



To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 21 June 2018

Subject: Regional Adoption Agency progress

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To note the progress made towards establishing a Regional Adoption Agency and any improved outcomes for children.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended:
- 1) To note the content of the report
 - 2) That the continued progress of Regional Adoption Agency be reviewed through the Corporate Parenting Board.
 - 3) To identify any further recommendations for the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 In the paper Regionalising Adoption in 2015, the Government gave clear direction to all local authorities that they were to participate in the development of a Regional Adoption Agency. This was confirmed in the Education and Adoption Act 2016. Coventry City has joined with Solihull MBC, Warwickshire County Council and Worcestershire County Council to develop a shared services arrangement. This is hosted by Warwickshire County Council. The arrangement was approved by Cabinet on 31 October 2017 and Adoption Central England (ACE) became operational on 1 February 2018.
- 3.2 Governance arrangements are in place and an Executive Board oversees the running of ACE. Expectations and responsibilities are laid out in a Hosting Agreement which is to be reviewed regularly. The Executive Board is currently chaired by a representative from Coventry City Council.
- 3.3 ACE works on a hub and spoke model to deliver services. The hub focusses on the recruitment and assessment of adopters, whilst the spoke in each Local Authority looks at matching children with adopters and supporting families up to the making of an adoption order, and beyond where necessary. 14 staff were seconded to ACE when it became live. These members of staff work closely with their ACE colleagues, but continue to have the benefits of being employed by Coventry City Council. It should be noted that ACE only has responsibility for the approval and matching of adopters with children, alongside support for families following adoption. Care planning decisions and case management for individual children remains with the relevant Local Authority. The staff in the ACE Coventry spoke are co-located with children's permanence social workers to facilitate closer working and maintain a focus on outcomes for children.
- 3.4 There has been a recent meeting with representatives from the DfE to review progress. In addition, ACE is to be part of a national review of Regional Adoption Agencies which has been commissioned by the DfE and undertaken by Bristol University. Performance will

continue to be monitored through the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB), and the lead manager for ACE has developed an outcomes framework to be reviewed on a quarterly basis.

3.5 Ace has a performance framework in place. However, as it has only been operational since 1 February 2018, there is not a full quarter data set available yet. However, early indicators are:

- ACE has received early warnings of 28 single children and 5 sibling groups of children who may need an adoption placement. This includes 11 children who as yet have not been born for whom a fostering for adoption placement might be the approved plan but will depend on ongoing social work assessments.
- There have been 4 further notifications of Coventry children who might need fostering for adoption who will be placed with ACE approved adopters.
- Since March 4 Coventry children have matched with adopters - 3 are ACE adopters (formerly Coventry) and one child on an inter-agency basis.
- There are 20 single Coventry children with an adoption decision waiting for placement and a further 9 sibling groups. 15 ACE adopters are being or have been approached/considered for these children including a small number of foster carers who are progressing the adoption route for the children in their care. 2 children are being considered for interagency placements.
- During June, 6 other Coventry children are to be matched with their prospective adoptive parents - 5 with ACE adopters and one interagency placement.
- Activity levels to date suggests a trend that 80% of Coventry children are being placed with adopters within the ACE cohort.
- In recognition of the specific placement needs of Coventry children links have been made with the African Caribbean network and Polish communities and specific recruitment activity is to be planned with After Adoption and Barnardos.

3.6 Initial benefits associated with the implementation of ACE include:

- Improved outcomes for children including access to a wide pool of adopters and an ability to better match children to a new family
- Reduction in bureaucracy as interagency fees between Local Authorities are avoided
- Better links across the region
- Ability to learn best practice from colleagues in other areas
- Consistency of approach across all four Local Authorities.

Paul Smith
Strategic Lead for Looked After Children
paul.smithcyp@coventry.gov.uk