

Corporate Parenting Board

27 September 2018

Report title	Update on Regional Adoption Agency Adoption@Heart	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paul Sweet Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Children Services	
Originating service	Looked after Children	
Accountable employee(s)	Alison Hinds Tel Email	Head of Looked after Children 01902 553035 Alison.Hinds@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by		

Recommendations for noting:

The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to note:

The progress on the establishment of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adoption@Heart.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update the Corporate Parenting Board on the progress of the implementation of the RAA, Adoption@Heart.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 A paper published by the Department for Education “Regionalising Adoption”, in June 2015; outlined how the development of Regional Adoption Agencies will create a wider pool of adopters who could potentially meet the needs of children for whom they were considering suitable for adoption and ensure adoption support would be easily accessible. Additionally, at this time the Government aspired to develop a system adoption service delivery through the development of RAA’s, which had a spirit of innovation and excellence at its heart.
- 2.2 A further policy paper published in 2016 “Adoption: A Vision for Change.” Detailed how the Government wanted to invest in the adoption workforce, with plans to equip the workforce with the professional skills and knowledge to navigate complex assessment, analysis and decision making and enable adoptive families to access the right support.
- 2.3 This paper also detailed how, by 2020, the Government will end the delay for vulnerable children in care by providing larger local pools of approved adopters by making sure every single council is part of a Regional Adoption Agency by 2020. This has been backed by £14.0 million of set up support for local authorities.
- 2.4 To further reinforce the Government’s intentions re the delivery of adoption services the Education and Adoption Act 2016 included measures to allow the Government to require local authorities to decide for their adoption functions to be carried out by another adoption agency, allowing for regional approaches. This endorsed the intention that all local authorities will deliver their adoption services via an RAA.

3.0 Progress, options, discussion, etc.

- 3.1 The four local authorities within the Black Country: Wolverhampton, Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall have successfully worked collaboratively to deliver many of their adoption services over a number of years under the auspices of Adoption in the Black Country (ABC). This included joint marketing, recruitment and training of prospective adopters, and joint family finding events for children from the Black Country with a plan of adoption. All four local authorities agreed that it was a natural progression for this collaboration to develop into the local RAA, now to be known as Adoption@Heart (A@H).
- 3.2 Planning for the implementation of A@H has continued over the last two years with appropriate time being given to ensuring there is consensus between all the local authorities involved with regard to what services will be delivered by the RAA and what

will remain in the local authority, what the agreed funding arrangements will be , and what the structure and form of the organisation will be.

- 3.3 All four local authorities had agreed that A@H would be delivered via a Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) and this delivery model was being progressed.
- 3.4 In May 2018 concerns were raised about some of the complexities and uncertainties of establishing a Local Authority Trading Company model for the RAA, as well as additional costs resulting from the LATC being unable to recover VAT. As a result, it was agreed to undertake some work to look at the feasibility of an alternative model whereby one local authority (LA) would “host” the RAA on behalf of the four, and to consider whether such a model could be suitable for the RAA.
- 3.5 A small group consisting of a representative from each of the four LAs/Trust and the RAA Project Manager prepared a paper setting out a common understanding of a hosted model, ensuring this met the Department for Education’s seven criteria for what needs to be in place for them to consider an RAA has been formed, and making an assessment of the suitability of a hosted model for Adoption@Heart.
- 3.6 The RAA Project Board considered the paper on the hosted model RAA, produced by the small working group, and recommended it be accepted by Directors of Children’s Services (DCS’s), along with a decision to move to a hosted model for Adoption@Heart.
- 3.7 Following a process of due diligence the four DCS’s unanimously agreed the recommendation that the City of Wolverhampton should host the RAA.
- 3.8 A full report to consider the City of Wolverhampton hosting the RAA will be considered in November and December by Cabinets in each local authority/Trust.
- 3.9 Work to progress the launch of the RAA hosted by the City of Wolverhampton, continues with progress being managed and monitored by an implementation group and project board.
- 3.10 There is a proposed plan to launch the RAA on 1 April 2019. On this date all adoption services for Wolverhampton, Sandwell, Dudley and Walsall which will include recruitment, training and approval of prospective adopters, family finding, and adoption support will be delivered by the RAA hosted by the City of Wolverhampton.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 The costs of setting up the RAA are being funded by the Department for Education (DfE) as part of the support available to early adopters of the programme. It is not anticipated

that any set up costs will be payable by the LAs although DfE are not able to cover the costs of marketing the new agency.

- 4.2 For Phase One of the RAA the DfE awarded £100,000 of which £57,000 was claimed in relation to this phase.
- 4.3 For Phase Two of the RAA the DfE awarded an initial allocation for April to May 2016 of £54,000 of which £45,000 was claimed. A further allocation from DfE was awarded of £100,000 for the period June to October 2016, of which £79,000 was claimed during the period.
- 4.4 A further allocation of £848,000 was awarded by DfE for the period November 2016 through to the project end date.
- 4.5 Funding for the new RAA will be largely provided by the partner local authorities.
- 4.6 An options appraisal is currently being prepared for partners on evaluating the costs and funding for a hosted model. The plan is to present this paper to the partners by mid October 2018 for a decision to move the RAA forward.
[NM/19092018/Z]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 The relevant legislation guidance and published policy papers by the government are set out in the body of the report. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.
[TC/19092018/E]

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 There are no equality implications. it is intended that by delivering adoption services for all four local authorities via the RAA, the majority of children with a plan of adoption within the black country will have the opportunity to be placed with families recruited by Adoption@Heart within appropriate timescales.

7.0 Environmental implications

- 7.1 There are no environmental implications.

8.0 Human resources implications

- 8.1 The staffing structure is in development and is to be shortly finalised. TUPE arrangements will be in place for staff from Dudley Sandwell and Walsall adoption services to transfer to the City of Wolverhampton to work in the RAA.

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 9.1 Accommodation for a hub is to be provided within the City of Wolverhampton, with each LA providing additional office space for staff to work in each of the four local authorities as and when required.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

- 10.1 There are no background papers