

Subject:	South East Regional Adoption Agency		
Date of Meeting:	29th March 2018		
Report of:	Pinaki Ghoshal		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 This report provides the Policy Resources & Growth Committee with the background and local context for national changes to Adoption Services as a result of the publication of the Department for Education document: 'Adoption – A Vision for Change' March 2016.
- 1.2 Specifically this report will detail;
- The current governance arrangements
 - The application for funding process
 - Summary of progress by the project group
 - The priority tasks for the project group for 18/19
 - Information on the preferred model of delivery

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Policy Resources & Growth Committee note the report and in particular background information.
- 2.2 That the Committee agree in principle to the development of 'Adoption South East' Regional Adoption Agency in order to comply with Department for Education 'Adoption – A Vision for Change' agenda.
- 2.3 That the Committee agree in principle to aligned budgets for the formation of Adoption South East.
- 2.4 That the Committee agree for a more detailed report to be presented following approval on government funding.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Government Legislation

- 3.1 The Department for Education published 'Adoption - A Vision for Change' in March 2016 setting out reforms designed to address delay in the adoption process for children by requiring all local authorities to become part of a Regional

Adoption Agency (RAA) by 1st April 2020. This will mean that from 2020 Brighton and Hove City Council Adoption Service will need to join with other local authorities to become a Regional Adoption Agency and cease operating as a sole Agency.

Local Context

3.2 Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council and Surrey County Council have worked closely together for many years, as part of Adoption South Central Consortium. This consortium comprised of 9 Adoption Agencies and 2 Voluntary Adoption Agencies, The geographical spread of this consortium was considered too large to develop into one Regional Agency and hence the 4 Local Authorities collaborated to form 'Adoption South East'.

Current Governance Arrangements

3.3 Directors and Assistant Directors of Children Services from the 4 Local Authorities met in 2016 to discuss Government proposals and the implications. The conclusion from the initial meeting was to form 2 groups;

- An Executive Board - made up of the Director of Children Services for each authority and relevant Assistant Directors. At the first meeting it was agreed that this group would be chaired by Stuart Gallimore, Director of Children Services in East Sussex and that Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director for Brighton and Hove will be vice-chair. This group was charged with setting the direction and allocating resources to the project
- A Project board - made up of leads for Adoption Services from each authority. This group was tasked with developing the operational detail that will inform the development of the Regional Adoption Agency. The project board is currently chaired by Suzanne Chambers, Adoption Service Manager for Surrey County Council.

3.4 A more detailed report will need to be presented at a future meeting of the Policy, Resources & Growth Committee for final decision making. Full sign off will be required by elected members in each of the 4 Local Authorities in order for Adoption South East Regional Adoption Agency (ASE) to go live in April 2020.

Preferred Model

3.5 The current preferred model of delivery draws parallels with Orbis Public Law and is explored in more detail in section 4 below.

3.6 Adoption South East has looked at learning from other areas. The project team have benefited from generous support provided to date from Adopt Thames Valley and Aspire. As part of the next phase learning from other areas will also be sought.

Application for funding

3.5 In July 2017 the Department for Education invited Local Authorities to an event in London to discuss the requirement for all agencies to be formally signed up to a RAA by 2020. All Local Authorities were strongly encouraged to either develop or

join an existing RAA project. The 4 Local Authorities attended this meeting and reported on the work undertaken over the previous year to prepare the ground for a formal application for funding to develop Adoption South East Regional Adoption Agency.

The Chair of the Executive Board subsequently wrote to the Department for Education on behalf of the 4 Local Authorities, formally expressing interest in forming Adoption South East Regional Adoption Agency and intent to apply for development funding. A funding application was made in December 2017. A decision is anticipated shortly. Funds agreed will be made available in April 2018.

- 3.6 The Department for Education also used the event to confirm that all Regional Adoption Agencies will need to include working with a Voluntary Adoption Agency as part of their application. Adoption South East has started discussions with potential partners.

Progress of Project Group

- 3.7 The project board was charged with progressing actions that bring together the adoption practice for the 4 authorities and provide regular updates to the executive board.

- Recruitment
- Family Finding and Matching
- Adoption Support
- Adoption Panels

In order to develop key support work streams in Finance, Legal and Performance, East Sussex has provided leads, supported by representative colleagues from each member agency.

Priority Tasks of Project Group for 18/19

- 3.8 Department for Education funding will enable the appointment of a Programme Manager, and an Operational Project Lead to drive ASE forward in accordance with Department for Education timescales. The Programme Plan will focus initially on:

- Appointment of Project team (Programme Manager, & Operational Lead)
- Identification of delivery model and governance structure
- Service design and financial modelling (aligned budgets)
- ICT
- Role of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA)

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The 4 Local Authorities all have strong records of service delivery, working with a large number of children in care and adopted children. The success of the 4 local authorities directed the executive board to consider a partnership approach rather than 1 authority managing and leading Adoption Services for the region. Pilot projects experienced a number of financial problems when trying to create a

new VAA or to outsource to an existing VAA, this added further motivation to a Partnership model.

4.2 Given the authorities involved, the obvious parallel project was with Orbis Public Law, where staff from the 4 local authorities come together in partnership under a joint management structure to deliver services across the region. This allows for the development of the RAA whilst maintaining ownership and sovereign terms and conditions for staff within each Local Authority.

4.3 **Orbis Public Law**

At this stage the executive group favour a delivery model where staff from all 4 local authorities come together under a single management structure to deliver adoption services across the region, but where sovereignty of staff is maintained. This is the model currently being implemented in our Orbis Public Law public sector partnership. Orbis Public Law is a single service partnership under the management of a Joint Committee. It is a fundamental premise that the high standard of service currently provided to each Council will be maintained. Members still have control over arrangements and staff remain employed by their existing Council. In addition, given the significant involvement of legal staff across Orbis Public Law in the four Authorities with adoption proceedings it felt appropriate to align Adoption SE with Orbis Public Law.

5. **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

5.1 Adoption South East has begun discussions with PACT (Parents and Children Together) to explore working in partnership. Discussions are at a very early stage and will be progressed as a priority in 2018.

5.2 Early discussions have taken place to create a communication strategy and include all key stakeholders. This will be developed following the result of government funding application.

5.3 Staff within each Local Authority have been updated as to progress and have contributed to work streams for Adopter Recruitment, Adoption Support, Family Finding & Matching.

6. **CONCLUSION**

6.1 The recommendations and supporting information will take forward the development of Adoption South East Regional Adoption Agency, bringing together Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, West Sussex and Surrey Adoption Services.

6.2 The Policy Resources & Growth Committee will need to consider these proposals in the context of Department for Education policy document: 'Adoption – Vision for Change' and recognise that the new model will need to be developed to be compliant with these requirements.

6.3 The relationship between the 4 local authorities has started from a good position and continues to get stronger as the project progresses. Governance arrangements are well established.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

7.1 None applicable at present.

Legal Implications:

7.2 It is a requirement for all adoption agencies to be formally signed up to a RAA by 2020. The government envisages that by moving to a regionalised adoption system, adopter recruitment, matching and adoption support will be delivered on an efficient and effective scale at consistent quality. Currently the preferred model for governance is to emulate Orbis Public law whereby there is an agreement to work in partnership under a joint management structure, but which allows each partner to retain sovereignty over the terms and conditions of staff. The vehicle and governance to deliver this will be developed with the assistance of Orbis Public Law.

Lawyer Consulted: Natasha Watson

Date: 24.01.18

Equalities Implications:

7.3 None applicable.

