)
Coventry City Council	29.0%	£949,025
Solihull MBC	11.4%	£373,065
Warwickshire County Council	31.0%	£1,014,475
Worcestershire County Council	28.6%	£935,935
Total ACE Cash Limit	100%	£3,272,500

10 Timeline

10.1 Should Cabinet agree the recommendations proposed, a formal consultation with staff will take place with gradual implementation and a fully operational Regional Adoption Agency going live on the 1st of February 2018.

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