

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND EARLY HELP SERVICES

TO:	COUNCIL		
DATE:	17 OCTOBER 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	7
TITLE:	REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY - JOINT ARRANGEMENT		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR GAVIN	PORTFOLIO:	CHILDREN & FAMILIES
SERVICE:	ADOPTION SERVICE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report is seeking the Council's formal agreement to enter into the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), which as a joint arrangement falls within the scope of a reserved matter for Council under Article 4 of the Constitution. The detail of the participation, inclusion and performance in the RAA has previously and will in future be considered by the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee (ACE).
- 1.2 Reading Borough Council's inclusion in the RAA is an effective move in achieving positive outcomes through permanence for Reading's children. In joining the RAA, Adoption Services will be delivered on a greater scale and with more innovative approaches to practice. This approach has real potential to improve outcomes for Reading's children.
- 1.3 The Council wants to ensure that in joining the RAA we will have an adoption system where children are matched with the most suitable adopter as quickly as possible. The recruitment of adopters will take place on an efficient scale to provide a pool of 'adoption ready' adopters large enough and well matched to meet the needs of Reading children who are waiting and that there will be enough high quality adoption support services available nationwide to continue to meet the needs of our children.
- 1.4 The 'go live' date for the RAA is November 2017.

## 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That, in accordance with Article 4 of the Constitution, "The Full Council", the joint arrangement to participate in the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency with Oxfordshire County Council as the lead authority, be approved.
- 2.2 That, in accordance with Article 11 of the Constitution, "Joint Arrangements", the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency be included in the list of joint arrangements set out in the table in paragraph 11.2.2 of the Constitution.

## 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The ACE Committee at its meeting on 20 March 2017 (Minute 57 refers) agreed the Council's ongoing participation in the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency, in order to speed up matching, markedly improve the life chances of neglected and damaged children, improve adopter recruitment and adoption support, and reduce costs. The development of RAAs will create a system where there are fewer organisations recruiting and assessing adopters - enabling operation on a much greater scale.
- 3.2 The Policy Committee, at its meeting on 10 April 2017 (Minute 116 refers) re-affirmed the Council's continued participation in the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency and approved financial contributions of £487k for 2017/18 and £430k for 2018/19 to enable that ongoing involvement.

## 4. THE PROPOSAL

### Current Position

- 4.1 As described above, the Council's ACE and Policy Committees have considered reports on the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency and approved the Council's ongoing participation in the process.
- 4.2 The final formula for the RAA was agreed in late March 2017 by the Adopt Thames Valley Board. Local Authority contributions have been evaluated against the formula and a financial commitment was made at Policy Committee on 10 April 2017 to be part of the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency.

### Options Proposed

- 4.3 The Constitution allows the Council to establish joint arrangements with one or more local authorities and/or their executives to exercise functions in any of the participating authorities. In so doing, the Council must formally give its approval to enter the joint arrangement. This formal approval is now being sought.

## Other Options Considered

4.4 There are no other options being considered.

## **5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

5.1 The strategic aim that the participation in the RAA will most contribute to is safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable. It will also achieve economies of scale for the Adoption Service, which will contribute to the financial sustainability of the Council.

## **6 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

6.1 Officers impacted by the creation of the RAA have been consulted. Additional engagement with these staff will take place throughout the period of TUPE in line with employment legislation.

## **7 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7.2 As this is a process report it does not have a differential impact on: racial groups; gender; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief. As such it does not require an equality impact assessment.

## **8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 Under Sections 101 and 102 of the Local Government Act 1972:

- (a) Full Council may establish joint arrangements with one or more local authorities and/or their executives to exercise functions in any of the participating authorities, or to advise the Council. Such arrangements may involve the appointment of a joint committee with these other local authorities.
- (b) Where the function to be exercised is an executive function in the other participating authorities, then full Council will establish the joint arrangement with the executives of those authorities. Such arrangements may involve the appointment of joint committees with these other local authorities.

8.2 Article 4 of the Council's Constitution, specifies at paragraph 4.2 the list of matters reserved to the full Council for decision. Included at Paragraph

4.2.2(q) is entering into joint arrangements with other local authorities under sections 101 and 102 of the Local Government Act 1972.

8.3 Oxfordshire County Council is the host authority for the RAA.

## 9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 At the Policy Committee meeting on 10 April 2017 (Minute 116 refers), it was agreed that financial contributions of £487k for 2017/18 and £430k for 2018/19 should be made with respect to the Council's participation in the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency.

9.2 At present all financial modelling suggests that in entering the RAA, RBC will reduce the current costs for adoption services. The financial modelling is based on previous adoption performance amongst other demographics. The potential is that where RBC would expect adoption performance to improve and the volume of children matched to successful adopters increase there is a likelihood that in future years with higher volumes and improved performance, costs will increase against a fixed finance formula.

9.3 The host authority is in the process of gathering adoption performance data from all partner Local Authorities for the past three years (placement data). The current budget is £766,300 for the provision of Adoption Services; this excludes the adoption allowances paid which will continue to be the responsibility of the Local Authority. The move to a Regional Adoption Arrangement will result in a more effective service, at a reduced cost to the Local Authority, achieving value for money. This will allow the Local Authority to achieve part year effect efficiency savings that have been identified by the Senior Management Team

## 10 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Reports and Minutes to ACE Committee on 20 March 2017 and Policy Committee on 10 April 2017

Regionalising Adoption

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regional-adoption-agencies-programme>