

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET – 19 SEPTEMBER 2013

WEST MERCIA ADOPTION PROJECT

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING

LEAD CABINET MEMBER – CLLR PAUL WATLING

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

The overall aim of the project is to develop a single West Mercia Adoption Service across Worcestershire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Herefordshire which delivers a more efficient and effective service to a wider range of children, with particular emphasis on improving the timeliness of placing children and young people for adoption.

The three most promising options identified as potentially able to deliver this will be subject to a cost/benefit analysis. None of the options preclude going into partnership with a voluntary organisation in line with the government agenda.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To approve in principle the proposal to develop a West Mercia Adoption Service as set out in the attached Outline Business Case**
- 2.2 To seek approval to explore the options described in the Outline Business Case**
- 2.3 To receive a further report when the full Business case is available in February 2014**

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Priority Plan objective(s)?	
	Yes	1. Putting Children and Young People first 2. Vulnerable Children and Adults Protected
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	Implementation of these proposals will enable more children who need adoption to be placed more quickly
TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE	Full implementation plan by April 2014	
FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes	There is a budgeted contribution of £347k to the Joint Adoption Service, administered by Shropshire Council, in the current financial year. Further work will be required on the various options to enable the full financial implications to be identified but the anticipated 20% saving to be delivered would be an ongoing full year save of £69k for T& W. Depending on the final commencement date of the new service a save of £40k may be achieved in 13/14 with the remaining £29k potentially being released in 14/15.

		The Adoption Reform Grant awarded to T&W in 13/14 is £542k of which £12.5k which will be used to fund 25% of the full project budget of £50k. TAS 22.8.13
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	<p><i>“Given that the Options listed in the Outline Business Case are very much at the formative stage it is difficult to set out the full legal implications of each, other than in very general terms. There is also the possibility that the Children and Families Bill might be further amended before being implemented. The Outline Business Case observes that depending on the option finally recommended there might be TUPE implications and the need for LAs to delegate their adoption functions to another LA or even a separate body. In the latter case it would be necessary to examine in some detail the extent to which such functions can legally be discharged other than by a LA.”</i></p> <p>Tim Collard - Shropshire Council Legal Lead for all 4 authorities</p> <p>In addition to the legal comment provided above, the Children and Families Bill is due to start the Committee Stage in the House of Lords on 9 October 2013.</p> <p>In respect of Telford & Wrekin, the current employees of the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Joint Adoption Service are employees of Shropshire Council in respect of any TUPE transfer of undertaking considerations.</p> <p>Legal Services from each LA will need to liaise on this project to consider the implications of the options. Kirsty Fisher - Telford & Wrekin Council</p>
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	<p>Opportunity to develop an innovatory solution to improve the prospects of adoption for a wider range of children</p> <p>Conflict between the project's vision/objectives and the strategic direction of each individual adoption service or authority reduces the potential benefit for children and adopters and affects realisation potential savings</p>
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	Yes	<p>Children who might benefit from adoption live in all parts of Telford and Wrekin</p> <p>Supports the recruitment of adoptive carers across all ward areas and provides more opportunities to people who have the potential to provide loving homes to children who need them</p>

PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4. INFORMATION

Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin councils have had a joint adoption service run by Shropshire council. Worcestershire and Herefordshire each have their own adoption service.

Under new powers provided to the Government under the Children and Families Bill 2013, local authorities that are not performing appropriately will have their role as adoption agencies withdrawn. In addition, there is a longer term proposal in the Government's 'Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay' which proposes as a default position that the recruitment and training of adopters will be transferred to voluntary organisations.

The four local authorities in the West Mercia region recognise that working collaboratively provides a genuine opportunity to respond to the national agenda. By delivering a single service whilst maintaining functions at a regional and local level, partners envisage achieving economies of scale and delivering a faster and more cost efficient process of providing alternative permanent homes for children across the West Mercia region.

The governance arrangements to deliver the project have been agreed and established. A strategic Project Board, made up of the four Directors of Children's Services, has been established. A Steering Group at Assistant Director level chaired by Laura Johnston, Director of Children and Families Services, Telford and Wrekin council, reports into the Board. A Working Group which reports to the Steering Group and Project Teams have been established and a Project Lead and Project Manager have also been assigned to the project. The Board, Steering Group and Working Group each meet monthly and have met regularly since May 2013.

5 options have been considered to improve the service across West Mercia. The benefits from two are negligible or minimal. It is possible that a model mixing elements of the other 3 may be feasible based on a cost/benefit analysis. More detail is provided in the Outline Business Account - Appendix 1

Consultation activity with stakeholders including children, adopters, staff and panel members is being arranged

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Not applicable

6. PREVIOUS MINUTES

Not applicable

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay. March 2012, Department for Education
Children and Families Bill 2013

Report prepared by Karen Perry, Assistant Director: Children's Safeguarding