



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children's Services
LEAD OFFICERS:	Director of Children's Services (Please Select)
DATE:	12 October 2017

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Children's Services
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WARD/S AFFECTED:	All
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KEY DECISION:	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
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SUBJECT:	Development of the NoW Regional Adoption Agency
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Adoption NoW Regional Adoption Agency (the RAA) will create a single regional service operating across six Local Authority areas in partnership with Caritas Care and Adoption Matters.

This paper sets out the proposals for operational and governance processes of the RAA in more detail. The RAA will provide a flexible and resilient service that will allow for the sharing of best practice between members with the primary aim of improving services and achieving the best outcomes for children.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

Notes the content of the report and agrees the proposals for the formal establishment of the Adoption NoW Regional Adoption Agency and the proposed creation of a Regional Adoption Agency Steering Committee.

Notes the development of the finance model for the RAA.

2. BACKGROUND

In its January 2013 publication: Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes, the Coalition Government outlined a vision of a new adoption system, particularly focusing on the adopter recruitment challenge. It set out that a system is needed where there were fewer organisations recruiting and assessing adopters with most of these organisations operating at a much greater scale.

Since then, the Adoption Leadership Board and Regional Adoption Boards have been introduced, there has been a growth in regional collaboration and consortia arrangements and a significant increase in the number of adopters approved.

In June 2015, the Department for Education issued its publication: Regionalising Adoption. This set out the Government's aim for "all children with an adoption plan to find a loving, stable home as quickly as possible." The view expressed was that the national system was not working well enough for children waiting to be adopted, particularly for children that are harder to place. Regionalising

Adoption also indicated that further development of the adoption support market is needed so that the right services are available to adoptive families wherever they live. The Government's stated position was that they want all local authorities to be part of regional adoption agencies by the end of this Parliament. £4.5m of start-up funding was made available to support partnerships wishing to be early adopters to take forward their proposals.

In addition to the proposal to provide start-up funding, the Government indicated that it intended to bring forward legislation in the Education and Adoption Bill to compel unwilling local authorities to join Regional Adoption Agencies. In these circumstances, it seemed therefore to be sensible to look to develop a coalition of willing local authorities and voluntary partners in the North West.

The Government subsequently legislated to provide powers in the Education and Adoption Act 2016 to require local authority adoption services to regionalise where they were not making voluntary plans to do so by 2020. Planning is required to have started by 2017 with entry into a regional adoption agency being completed by 2020.

Partnership Development

As a result of discussion between Adoption Leads from a number of agencies, a partnership emerged comprising two Voluntary Agencies, Caritas and Adoption Matters North West and the Blackburn with Darwen, Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside Local Authorities. The partnership initially operated as the West Pennine Regional Adoption Agency but, following substantial consultation, has been rebranded as Adoption NoW.

Approval was given by the Leaders and Lead Members and Directors of Children's Services of the six Councils and the Chief Executives and Board Chairs of the VAA's for the development of an RAA bid. The bid was successful and funding was provided by the DFE to promote the development of the RAA.

The initial RAA proposal set out a plan to build on the strengths of the individual partners and on existing collaborative working arrangements. All participant agencies have been active members of Adoption 22, the consortium of North West adoption agencies which has worked together to match children and prospective adopters across the region. There have been existing collaboration arrangements within the group on recruitment, preparation and training of adopters and there are existing, productive partnerships with Caritas Care and Adoption Matters on Fostering to Adopt and Concurrent Planning. The very successful Adopt North West recruitment programme has been hosted by Bolton. Blackburn with Darwen, Rochdale and Bolton Councils have been amongst the very best performing Local Authorities nationally for performance in the proportion of children leaving care through adoption. A partnership between Caritas Care and Adoption Matters operates the successful regional Centre for Adoption Support.

3. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The learning from best practice and innovation in each of the participant agencies and from other Regional Adoption Agencies will be embedded in the practice of Adoption NoW, with a particular focus on improving availability of adopters and addressing the current difficulties in placing harder to place children. In the medium term, it is expected that increased efficiency in the recruitment of adopters within Adoption NoW will generate cost savings for participant Local Authorities, though the initial aim is to focus on improving the quality of services.

Aims and Objectives

The Adoption NoW Regional Adoption Agency (the RAA) will create a single regional service operating across six Local Authorities areas in partnership with Caritas Care and Adoption Matters.

The RAA will provide a service which has the flexibility and resilience to adapt and manage the needs of children for adoptive placements, the supply of adopters to meet those needs and provide placement choice and high quality adoption support services. The RAA will maximise the contribution that adoption can make to achieving legal permanence and the best possible outcomes for children by building on partners' individual and collective expertise and strengths. The vision is to "achieve timely adoption for each child with an adoption plan, regardless of age, ethnicity, disability or sibling status; promote identity and provide lifelong support to everyone involved in the adoption".

The RAA aims to create a distinct regional agency, focusing on positive approaches to permanence; build on existing excellent practice and innovation; drive outstanding performance; and ensure that the voice of adopted children and of adopters shapes the service design and delivery. The RAA will achieve and support as many adoptions as possible within the region; maximise flexibility, effectiveness, and efficiency of resource use; and ensure the quality and sustainability of adoption services in the sub region.

The RAA's initial focus will be recruitment, assessment and training of adopters, improving family finding and matching, including maximising opportunities through concurrent planning and fostering to adopt and developing an improved range of post adoption support.

Governance

It is proposed that a Regional Adoption Agency Steering Committee is established to oversee and monitor the development and progress of the RAA. The Steering Committee will comprise of one representative from each Voluntary Adoption Agency Board and the Lead Member for Children's Services from each Local Authority (or their designated deputy). The Steering Committee will meet quarterly and the Regional Adoption Agency Board will provide progress reports to the Committee on all aspects of the RAA.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The RAA steering committee will be responsible for policy development.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

To date Department for Education (DfE) grant funding has been utilised to develop and set up the RAA.

The RAA propose to adopt a three stage approach to the financial model in the short, medium and long term and this model will enable partners to further develop the approach to combine adoption resources over a period of two full financial years. The model allows for a gradual transition of resources from LAs to the RAA over a two and a half year period and further agreement on the allocation of any surplus/deficit within the RAA. Based on our estimated current levels of operational expenditure to be combined initially, Blackburn with Darwen's share of the RAA surplus/deficit would be in the region of 19% of the RAA total from 18/19 onwards. Full establishment of the RAA finance model is expected by April 2020 and colleagues from the partner LAs are working closely to finalise the model.

Under the current model of Adoption a system of interagency fees exists, which are payable between Local Authorities when placing a child with an adopter from another Local Authority. In the medium term, it is expected that increased efficiency in the recruitment of adopters within Adoption NoW will generate cost savings on interagency fees for participant Local Authorities.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

A legal agreement has been developed, which sets out the arrangements for the provision of adoption services in the RAA.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

A Regional Adoption Agency Board which includes the six Local Authority Children's Services Assistant Directors and the Chief Executives of the two Voluntary Adoption Agencies was established at the beginning of the RAA application process and has overseen the development of the RAA. The Board is chaired by the Director of People Services from the host authority (Bolton Council). A Regional Adoption Agency Manager has been appointed and she has begun the development of an Operational Group containing service leads from each agency.

The Board will be responsible for the strategic development, leadership, performance and evaluation of the RAA. The Board will also be responsible for the co-ordination of the appointment of staff. RAA staff will be seconded from local authorities, or co-located from voluntary agencies.

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

The Regional Adoption Agency breadth of consultation includes staff, service users and young people and this will continue to be the case as the Authority transitions towards the RAA.

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.

VERSION:	2.0
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DATE:	29 th September 2017
BACKGROUND PAPER:	NoW Governance Structure & Functions