
Cabinet Member Children and Young People

12 March 2013

Name of Cabinet Member:

Children and Young People – Councillor Jim O’Boyle

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Children, Learning and Young People

Ward(s) affected: All

Title:

Report on Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull Adoption Conference on 21 January 2013

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire held a joint conference on adoption on 21 January 2013. The purpose of the conference was to raise the profile of adoption as offering one of the best means to achieve a permanent, safe and loving family life for children in the care of the three Councils. The conference keynote speaker was Sir Martin Narey who is the Government’s adoption advisor. He outlined the reasons for the development of the Government’s programme to reform adoption services, what has been done already and what further reforms are planned. The Government’s aim is to increase the number of children adopted from care.

The Conference was attended by about 90 staff from across the three local authorities and provided them with an opportunity to hear about the Government’s programme and consider how adoption can be improved across the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire sub-region.

Recommendations:

- 1. Note the benefits of holding this conference**
- 2. Recognise the good work being done by the Coventry Adoption service**
- 3. Agree that a further sub-regional conference should be held in 2014 to continue to promote adoption**
- 4. Ask officers to work with their colleagues in Solihull and Warwickshire on how we can improve recruitment and assessment of adopters through working more closely together**

List of Appendices included:

None

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title:

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 Increasing the number of children adopted from care is a Council and Government priority. To help promote this priority Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire agreed to hold a conference on adoption aimed at staff and Councillors. The conference aimed to provide information on current and future Government policy, reflection on what it is like to be adopted and the opportunity for staff to consider how adoption services can be improved in each local authority and across the sub-region..

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 The decision to hold the conference was made by the respective Cabinet members and Directors of Children's Services in Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull. Sir Martin Narey agreed to be the keynote speaker, supported by input from two adoptive parents and the adult adopted child of one of the adoptive parents. There were also speeches by the respective Cabinet members and senior officers from each local authority.
- 2.2 Sir Martin Narey spoke about the development of his interest in adoption and children in care from his time first as Director of the Prison Service and then as Chief Executive of Barnardos. This led to him writing a substantial report on adoption in 2011 and his subsequent appointment as the Government's adoption advisor. His report presented a picture of an adoption system that took too long to place children with delays at many stages and that was not service the best interest of children and not making the most of the potential of those people who want to adopt.
- 2.3 In his speech Sir Martin outlined the Government's programme of reform including the introduction of scorecards for local authorities to help them focus on tackling delay, the reform of the adoption assessment process, changes to the criteria used to match children with adopters to remove potential barriers, improvements to the recruitment of adopters through the introduction of a national adoption gateway and other significant changes
- 2.4 The adopters spoke powerfully about their experience of becoming adopters and of the difficulties and enormous rewards of adopting a child. Their contributions were moving and reminded the professionals in the audience to always think sensitively and imaginatively about what someone coming forward to adopt may have to offer and top never stereotype.
- 2.5 The person who had been adopted spoke about what adoption had meant for her and the difference it had made to her life. This was a very powerful account of why children need adoptive families and how transforming adoption can be. This account also showed how birth parents can remain part of an adopted child's life where this is the right thing to do and the relationships are sensitively handled.
- 2.6 The Cabinet Members expressed their commitment to adoption and to improving adoption in their local, authority.
- 2.7 The group session produced a wealth of ideas for improvement which the respective services will be considering including the opportunities for the three local authorities to work more closely together in this critical re of service.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

None

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 Following the conference there was agreement that a further conference in a year's time to review progress and continue to give adoption a high profile would be valuable.

4.2 Subsequently the three local authorities have discussed deepening collaboration on adoption services and this will be the subject of further work between the three local authorities

5. Comments from Director of Finance and Legal Services

5.1 Financial implications

Coventry hosted the conference, although the cost of the conference was shared between Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull Local Authorities. The cost was £915 which included room hire, lunch and refreshments. The conference was delivered internally using Coventry City Council facilities. There was no charge for the key note speaker, and the only additional costs that may be incurred are expenses for the key note speaker.

It is anticipated that any future conferences be funded in a similar way.

5.2 Legal implications

To include reference to specific legal powers or criteria and appropriate legislation and, if required, details of what legally needs to be achieved in order to satisfy the proposals.

6. Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

Improving the lives of children in our care is a key priority for the Council. Ensuring more children are adopted from care, where this is the right decision for them, and improving the timeliness of this is a vital test of the Council's effectiveness in helping some of our most vulnerable children have the best possible life chances.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

None

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Improving adoption services will help the Council achieve some of the key objectives both service and financial that were set out in the CLYP Fundamental Service Review of reducing our numbers of children in care and reducing the costs of children in care.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

Not applicable

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None

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