

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	8 th March 2016
Report of:	Kath O'Dwyer, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services
Subject/Title:	Regional Adoption Agency
Portfolio Holder:	Children and Families

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 In May 2015 the government announced changes to the delivery of adoption services; by 2020 all adoption services would need to be delivered on a regional basis. The premise for this was to increase the number of children adopted, reduce the length of time children wait to be adopted and improve post adoption support services to families who have adopted.
- 1.2 In July 2015 it was further announced that local authorities would bid for funding to become a pilot Regional Adoption Agency (**RAA**) operating for 1 year from April 2016. It was also confirmed that if a local authority did not have plans in place to join a RAA by 2017 then this would be selected for them. Subsequently 22 of the 23 North West local authorities submitted various regional bids for funding under the pilot scheme by the deadline of July 2015. The main consideration was for each RAA to have a minimum of 200 children a year adopted and services should be an integration rather than collaboration.
- 1.3 For a number of years Cheshire East has been working closely with Tameside, Stockport and Trafford as part of 'Four4adoption'. This award winning partnership of four local authorities has worked together to make the adoption process as seamless and effective as possible for children waiting for adoption.
- 1.4 Given the success of 'Four4adoption', Cheshire East looked to build on this work to form an effective RAA bid. Tameside took the early decision to join a South Pennines partnership. The remaining 3 authorities subsequently developed a strong bid which added Manchester and Salford thus ensuring the requisite number of prospective children and adopters to meet bid requirements.

1.5 Adoption Matters and Caritas are also intrinsic to the RAA bid as voluntary sector partners.

1.6 This bid was accepted by the DfE as a Grade 1 bid indicating its strength to move forward.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 For Cabinet to agree to Cheshire East entering a Regional Adoption Agency with Trafford, Stockport, Manchester and Salford.

2.2 For Cabinet to agree that decisions concerning the specific detail of arrangements are delegated to the Portfolio Holder in consultation with the Executive Director of Childrens Services and the Director of Legal Services.

3.0 Other options considered

3.1 The Government have made it clear that there is no option for adoption services to remain as they currently are.

3.2 Other partnership options were considered during the bid stage but the strength of established arrangements in 'Four4adoption' offered the greatest potential for success.

4.0 Reason for Recommendation

4.1 Cheshire East adoption services were judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted in July 2015. The strengths of 'Four4 adoption' were recognised as part of the inspection process.

4.2 Trafford and Stockport adoption services are also judged to be 'Good'. Manchester has recently been judged to be 'Inadequate' and Salford 'Requires Improvement'. A term of the bid process was to demonstrate how integrated arrangements across local authorities would spread and share good practice. Stockport are already working closely with Manchester providing management support to their adoption services.

4.3 Both Manchester and Salford have a diverse population in terms of adopters and children and this further enhanced the regional bid.

4.4 The benefit of being a pilot RAA is the provision of funding to support the implementation process, this amounts to £171,000. A successful bid also allows influence in respect of how RAA's develop nationally.

4.5 A Project Board has been established to oversee the project plan and work streams. The Board operates at an appropriately senior level and includes the Directors and/or Assistant Directors of the 5 local authorities.

- 4.6 The Project Board will ensure a Transition Plan is submitted to the DfE by March 31st 2016. This will outline how the local authorities will move from current arrangements to a single RAA covering the existing local authority areas. The DfE have still to provide a definite date by which the new agency has to be up and running.
- 4.7 Working groups have commenced with staff across each of the authorities to scope out plans for the new agency. The three initial practice groups are care planning, family finding and matching; recruitment, assessment and preparation; and adoption and permanence support. In addition separate workstreams have been established around finance, IT, HR, commissioning arrangements for support services and marketing and communication. All work streams report to the Project Board.
- 4.8 The government have provided a choice of 'legal entities' (forms of organisation) to determine how staff will be employed within the RAA. The options include employment by a 'host' local authority, the formation of a voluntary adoption agency or a joint venture which would be a combination of the two. These options are still under consideration by the Project Board.
- 4.9 There is no expectation to reduce staff numbers in the new agency. Staff will be considered for roles balancing staff choice with the need to ensure that the right people with the right skills are in the right jobs. There is no reason to believe that jobs in the new agency will be less secure than jobs in the current local authorities.
- 4.10 Staff are fully involved in the planning stages with regular feedback sessions, a monthly newsletter and engagement in the relevant work streams.
- 4.11 There are legal regulations covering terms and conditions of transferring people to another organisation and consultation with the Unions is an intrinsic part of the process.
- 4.12 Office space is still under consideration by the Project Board with different models under discussion. The options vary from one large central hub to smaller office locations based across the region. Cheshire East have offered to host staff from within the RAA at Macclesfield Town Hall. It is expected that greater clarity will be contained in the Transitional Plan submitted to the DfE by March 31st.

5.0 Background

- 5.1 The background and chronology to the government requirements to form a RAA have been provided within the report summary above.

6.0 Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

- 6.1 Prospective adopters and children placed for adoption may reside in all wards

7.0 Policy Implications

7.1 Policy in the authority will remain unchanged.

8.0 Legal Implications

8.1 None at this stage. However, Legal Services will need to advise on the implications of the arrangements and documentation as these become known.

9.0 Financial Implications

9.1 Services will be provided within existing budgets supported via the pilot funding allocation.

10.0 Human Resources Implications

10.1 The detail concerning the employment status of the RAA have still to be confirmed.

11.0 Equality Implications

11.1 There are no immediate implications in relation to equality.

12.0 Rural Community Implications

12.1 There are no implications for our rural communities.

13.0 Public Health Implications

13.1 There are no Public Health implications.

14.0 Risk Management

14.1 There is a risk to the authority if it fails to join a regional agency, this would include the government directing how its services would be delivered

15.0 Background Papers

15.1 Contact Information

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