

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**CABINET – 24 APRIL 2014****WEST MERCIA ADOPTION PROJECT****REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING & SPECIALIST SERVICES****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.

An option to deliver some of the functions together with the future potential to integrate all functions as one entity is recommended. Both phases may include going into partnership with a voluntary organisation in line with the government agenda.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To approve the direction of the proposed future operating model for a West Mercia Adoption Service;**
- 2.2 Delegate any future decision on the implementation of the operating model (Option 2) including appointments, hosting arrangements, key milestones and appropriate legal documentation for the operating model to the Director: Children & Family Services in consultation with the Lead Member for Children, Young People & Families**

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	Phased implementation; 2014-15 and 2016-17	
FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes	The recommended option 2 requires the delivery of some key functions together while maintaining delivery of other functions within individual authorities. Financial modelling reflects costs of all four Councils but at this stage only at a high level and all calculations for the preferred option can only be considered to be indicative. The development of a more detailed methodology for costing and allocation of costs to activity will be carried out as part of the

		<p>transformation of this service to a West Mercia model. This further work will address any longer term savings. It is not yet possible to identify the full financial implications of this proposal from current information.</p> <p>It is also proposed that the four local authorities use a proportion of their Adoption Reform Grant to fund a dedicated Transformation Manager for 12 months to support implementation. T&W has a grant of £159,680 in 2014/15.</p> <p>In addition to the West Mercia business case there will be a review of the utilisation of some existing staff posts within the Joint Adoption service (Shropshire and T&W Joint Adoption Service) as well as management changes. The Council's current 2 year budget strategy identifies savings from this change to the Adoption service as £40k in 14/15 and a further £29k in 15/16. It is anticipated that these can be achieved from the review of the JAS as well as a minimum increase in adoptions completed of two. Each additional adoption should save the Council £18,000 per annum. This proposal sits outside the 2014/15 cost improvement plan. If these savings cannot be achieved the service will need to identify alternative proposals to meet the savings identified above</p> <p>There is a budgeted contribution of £347k to the JAS, administered by Shropshire Council, in the current financial year. .</p> <p>TAS 27.3.14</p>
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	<p>As per previous report Shropshire is the legal lead for all four authorities and it is essential that such legal advice is obtained and no one authority acts in isolation. There will be an opportunity for legal services from each authority to liaise on this Project but this should probably occur once the new Transformation Manager is appointed. Telford need to ensure that it is clear on its role and any implications and that any such working arrangements are considered fully by Legal Services and fully documented to ensure that this Councils interests are protected and fully set out.</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. Therefore need to ensure that documentation is put in place to provide exit strategies if appropriate.</p> <p>Risk that current excellent performance on timeliness will deteriorate if total pool of adopters is not increased quickly enough to meet demand.</p> <p>A robust risk management process is in place, which will be updated and kept under active review by the Management Board</p>
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	Yes	<p>Children who might benefit from adoption live in all parts of Telford and Wrekin</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
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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 are well established. They comprise a strategic Project Board, made up of the four Directors of Children's Services: a Steering Group at Assistant Director level chaired by Laura Johnston, Director of Children and Families Services, Telford and Wrekin council, reporting to the Board; a Working Group reports to the Steering Group. Project Teams and Project Manager have also been assigned to the project to produce a needs and gap analysis. The Board, Steering Group and Working Group each meet monthly and have met regularly since May 2013.

The last report to Cabinet (September 2013) described 5 options to improve the service across West Mercia. These have been further refined into 4 options. Both are described in full on page 8 of the Detailed Business Case attached as appendix 1

Option 1 confers no benefits. Option 3 or 4 is premature at this stage. The preferred option is Option 2 (*deliver some adoption functions within a single adoption service, hosted by a lead West Mercia authority, with some specific functions continuing to be delivered within the individual local authorities*). The details of functions and reasons for recommending which should be in or out of scope are provided on pages 9-10 of appendix 1.

Under this option the budgets for the combined functions would be pooled and managed by the West Mercia Adoption Partnership. This would be established as a new single entity, hosted by a lead authority on behalf of the four local authorities. It is proposed that the four local authorities use a proportion of their Adoption Reform Grant to fund a dedicated Transformation Manager for 12 months to support implementation. Staff currently involved in the work associated within these functions would be seconded to the West Mercia Adoption Partnership within their existing terms and conditions, pending any re-commissioning of the functions, or the local authority will provide the pro-rata budget for the function. However, this would be subject to formal consultation with staff.

Moving towards and implementing Option 2 would be the first phase of service transformation in 2014/15. By 2016/17 this would lead to an Option 3 service model (*deliver a single adoption service, incorporating all the adoption services, hosted by a lead West Mercia authority*) if evidence continues to support this as the overall preferred option. This first phase would allow time for the four authorities to better understand all best practice elements between them and develop a West Mercia culture in order to then capitalise on it and develop a fully integrated service model. It would also allow time to form relationships with voluntary organisations and does not exclude consideration of Option 4.

A Communication Strategy is in place which includes a plan for wide consultation with all stakeholders. Stakeholder reference groups across the four authorities for adopters, foster carers, health representatives, Adoption panel chairs/members and staff have been established and each stakeholder group has been consulted on the options. Their views on the options have been considered and incorporated into the options appraisal. Further work is planned to ensure the views of children and young people shape any future service provision. There has also been a stakeholder event with voluntary organisations interested in providing services, or working in partnership. Their feedback has also contributed to the Detailed Business Case.

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Not applicable

6. PREVIOUS MINUTES

19/09/13

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