

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET 14th MARCH 2019

DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL PERMANENCY ARRANGEMENT

**REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SAFEGURDING
& EARLY HELP**

LEAD CABINET MEMBER – CLLR P WATLING

PART A – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

- 1.1. The North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership is proposing a collaborative Regional Permanency Arrangement which combines the expertise of the four Local Authorities. Working together to find local, caring, stable and loving homes for Looked After Children who require permanence, giving a child a sense of stability, continuity, commitment and identity.
- 1.2. The Partnership will be a unique arrangement, creating a sustainable system which operates on a regional footprint, maximising resources, capacity and flexibility, which leads to improvements in service delivery, effective practice and long-term outcomes for children, whilst maintaining the independence of each individual Local Authority.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. Cabinet acknowledge the statutory requirement to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by the 1st April 2020, as set out in the Education and Adoption Act 2016.
- 2.2. Cabinet approve the formation of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) between Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.
- 2.3. Cabinet approves the Outline Business Case (OBC) which sets out the ambition of Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council to go beyond adoption and develop a regional model of wider permanence which includes Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO).

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Co-Operative Council priority objective(s)?	
	Yes	In line with the council's priority of putting children and young people first.
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	Children & young people in terms of improved placement choice and outcomes.
TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE	Regional Adoption Agency – March 2020. Permanency Hub is a four year programme.	
FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes/No	<p>Government legislation requires Councils to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency by 1 April 2020. In order to support this requirement, additional Government grant has been allocated. The North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership has been allocated up to £610,000 for the period until 2020. This has enabled the preparations for the partnership to commence, with Staffordshire County Council employing the project leads.</p> <p>Financial details of the partnership have yet to be developed, but a financial formula to underpin the Regional Permanency Arrangement will be included in the full business case, which will require Cabinet approval by 31 December 2019. The intention is that the partnership will deliver a range of financial benefits, including better value for money through economies of scale and a decrease in the number of children requiring specialist, intensive and costly placements/services. The four participating Local Authorities are clear that the partnership arrangements cannot lead to increased financial pressures. TLD 25.2.19</p>

<p>LEGAL ISSUES</p>	<p>Yes/No</p>	<p>In approving the Outline Business Case Cabinet are confirming a commitment for officers to continue work on the development of a Regional Adoption Agency. Legal Services will provide advice regarding any statutory requirements together with governance advice on an ongoing basis as the project develops further. Advice will also be given as to the powers to enter into such an arrangement and any limitations on such powers</p> <p>Section 15 of the Education and Adoption Act 2016 came into force on 7th March 2018 inserting a new Section 3ZA into the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to enable the Secretary of State to give directions to local authorities to make arrangements for one regional adoption agency to carry out a wide range of 2002 Act adoption functions on behalf of a number of local authorities. This supported the Governments reform and regionalisation plans for adoption which have been in development since March 2012.</p> <p>Local Authorities fostering [including connected persons fostering] functions are undertaken further to the Children Act 1989 and Care Standards Act 2000 [as amended], regulations made thereunder including The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, statutory guidance including the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and practice guidance.</p> <p>Special Guardianship functions are undertaken under the 1989 Act [as amended], the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 and statutory guidance.</p> <p>EH & KF 28.02.2019</p>
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OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	No	N/A.
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	N/A.

PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. Overview:

- 1.1. In April 2017, responding to the requirement to form a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council joined together to facilitate a collaborative working arrangement, through the establishment of the North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership.
- 1.2. The Partnership came together because of the four Local Authorities shared vision to create an arrangement which goes beyond Adoption (as required in the Education and Adoption Act 2016) and includes Fostering, Special Guardianship and Connected Persons. The Partnership has a shared mission to lead the local, regional and national agenda in respect of achieving permanence for all Looked After Children who require it.
- 1.3. The Partnership is proposing a collaborative Regional Permanency Arrangement which combines the expertise of the four Local Authorities. Working together to find local, caring, stable and loving homes for Looked After Children who require permanence, giving a child a sense of stability, continuity, commitment and identity.
- 1.4. The Partnership will be a unique arrangement, creating a sustainable system which operates on a regional footprint, maximising resources, capacity and flexibility, which leads to improvements in service delivery, effective practice and long-term outcomes for children, whilst maintaining the independence of each individual Local Authority.
- 1.5. This Partnership received a significant transformation grant from the Department of Education (DfE) to pursue this new innovative way of working.

2. Context:

- 2.1. Most children will have their need for stability and nurturing met by their birth parent(s) and will not require support from, or come to the attention of, Local Authority Children's Services. A small number of children will come into the care of the Local Authority and will require long term provision away from their birth parent(s).

- 2.2. Where children require long term care, Local Authority Children's Services will prioritise the achievement of permanency. Permanence, in the context of Children's Social Care, is defined as a framework of emotional (attachment), physical (stability) and legal permanence (in respect of who discharges parental responsibility).
- 2.3. Failing to achieve permanency for Looked After Children can lead to a detrimental impact on their short, medium and long-term outcomes, including a direct impact on their sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. This can often result in placement breakdowns and disruptions leading to children requiring specialist, intensive and costly placements/services, causing direct financial pressure on Local Authorities.
- 2.4. In June 2015, the Coalition Government prioritised the achievement of permanence through Adoption. "Regionalising Adoption", published by the Department of Education (DfE), set out the Government's direction for the formation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) by 2020. The DfE's expectation is that larger delivery models should be able to pool resources and share best practice to better target the recruitment of prospective adopters and speed up the matching and placement of children for adoption.
- 2.5. Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council initially came together in 2015 to consider opportunities for the development of a Regional Adoption Agency (with consideration to a wider Regional Permanency System). Following engagement with the DfE, the two Local Authorities were not invited to join the Regionalisation of Adoption Programme on the basis that the proposed partnership arrangement was too small in terms of scale.
- 2.6. Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council initially came together in 1997 to develop a Joint Adoption Service (JAS) across the two Local Authorities which has continued to develop and evolve.
- 2.7. In 2015, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council joined the City of Wolverhampton Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council to develop the Adoption@Heart Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council were actively engaged in the project until February 2017, when they concluded that being part of the arrangement was not in their best interests. Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council were

supported by the DfE to leave the arrangement to pursue a wider model of permanence.

- 2.8. Responding to the Education and Adoption Act 2016, Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council joined together in April 2017 to facilitate an innovative, dynamic, forward thinking collaborative working arrangement which focuses on all permanence options, through the establishment of the North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership.
- 2.9. The Partnership recognises that only a small number of children enter the Adoption System and a much larger group require long-term permanence through mainstream fostering, Connected Person's Fostering and Special Guardianship.
- 2.10. The Partnership is seeking to achieve improved outcomes for Looked After Children requiring permanency by operating on a regional footprint, that maximises resources, capacity and delivers flexibility, leading to improvements in sustainable service delivery whilst maintaining the independence of each Local Authority.
- 2.11. This Partnership is the first of its kind in the country and has received a significant transformation grant from the Department of Education (DfE) to pursue this new innovative way of working, which is focused on improving the long-term outcomes of all Looked After Children requiring permanency.

3. Proposed Regional Permanency Arrangement:

- 3.1. It is proposed to create a regional arrangement across Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council with the creation of a joint service delivery model. The arrangement will focus on finding local, caring, stable and loving homes where Looked After Children achieve permanence.
- 3.2. Through a phased Regional Permanency Transformation Programme, we will align permanency functions relating to Adoption, Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardians between 2019 and 2024. This will ensure that governance arrangements, delivery structures, systems, processes and practice enable the workforce from the four Local Authorities to work together, ensuring all children entering care will receive a consistently high level of organisational commitment, leading to better outcomes for children.

- 3.3. The Regional Permanency Arrangement will operate through a hub and spoke model which enables Local Authorities to benefit from a network of regional delivery whilst maintaining their own individual independence. This will ensure the Partnership reflects the local landscape, adapted as necessary to the needs of individual Local Authorities, whilst demonstrating clear links to the local Children & Families System.
- 3.4. The proposed model demonstrates learning from delivery adopted by Integrated Children & Families Services across England in relation to the principles of multi-agency teams, integrated working and governance. Such ways of working have been successfully embedded within Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH), Multi Agency Early Help Partnerships, West Mercia YOS, Stoke-on-Trent YOS and the Staffordshire YOS.
- 3.5. Staff will continue to be employed and based within each Local Authority and will not be transferred to another alternative delivery vehicle. We will however, where appropriate, seek to explore opportunities for secondments where it is in the best interests of the Partnership.
- 3.6. Statutory responsibilities relating to Looked After Children will continue to sit with Local Authorities (i.e. Corporate Parenting, Agency Decision Maker and Care Planning, Placement and Case Review).

4. Financial Implications:

- 4.1. In proposing the development of a Regional Permanency Arrangement, the four Local Authorities are clear that it provides an opportunity to achieve a range of financial benefits in the medium term, as outlined in the Outline Business Case (OBC).
- 4.2. The four Local Authorities are clear that any future partnership arrangement cannot lead to increased financial costs or pressures because of the development of this Partnership. The four Local Authorities are also clear that no Local Authorities will be disadvantaged financially because of the development of this arrangement.
- 4.3. During the design phase of the Regional Permanency Transformation Programme, we will develop a financial formula to underpin the Regional Permanency Arrangement. This formula will be outlined in detail and will be included in the full business case which will require Cabinet approval by the 31st December 2019. This financial formula will be equitable and

will ensure Local Authorities are not funding services/provision for Looked After Children for whom they are not responsible for.

5. Delivering Our Regional Permanency Arrangement:

- 5.1. The development of this OBC has provided a valuable opportunity for the four participating Local Authorities to achieve greater consensus on the collective vision, outcomes, priorities and success measures along with our proposed new operating model.
- 5.2. To maximise the potential benefits of the new operating model, and to manage the risks, it is recommended that permanence functions will form part of the arrangement at different stages, through a well organised and sequenced plan to achieve go live of phase one (2018 – 2020), phase two (2020 – 2022) and phase three (2022 – 2024). Each stage will be subject to Cabinet approval.
- 5.3. Our proposed model has received endorsement from the DfE and the partnership has been awarded a transformation grant to deliver the change and ensure focus on creating a RAA. This grant will be available until 2020 and has secured additional specialist capacity to underpin the development of our proposed new way of working.

6. Next Steps:

- 6.1. If approved, the programme will move into the design phase of the new operating model which prepares the detail for phase one to go live in April 2020.
- 6.2. We will continue to engage stakeholders, including the workforce, Looked After Children, Adopters, Foster Carers, Special Guardians, Designated Family Judges, Family Justice Boards and CAFCASS, partners, residents and other stakeholders to co-produce the development of this operating model which focuses on permanence.
- 6.3. Lead Cabinet Members for Children & Young People, along with Directors of Children's Services (DCS), will be invited to quarterly strategic partnership meetings to continue to provide political, member led leadership to the development of our Partnership and the Regional Permanency Arrangement.
- 6.4. We will return to the Cabinets of Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council

with a full business case in respect of a Regional Permanency Arrangement by the 31st December 2019.

4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

None.

5. PREVIOUS MINUTES

None.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

See appendix – Outline Business Case.

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