

REPORT TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY BOARD

11th November 2019

Subject:	Regional Adoption Agency: Adoption@Heart
Cabinet Portfolio:	Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life - Councillor Joyce Underhill
Director:	Executive Director of Children's Services – Lesley Hagger
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Contact Officer(s):	Lesley Hagger Executive Director of Children's Services lesley_hagger@sandwell.gov.uk

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That:

1. The Scrutiny Committee considers the report which provides a performance overview of the initial few months of service delivery by Adoption@Heart;
2. The Scrutiny Committee agrees to receive a full performance report from Adoption@Heart at its first meeting in the new calendar year.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 At its meeting on 7th January 2019 it was agreed that the performance of the new arrangement for the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) would be reported to and scrutinised by the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.2 The new organisation has been operational since 1st April 2019 and, at the time of writing this Scrutiny Committee report, the first half-year performance report has not yet been presented to the Adoption@Heart Commissioning Board. However, there are some early indications of

performance that are promising from Sandwell's perspective and these are presented below.

- 1.3 It is recommended that a full performance report is presented to the Scrutiny Committee at its first meeting in the new calendar year.

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 government agreed that all local authorities (LAs) would be expected to deliver their adoption services through an RAA by 2020 and funding was provided by the Department for Education (DfE) to cover the costs of setting up these new arrangements.
- 3.2 On 12th December 2018, SMBCs Cabinet gave approval to transfer adoption services to the new Regional Adoption Agency: Adoption@Heart. These arrangements were considered by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7th January 2019 when it was also agreed that the Scrutiny Committee would undertake the role to scrutinise these arrangements and report its findings to the Corporate Parenting Board, which is chaired by the Lead Member for Best Start in Life.
- 3.3 The RAA for the Black Country local authorities is called Adoption@Heart. The arrangement is a 'hosted' model, whereby the adoption service is hosted by Wolverhampton City Council on behalf of the four Black County local authorities, and commissioned on their behalf via Dudley Council. Contractual arrangements are in place for all partners. The adoption service has an interface with each local authority children's service; in Sandwell, this is Sandwell Children's Trust.

4 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW – 1ST April 2019 to 30th September 2019

- 4.1 A performance dashboard has been developed but requires further development to be a robust reporting tool. In the meantime, monthly written reports have been made to the monthly Operational Management Board and the quarterly Strategic Commissioning Board.
- 4.2 **Adopter Recruitment**

20 adopters have been approved in the period and 53 are in the process. Prior to Adoption@Heart the combined number of adopters approved was 49 in 2017/18 and 73 in 2018/19. However, the target for year 1 of Adoption@Heart is 120 and this is unlikely to be met due to a large number of transitional issues experienced during the first 3 months of the organisation being established, all of which have now been resolved.

4.3 **Children Placed**

47 children were placed by Adoption@Heart in the period, of which 24 were placed for Sandwell. The number of placements required in year 1 for Sandwell was 34 and it is anticipated that this target will be met.

4.4 **Budget**

The budget for 2019/20 is shown below:

Partner organisation	Budget 19/20
City of Wolverhampton Council	£1,102,948
Dudley MBC	£1,128,172
Sandwell MBC/Children's Trust	£ 965,575
Walsall MBC	£ 984,615
Total	£4,181,310

The position in the period shows an underspend. The budget setting process for 2020/21 will be finalised by the end of December 2019.

4.5 **Local authority scrutiny**

- a) An interim report will be made to the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) on 13th November 2019: this meeting involves Council Leaders and Chief Executive Officers;
- b) A meeting of Lead Members for children's services will take place early in the new calendar year to ensure that Corporate Parenting Boards can be assured of progress;
- c) All 4 local authorities will receive a first full performance reports early in the new calendar year.

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

- 5.1 During the process of establishing Adoption@Heart there was full consultation with children, young people and families, and with staff that were transferred via a TUPE arrangement from Sandwell Children's Trust to Adoption@Heart.

6 **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 5.1 There are currently no alternative options to an RAA arrangement.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (

- 7.1 The resource implications for Adoption@Heart were set out in Appendix 1 to the 7th January Scrutiny Committee paper.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The legal and governance implications for Adoption@Heart, and for the local authority, were set out in the 12th December 2018 Cabinet paper which was attached at Appendix 1 to the 7th January Scrutiny Committee paper.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 The equality impact assessment was attached to the Cabinet paper.

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 The data protection impact assessment was 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 were addressed in the Cabinet paper and are 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 The Council will continue to have overall responsibility and accountability for adoption, and any future Ofsted inspection will be of the individual

local authorities/Trust, and not of the RAA. For this reason, it is important that the Scrutiny functions are regular, clear and robust.

15.2 This paper to the Scrutiny Committee is an interim report to ensure regularity in reporting. The first half-year performance report will be presented to the Scrutiny Committee at its first meeting in the new calendar year and this will enable a full and robust discussion about performance with the Adoption@Heart managers.

16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

15.1 None

17 APPENDICES:

16.1 Appendix 1: 12th December 2018 Cabinet report: Regional Adoption Agency

16.2 Appendix 2: 7th January 2019 Scrutiny Committee report: Regional Adoption Agency



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