


## REPORT TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY BOARD

07 January 2019

<b>Subject:</b>	Regional Adoption Agency
<b>Cabinet Portfolio:</b>	Councillor Simon Hackett - Cabinet Member for Children's Services
<b>Director:</b>	Executive Director of Children's Services – Lesley Hagger
<b>Contribution towards Vision 2030:</b>	
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### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

**That Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board:**

1. Considers the report and agrees the process for future reporting arrangements.
2. Makes any comments and recommendations as necessary.

## 1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 On 12 December 2018 Sandwell Council Cabinet considered Regional Adoption Agency Arrangements and gave approval in Cabinet minute no 162/18 to transfer adoption services to the new Regional Adoption Agency: Adoption@Heart. The local arrangements for Scrutiny are now to be determined.

## 2 IMPLICATIONS FOR SANDWELL'S VISION

- 2.1 High quality adoption services improve the life chances of vulnerable children and young people and ensure that all children are offered an equality of opportunity in the way that they are matched with an adoptive

family. Adoption offers children a new start in life that can give them the best chance to have a successful adulthood.

### **3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 The provision of an adoption service is a statutory requirement and the council is required to monitor the provision of adoption services. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 provides the structure for this and under Section 3 of the Act, each council must continue to maintain within its area an adoption service designed to meet the needs of children who may be adopted, their parents, natural parents and former guardians. These services are referred to as the 'adoption service', meaning either a local authority or a registered adoption society may be referred to as an adoption agency (section 2(1) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002).
- 3.2 The development of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) is part of the national regionalising adoption programme. All local authorities (LAs) are expected to deliver their adoption services through a RAA by 2020 and funding has been provided by the Department for Education (DfE) to cover the costs of setting up these new arrangements.
- 3.3 Benefits are anticipated from the creation of a RAA such as the opportunity to improve practice and outcomes for children through innovation, and the efficiencies that can come from its larger scale, as defined below:

#### **(a) Efficiencies**

- Reduction in LA expenditure on fostering placements (and practitioner time);
- Reduced expenditure on adoption panels;
- Decreased use of inter-agency placements;
- More children identified for adoption through improved permanence planning.

#### **(b) Quality of Practice and Outcomes**

- Improved permanence planning for children;
- Increased placement choice from a larger pool of adopters;
- Reduction of placement days from children entering care to being placed with their adoptive family;
- Fewer children for whom the permanence plan changes away from adoption;
- A wider range of support services for adoptive families, promoting stability and reducing disruption;

- More adopters approved and swifter matching of adopters with children.

## **4 THE CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 A Black Country Project Board was established in 2017 to explore the creation of a Black Country RAA and a project lead was appointed to support the four local authorities to establish the RAA, with funding secured from the DfE to cover set up costs.
- 4.2 At its meeting on 12 January 2018, SMBCs Cabinet agreed to enter into an agreement with other Black Country local authorities to deliver future adoption services through a Black Country Adoption Agency, Adoption@Heart. The Cabinet paper is attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.3 Whilst the high-level governance arrangements are set out in the Cabinet paper, there is flexibility to determine local authority Scrutiny arrangements locally.

## **5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)**

- 5.1 During the process of establishing Adoption@Heart there has been full consultation with children and young people and families. Formal staff consultation will begin in January 2019.

## **6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 6.1 There is an important ongoing function for each local authority to ensure that it has full visibility of the new Agency and that there is assurance that children requiring adoption in each local authority are well-served by this new arrangement.
- 6.2 As set out in the governance chart at Appendix 2 of the Cabinet report, one of the routes to this assurance is directly through the Corporate Parenting Board via officers involved in the Strategic Commissioning Board. The Scrutiny Board may view this as an adequate and acceptable arrangement.
- 6.3 If the Scrutiny Board would prefer a direct involvement in seeking assurance about adoption services, it may require that the assurance is provided to it directly and that the Scrutiny Committee would then, in turn, report its findings to the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 6.4 There may be other options that the Scrutiny Board will want to consider during its meeting on 7 January 2019, and it may be the case that one of these options is the agreed way forward.

## **7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The resource implications for Adoption@Heart are set out in the Cabinet paper attached at Appendix 1.

## **8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 The legal and governance implications for Adoption@Heart, and for the local authority, are set out in the Cabinet paper attached at Appendix 1.

## **9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 The equality impact assessment to the Cabinet paper on 12 December 2018 is attached as Appendix 2.
- 9.2 The development of a RAA has direct implications for looked after children with a plan for adoption.
- 9.3 Actions included in this report target support for the most vulnerable children and therefore will have a positive impact on equalities.
- 9.4 Sandwell Children's Trust, through the implementation of its own policies, will continue to identify children that require permanency and adoption services.
- 9.5 Each council involved in the development of the RAA has completed its own Equality Impact Assessment.

## **10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 10.1 The data protection impact assessment is contained within the Cabinet paper.

## **11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 11.1 There are no relevant crime and disorder risks.

## **12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS**

- 12.1 The sustainability matters are addressed in the Cabinet paper and will be specifically set out in one of the Schedules for the Contract between SMBC and the Regional Adoption Agency.

**13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)**

13.1 Timely and well-planned adoption improves the life chances of vulnerable and young people.

**14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND**

14.1 There are no relevant property or land matters.

**15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

15.1 Whilst the future arrangements for the delivery of adoption services for Sandwell's children and young people will be through the new Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption@Heart, the Council will continue to have overall responsibility and accountability for adoption, and any future Ofsted inspection will be of the individual local authorities involved, and not of the RAA. For this reason, it is important that the Scrutiny functions are clear and robust. There are two options set out for consideration in this paper, but it may be the case that the Scrutiny Committee identifies a different option that better suits its needs.

**16 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

16.1 None

**17 APPENDICES:**

17.1 Appendix 1: 12 December 2018 Cabinet report: Regional Adoption Agency

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