

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND EARLY HELP SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	10 APRIL 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	15
TITLE:	PROGRESS OF THE REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR GAVIN	PORTFOLIO:	DCEEHS
SERVICE:	ADOPTION SERVICE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the status of the new Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). The report will identify the current status of the project and the current implications for Reading Borough Council (RBC). The detail of the participation, inclusion and performance in the RAA has previously and will in future be considered by the Adults, Children's and Education Committee (ACE).
- 1.2 RBC'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 RBC 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 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. The project status of the current RAA is recorded as amber. This is due to the risk of not being able to finalise the budget, Local Authority contributions and political approval within the timeframe required (end April 2017).

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Reading Borough Council continues to participate in the Adopt Thames Valley Regional Adoption Agency.
- 2.2 That once the financial contribution is confirmed by the Adopt Thames Valley Board it is approved and authority to commit to the financial contribution is delegated to the Director of Children, Education and Early Help Services, in consultation with the Director of Finance and the Lead Councillor for Children and Families, in order not to further delay the launch of the 'go live' of the RAA.
- 2.3 That the governance arrangements are accepted for the onward delivery of the project in allowing both officer and member oversight and engagement.

2 POLICY CONTEXT

- 2.2 Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) are intended 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.
- 2.3 Reading Borough Council is a partner in the Adopt Thames Valley RAA. The Partnership Board (attended by The Director and/or Head of Service Safeguarding) meet on a monthly schedule and progress is monitored against a project plan covering the themes of Project Management, Vision, Developing Partnerships, Service Specifications, Processes, Voice of the Child/Adopter, Commissioning, Finance, HR/Staffing, Property, ICT, Legal, and Communications.

3 THE PROPOSAL

Current Position

- 3.2 Previously all funding options proposed against formulae would deliver budget savings on adoption for Reading Borough Council. The final formula was agreed late March by the Adopt Thames Valley Board and Local Authority contributions are currently being fixed against the formula, the delay to the 'go live' date of November is at risk if Local Authorities fail to confirm financial commitment during April 2017. This is captured as an amber rated risk to the 'go live' of the project.
- 3.3 Since the funding formula is now agreed by all partners and contributions are being calculated, RBC's political approval is required during April 2017.
- 3.4 The staffing structure of the new organisation is now agreed. The confirmation of the final structure was complicated by the fact that the participating Local Authorities have existing structures that vary; this includes variance with management arrangements, social workers, support workers and business support. An early commitment by the RAA was that

there would be no redundancies as a result of the creation of the RAA and therefore though the final staffing structure is yet to be agreed the finalisation of the structure poses no risk to Reading Borough Council.

- 3.5 The recommendation for a three site property for the RAA has been agreed. The fixed sites across the region will be supplemented by the availability in Local Authority offices for social workers to hot desk within social work offices.
- 3.6 Agreement was reached at the February Board that the governance arrangements for the live RAA would be via a single Board that will meet monthly through the initial stage of delivery. Attendance at the Board will be at officer level (likely Head of Service) and that a second tier of Lead Member/Director meetings will take place (likely 6 monthly) to ensure member involvement in the joint delivery of the service.
- 3.7 The quarterly performance framework for the RAA was also considered and agreement was reached that the proposed framework would allow appropriate management oversight.

Options Proposed

- 3.8 The move of RBC's Adoption Services to Adopt Thames Valley as the most appropriate RAA remains the most appropriate and innovative model to ensure positive outcomes for Reading's children placed for adoption. It is proposed that RBC continues to operate as a partner within this model.

Other Options Considered

- 3.9 There are no other options being considered at this stage for the overall model.

4 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The strategic aim that the participation in the RAA will contribute to is safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable.

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 None required at this stage.

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Oxfordshire County Council is the host authority for the RAA. Work is commencing during March 2017 to TUPE Reading Borough Council employees to Oxfordshire County Council. RBC lawyers and HR professionals will be

working collaboratively with Oxfordshire CC to ensure this transition is within timescale and afford full protection to staff employed by RBC.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 The host authority is in the process of gathering adoption performance data from all partner Local Authorities for the past three years (placement data). Our 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

Regionalising Adoption

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