



# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

**REPORT OF:** Executive Member for Children's Services

**LEAD OFFICER:** Director of Children's Services

**DATE:** 8<sup>th</sup> December 2016

**PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:** Children's Services

**WARD/S AFFECTED:** All

**KEY DECISION:** YES  NO

**SUBJECT: Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)**

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is proposed that the Adoption Service for the Council becomes part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) from Autumn 2017 alongside five other Local Authorities and two Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs). Department for Education (DfE) grant funding has been in place since Autumn 2015 to support the scoping out of this venture; however, funding has not been at the level we have needed to sustain progress between April 2016 and October 2016 so there has been a delay in the initial time frame for implementation.

This paper sets out the proposals in more detail and requests that agreement is given to continue the development of the programme with a view to the RAA becoming operational in 2017. Working together in this way will provide longer term improvements to the timeliness of placing children with adopters and the general quality of experience of adoption throughout the child's life.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

Gives permission to continue the programme development work through the coming year to finalise the design of the RAA, based on the proposed model recommendations and design principles set out in this report and in further details in Appendix 1.

The proposed plan is to continue development of the RAA to the point of full implementation in Autumn 2017. The proposed model is a hub and spoke model with the hub to be based in Bolton. The proposed legal model is a local authority hosted model and Bolton are the proposed host authority.

## 3. BACKGROUND

In June 2015, the DfE released plans via the 'Regionalising Adoption Paper' to regionalise adoption services and invited organisations to submit an expression of interest to be early adopters of the model to apply for funding to explore potential models to deliver a regionalised adoption service. The DfE require all adoption agencies to become part of Regional Adoption Agencies within the next few years.

The West Pennine Regional Adoption Agency Board was established and submitted a joint

expression of interest to release funding to explore options. The group consists of the following organisations: Caritas Care; Adoption Matters; Bury Council; Bolton Council; Rochdale Council; Tameside Council; Oldham Council and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.

In January 2016, a Project Team was established to scope out the work. An extensive consultation exercise was conducted involving the workforce from across all 8 partners, along with other stakeholders including adopters, panel chairs and professionals from each of the partners including HR and legal representatives.

A bid for further funding was submitted to the DfE in April 2016; however, the amount offered was significantly less than that requested. This effectively meant that progress slowed down significantly as clarity about future funding was uncertain. Funding has now been clarified and £380k has been allocated to the RAA to progress to implementation. This is in conjunction with the £100k allocated from April 2016 - October 2016, which will suffice to fund the transition.

#### **4. KEY ISSUES**

Following considerable scoping work, a number of proposals have been made relating to how the West Pennine RAA should operate.

Following expressions of interest and a vote, the Board's preference is for Bolton Council to host the RAA due to their size, their good reputation in adoption and that Bolton is also one of the more geographically central authorities involved in the RAA.

Proposed models have been considered including collaborating more with each other, having a single Local Authority host the RAA, becoming a local authority limited company or having one of the two VAAs host the RAA.

The preferred legal entity of the RAA from the perspective of the Board is the Local Authority hosted model. Reasons for this include that the VAAs did not feel that they had capacity to host the programme. Separately, the complexities of becoming a limited company would have affected the timescales for delivery and some local authorities had poor experiences of moving to such models. The advantages of a limited company are that commissioning arrangements would be more straight forward and that each local authority would feel more like an equal partner. However, the Board concluded that the limited company model could still be a possibility in the future but a local authority hosted model could be more easily achieved in the first instance. Finally, simply collaborating more was not what the DfE had envisaged and it would be harder to ensure consistency of practice at a high level.

The preferred delivery model is that of hub and spoke whereby some adoption services are delivered from a central point (hub), such as activity around recruitment of adopters and functions of adoption panels, and that others remain in each local authority (spoke). An example of a spoke function is the support to early care planning for children as social workers will remain within the local authorities.

#### **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The Regional Adoption Agency will devise policy and procedures agreeable to all the agencies involved.

#### **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The RAA project is currently funded through a grant received from the DfE, which is managed through Bolton Council. Therefore, there are no direct financial implications to individual members of the RAA in continuing the design work.

Financial modelling is imminent and this will be an independently commissioned piece of work. It is envisaged that set up costs will be met by the grant funding; however, the running costs throughout the process and once the agency is set up will be met by the Council's current adoption budget, although this will depend on some economies of scale to offset the additional infrastructure costs associated with the 'hub'.

A further paper will be submitted to agree the financial arrangements.

## 7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are currently no legal implications in the design work. There is a legal workstream within the Project, which will examine potential legal implications in establishing the RAA.

Children will remain the legal responsibility of the local authority from which they originate.

## 8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are implications for staff associated with the Blackburn with Darwen Adoption Service as the RAA is implemented. It is envisaged that staff will be seconded into the RAA from each Local Authority on their existing terms and conditions. Other staff may be required to work from the 'Hub' which will be based in the host Local Authority (Bolton).

Staff have been consulted on the possible implications and will be further consulted as the programme moves forward. Unions are aware of the plans and will work closely with the Department as the specific plans become clearer.

The funding or provision of staff for a variety of administration roles will be required, for example to support adoption panels, and this need will be defined as the work moves forward.

The Head of Service for Permanence has a place on the Project Board and Blackburn with Darwen Adoption Team staff are contributing to the workshops and development groups.

## 9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

**Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.**

Option 1  Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2  In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3  In determining this matter the Executive Board members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

## 10. CONSULTATIONS

A briefing paper has been presented to the Local Joint Negotiating Consultative Committee (LJNCC) to inform unions of the proposals and how these may affect staff.

Adopters and adoptees have been and will continue to be consulted on the proposed models of development and their priorities. Staff are engaged in the process of contributing their views on the

process through a variety of workshops.

The Executive Members for Children's Services from all of the local authorities met in late June 2016 to discuss the programme and a further meeting is being arranged.

#### **11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE**

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

#### **12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

<b>VERSION:</b>	<b>1.1</b>
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<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Karen Barrick, Head of Service – Permanence
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<b>DATE:</b>	01 November 2016
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<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	Appendix 1 – West Pennine Regional Adoption Agency Additional Information
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