

MEMBERS REPORT
REGIONALISATION OF ADOPTION IN SOUTH YORKSHIRE
(RAA)

1 SUMMARY

Adoption Reform has been a key government priority since 2010, supported by Adoption Reform Grants in 2013, Adoption Support Fund in 2014, Regionalisation grants in 2015 and 2016, with additional measures contained in the Adoption and Children white paper in 2016.

The key objectives are:

- To increase the speed of decision making for children whose needs can be met through adoption
- To increase the number and speed of recruitment and of families able to meet their needs
- To improve the quality and availability of support to families after adoption.

The Government sees Regionalising Adoption as a key strategy to meet these aims and the 2016 Children and Adoption White paper requires all councils to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by the end of this parliament and gives the Secretary of State power to enforce this if necessary.

The 15 Yorkshire and Humber LAs, in partnership with the Voluntary adoption Agencies in the region have proposed to build on the existing regional consortium framework to establish 3 RAAs, South, West and North & Humber, supported by a regional Hub. During the development phase, October 2015 to May 2016, each RAA group undertook appraisals of different options for governance, service delivery and practice improvement. The Transition phase, June 2016 to April 2017, requires confirmation of the options appraisal outcomes and the implementation of proposals to enable the new RAAs to begin operation in April 2017.

The proposal for the South Yorkshire RAA is that The Doncaster Children's Services Trust act as the Host agency for the RAA. The rationale for this proposal is explored in detail within the body of the report.

Recommendations:

- Elected members receive the report, note the progress made to date and the work to be completed.
- Elected members support the delegation of a range of adoption functions to the new RAA
- Elected members support the proposal from the options appraisal that the Doncaster Children's Services Trust hosts the new RAA on behalf of its LA

members.

- Elected members consider a further report when the detailed implementation plans have been developed – in December 2016 to January 2017.

2 BACKGROUND

In March 2016 'Adoption: A vision for change' set out plans for adoption reform as part of the overarching vision for transforming the quality of children's social care services by 2020. The key objectives identified were

- To reverse the marked decline in the numbers of adoptions
- To address concerns that some children still wait too long for adoption
- To address concerns that too many families miss out on vital support services
- To address concerns that some children fail to get the permanence option that would be in their best interests

The issues that the government is seeking to address within adoption reform are:

- **Inefficiencies**
The current system is fragmented with around 180 agencies, both Local Authority and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA), recruiting and matching adopters for 5000 children per year. The majority of agencies are operating at a very small scale and this hinders strategic planning and economies of scale.
- **Timeliness of placing children**
Whilst there has been improvement in the performance of Local Authorities in placing children swiftly with adoptive families it still takes an average of 593 days from a child entering care to being placed for adoption. This is particularly the case with harder to place groups of children, often older, within a sibling group or with a disability.
- **Adopter recruitment**
Again there has been improvement in both the number of adopters recruited and the timescales to achieve this. However, whilst the number of approved adopters nationally and in this region is now greater than the number of children waiting, many of these adopters are less willing to consider those children who are harder to place.
- **Adoption support**
Adoption support is currently fragmented and characterised by a combination of in-house and spot purchased arrangements with often significant variations between local authority areas. A third of families reach crisis point, and 3% returning to care.

Regionalising and scaling up the adoption services is a key feature of Government strategy to address these concerns and the sector (Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies) has been asked to propose the most suitable model, scale and scope for these regional agencies according to individual regional profile and need. There are further stipulations that proposals:

- Fully involve the Voluntary Adoption and Support Agencies in the design and future

- delivery of the RAAs
- Deliver scale
- Are based on innovative practice which improves outcomes
- Engage service users

The Government has provided funding to achieve this for early adopters. Yorkshire and Humber has for some time been seen as a leader in this field and was one of 19 “early adopter” projects supported by DFE with a grant of £480,000 for the development phase. It has subsequently been designated as one of 5 “Demonstration” Projects, which have been awarded a higher level of funding for the transition phase (£650,000 confirmed and anticipate additional £490,000).

The key features of the Y&H proposal which attracted this “Demonstration” status are:

- Its potential to achieve significant scale, economies and consistency through its hub and spoke model
- Its history and constructive engagement with the Voluntary Adoption Sector.
- It actively engage with Adopters and Young People in its design
- Its innovative approach to practice focus and focus on improving outcomes for children

The success of this region’s bid for support is a significant achievement and is recognition of the collaborative culture existing between its local authorities and with the voluntary sector.

3 A YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE

The proposal for the 15 Yorkshire and Humber Local Authorities, in collaboration with the Voluntary Agencies, Adopters and Adopted Young People, is to create a Yorks and Humber Regional Adoption Hub with 3 sub-regional, autonomous RAAs, North & Humber, West and South. The Hub will take on many of the functions previously provided by the Adoption Consortium; performance data collection and analysis to enable tracking and service planning, some adopter and staff training, and other coordinating functions which enhance consistency and economies of scale. The RAAs will take on a range of adoption functions on behalf of LAs, described in more detail below.

The key benefits of this framework will be:

- To strengthen the specific service focus on best outcomes for children requiring adoption.
- To increase the choice of families available to improve matching
- To improve the preparation of adopters to meet the needs of the children placed with them.
- To improve the range and accessibility of support to families at all stages of their adoption journey.

- To develop relationships with the Voluntary Adoption and Support Agencies which makes best use of their unique contributions to a comprehensive, broad based adoption service.
- To strengthen the involvement of adoptive parents as partners in meeting their children's needs.
- To strengthen joined up working between Local Authorities, Voluntary agencies, NHS and other providers to promote the shared responsibility for the care and outcomes of Yorks and Humber Children
- To build on the region's reputation as a practice Leader and Innovator in Adoption.
- To deliver economies of scale through shared delivery, backroom support and management.

The Regional Framework

Each new RAA will be hosted by one of the agencies in the sub regional groups and will be managed through a Project Board. Each board is chaired by a DCS, independent to the host agency, and includes representatives from the LAs in that group, from the Voluntary Alliance (an Alliance of the Voluntary Sector agencies who operate in this region and who are members of the Adoption consortium), Adopters and other stakeholder groups. These boards are developing the transition plans to create each RAA and will become the management bodies of RAAs once operational.

The Hub (previously the consortium) is currently hosted by North Lincs Council on behalf of all LAs and VAs and will be hosted by Barnardo's from Autumn 2016. Additional adoption functions will be provided by the Hub as regionalisation plans develop, where they can better improve the outcomes for children and achieve better value.

A Regional Project Board is managing the wider Y&H development and is made up of representatives of each new RAA board, the VA Alliance, Adopters, Adopted Teens and other stakeholder groups. This board is overseeing the development of the new RAAs and the Regional Hub and will become the management body of the Hub when RAAs are in place.

There are opportunities for further funding across the RAA's with a further £16m allocated by the DFE to support systemic innovation and practice redesign, to improve the skills of the workforce to support permanence decisions and provide high quality adoption support. A separate application for funding has been submitted to the DFE to begin the development of a Regional Centre of Excellence, combining Children's Social Care, Schools, Universities and Health and Third Sector services to improve the range and quality of support and resources available to families and professionals across the region. If successful, this will form a central part of the Regional Hub and further reports will be provided as it develops.

4 CHALLENGES AND PROGRESS FOR EACH RAA

4.1 LA's who are involved

It is proposed that the South Yorkshire RAA comprises of Sheffield, Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster Local Authorities and the Doncaster Children's Service Trust. With the option of a thin joint venture to other VAA's.

Progress and challenges:

4.2 Progress

- The South Yorkshire Regionalisation project has had full engagement from all partner agencies and has actively contributed to the Y&H wide regionalisation agenda. Core partner agencies in South Yorkshire comprise of all four Local Authorities and the DCST. Other partners include, Barnardo's After Adoption and Yorkshire Adoption agency. We have also been supported by CAFCAS and partners in the Health service.
- An option appraisal has been completed: The options appraisal recommends that the Doncaster Children's Services Trust would be the preferred delivery option. This is explored in more detail later in the report.
- A new South Yorkshire Regionalisation of Adoption Implementation Board was established on 6th June 2016 with Rachel Dickinson, Executive Director, People Barnsley MBC, appointed as the Board Chair and Project Sponsor. The board comprises DCS's or their representatives from the relevant LA's and a Director from DCST, together with their respective Heads of Service. The Board has representation from Voluntary Adoption Agencies and from two Adopters.
- A Project Implementation Team has been identified, with representatives from each of the partner agencies and the first meeting of the team was held on 15th June 2016. The team have agreed a detailed project plan with a number of key work-streams. Two intensive work sessions have been booked within the next 2 months for the whole implementation group. Firstly to finalise the information gathering element of the project and understand the structure, delivery models and financial infrastructure of all services and secondly to map the proposed service structure for the new RAA.
- Principles for service delivery are being developed and an outline process map and service delivery model is in development with the assistance of Leeds Beckett University, who have given their support pro-bono in recognition of the ground-breaking work being undertaken within South Yorkshire.
- Further funding has been agreed with the DfE (approx. £100,000) to support the first implementation phase of the project in South Yorkshire.

4.3 Challenges

- The board is a new 'entity' which will provide governance for the development and implementation of the project.
- Service and financial mapping is complex. Adoption services are delivered differently in all three areas and many services or support services are integrated into other service areas or functions. Some services are commissioned in some areas and directly delivered in others. Some financial mapping has been undertaken but difficulties have been encountered to date, however with the support of the new board it is hoped that these problems will shortly be resolved.
- Although the DfE have accepted the Y&H bid, it has not granted the full amount requested. The requested sum of £1,627,000 has been reduced to £1,140,000 and initially only partial funding will be provided for the first five months. Y&H award for this period is £490k.

5 OPTIONS APPRAISAL & PROPOSED MODEL

5.1 Options Appraisal

- The options within the appraisal introduce the concept of 'thin joint venture'. This describes a range of options for a commissioning relationship with other VAA's whereby they also have some role in advising and supporting the development and delivery of the RAA's. This relationship is essential to meet the requirements of the DfE and brings added value from the diverse range of services in the adoption field.
- All options assume governance of the RAA through a board comprising of senior representatives from all LA's and the Trust with representation from other VAA's, adopters and adoptees. Voting and decision making rights may be restricted to the LA's and Trust (the funding partners) in matters of financial spend and deployment of resources. All decisions will be subject of further reports for approval.
- The RAA would continue to be accountable to Corporate Parenting Boards and other Local Authority bodies.
- The RAA will aim to provide a high quality service to our adopted children with improved outcomes; taking the best models of delivery from each of the four services. The RAA will also aim to provide savings through economies of scale.

Financial modelling and deployment of resources poses a significant challenge and the detail of the proposed modelling will be subject of further approval.

5.1.1 Option 1: RAA hosted by a single LA on behalf of other LAs, with a thin Joint Venture to other VAA's

This option would provide an apparently simple solution and would ensure continuity of Local Authority Terms and Conditions and pension rights for all staff. It is a model currently being explored in a number of regional development projects. It is possible for Local Authorities to delegate service delivery to another Local Authority through a joint venture but in the current climate multiple government agendas this solution requires a singular focus from a Local Authority. The Doncaster Children's Services Trust would also be unable to join the LA led venture without approval from the Secretary of State. This option would also require close partnership with a VAA in order to meet DfE requirements for integral VAA involvement. Although this is a viable option it is the opinion of the service experts that the DCST model proposed below does bring added value.

5.1.2 Option 2: RAA is formed as a company limited by guarantee, formed of LAs, with a thin Joint Venture to VAA's.

This option would require the establishment of a new company. For such a large complex organisation this would be costly and time consuming. Specialist independent advice has been sought. Staff would not have continuity of Local Authority Terms and Conditions and pension rights unless the body obtained admission to the South Yorkshire Pensions Authority. Should the organisation be admitted, advice is that employee contributions would increase by approximately 50 to 100%. The options appraisal concluded that although this model would provide the means by which an RAA could operate; development of a new delivery vehicle was unnecessary and costly. Local Authority adoption workers have been consulted nationally and the issue for staff of losing pension rights would place the service at risk of losing a large number of experienced workers.

5.1.3 Option 3: RAA is formed by LAs and VAAs combining under an existing brand (eg Barnardo's or Coram) with co-ownership of the brand by VAAs and LA's.

This option would bring a national perspective to the Local region but would bring local services under the management of a separate national body. The current position of most the Council for Voluntary Adoption Agencies is retention of a separate identity to the new RAA's with commissioning or partnership offer to the RAA. No National body has indicated they have the capacity to undertake further regional development and it was the view of the Board that there was no benefit to be gained from incorporation of a large

national organisation; local relationships formed are strong and the knowledge base extensive. This view was supported through advice given by a senior member of Barnardo's fostering service who sits on the board. The National perspective will be incorporated through the thin joint venture to VAA's working in partnership. As with the option above, staff Terms and Conditions and pension rights would be affected and loss of pension rights would place the service at risk of losing a large number of experienced workers.

5.1.4 Option 4: RAA is formed by LAs combining under Doncaster Children's Services Trust to form a company jointly governed by LA's, and the Doncaster Children's Services Trust VAA, other VAA's would be connected to the RAA by a thin Joint Venture.

This option was agreed to provide the most effective and efficient means of developing and delivering the new RAA for the following reasons.

- DCST is able to meet all the benefits of the LA option outlined above and also brings added value as an organisation.
- DCST is an existing VAA and an independent Trust; this meets Government aspiration for VAA led solutions. Other RAA's have proposed a Local Authority lead in the absence of a local VAA with Local Authority experience. In South Yorkshire we have the ability to harness the expertise of the DCST in management of a VAA delivering a full Local Authority service.
- DCST has current experience of transferring children's statutory services from into a new organisational framework. This has entailed: development of a Company Limited by Guarantee; TUPE of the children's workforce; development of a new infrastructure and framing a company vision and identity. Learning from this venture has informed the RAA project development to date
- The work outlined above included registration of the adoption service as a VAA. This has entailed development of services capable of working to both the VAA and LA service expectations in Ofsted inspection. In inspection last year the service achieved 'Good' in both the VAA inspection and Local Authority SIF.
- DCST is able to respond flexibly and quickly to respond to need. For example DCST was asked to manage the procurement of a business partner on behalf of the Yorkshire and Humber region as the Trust was able to respond immediately and provide a light touch solution.

- As a VAA: DCST is able to apply for funding unavailable to Local Authorities and participate in CVAA led development.
- DCST has Secretary of State Dispensation for LA pension rights for all employees. This ensures that all staff will be able to transfer under TUPE with all employment rights retained and with the same contribution costs as those of a Local Authority. Pension and employment rights are a major issue for staff and this benefit cannot be underestimated.
- The proposed model includes development of a governing body independent of the Trust with equal representation from all Local Authorities and the Trust. The RAA would be required to report to the Board and to meet agreed KPI's. Financial, resource and staffing issues would be subject to board approval. In this way the model replicates the organisational independence aspired to in option 2.
- As DCST is an independent limited company and reports directly to the Secretary of State, it is unable to transfer its resources and assets to another VAA or LA without the agreement of the Secretary of State.

The outcome of the options analysis was that Option 4 was the unanimous preferred option.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- All Local Authorities are tasked to develop regional adoption agencies by 2017 or may be compelled to do so. As part of the Yorkshire and Humber consortium we have successfully achieved 'demonstration project' status. Officers in all four Local Authority areas are committed to development of an RAA by April 2017. All authorities are confident this will improve services to our adopted children. Failure to continue with this programme risks removal of DfE funding and direct government instruction.
- Development of the RAA involves complex decisions in respect of financial contribution, HR and governance arrangements. All developments and decisions will be detailed in further reports.

7 MANAGEMENT BOARD STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP INCLUDING VA ALLIANCE AND ADOPTERS

The Implementation Board is chaired by the DCS of Barnsley, who is the South Yorkshire

project sponsor.

Membership of the Board comprises of:

- DCS's of all South Yorkshire Authorities and the Chief Executive of Doncaster Children's Services Trust or their representatives with delegated authority to make decisions;
- Head's of Service of all LA and Trust Adoption services;
- VAA Representatives
- Adopter Representatives

The project management team report to the Board.

The proposed RAA governance arrangements will be subject to a further detailed report which will be presented to the all LA's and the Trust for decision. It is envisaged that the Governance of the new RAA will comprise of a similar board structure. Decisions, especially financial decisions will be made by core funding partners.

The board would continue to be accountable to all LA Corporate Parenting Boards.

8 FUNCTIONS TO BE DELEGATED TO THE RAA BY LA's

All services currently provided by LA Adoption teams would be delivered by the RAA. This includes:

- Recruitment, assessment and approval of Adopters
- Family finding for children who have a placement order
- Adopter training
- Adoption support
- Partner adoption assessments

In addition, children's social work teams currently benefit from direct support and training from adoption teams. This support will continue.

The LA or Trust Children's Social Work service will continue to have responsibility for:

- Children's care planning decisions
- Matching decisions
- Life story work and later in life letters

Further detailed work on the scope of the service will be undertaken.

9 GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITIES AND DECISION MAKING

This report proposes that the RAA will provide the Host agency for the new RAA. There are a number of means by which the new body may be constituted and these are currently subject to legal advice. Key principles of the constitution include:

- A detailed Service Level Agreement or constitution
- TUPE of relevant staff
- Agreed budget and risk sharing agreements
- Key performance targets and monitoring agreements
- Accountability of the organisation to the Board and to all LA's and the Trust.

10 FINANCIAL MODEL

The financial model is currently under development. The service will seek to provide enhanced service provision within current funding levels.

11 STAFFING

All relevant staff will be subject to TUPE. All LA's and the Trust have admitted body status into the South Yorkshire Pensions Authority which maintains consistency for staff. HR leads from all organisations have begun to scope arrangements and are confident that this process can be effectively managed.

All staff have been briefed about the national agenda and proposed local solutions. Feedback from staff is generally positive about the proposals.

Full and formal consultation will take place when formal agreement is given by all relevant bodies.

12 TIME LINE FOR APPROVAL

Please see appendix A attached.

The proposed timeline for development of the South Yorkshire RAA has been put back to October 2017 in order to allow the project team to undertake Due Diligence and seek all approvals.

The development has been funded by the DfE as a national demonstration project and has benefited from not only enhanced funding but from direct support from the DfE and commissioned coaches.

This timeline is not subject to further extension and the service must commence no later than October 2017.