

Regional Adoption Agency: Confirmation of Arrangements

To: Children and Young People's Committee

Meeting Date: 1st December 2020

From: Wendi Ogle-Welbourn, Executive Director: People and Communities

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: n/a

Key decision: No

Outcomes: Confirmation of the establishment of a Regional Adoption Agency between Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Councils, hosted by Cambridgeshire.

That Cambridgeshire County Council fulfils the requirement by Government to have regional adoption arrangements in place by March 31st 2021 and Cambridgeshire children have more timely access to an increased number of potential adopters.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Agree that Cambridgeshire County Council hosts the Regional Adoption Agency on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council and enters into a partnership agreement to that effect to 30 November 2030 and subject to extension as agreed between the two authorities.

Officer contact:

Name: Lou Williams
Post: Service Director, Children & Safeguarding
Email: Lou.Williams@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tell: 01733 864139

Member contacts:

Names: Councillors Simon Bywater and Samantha Hoy
Post: Chair/Vice-Chair
Email: Simon.Bywater@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 706398 (office)

1. Background

- 1.1. Every local authority is required to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency by 31st March 2021.
- 1.2. The Children and Young People Committee agreed in principle to explore establishing a Regional Adoption Agency between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in July 2018.

- 1.3. The plan at that point was for the Regional Adoption Agency to be hosted by a Voluntary Adoption Agency, which would follow a procurement exercise that took place after that Committee. In the event, however, no bids of sufficient merit were received.
- 1.4. In light of this, the Department for Education agreed that the Regional Adoption Agency could continue to consist of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, with Cambridgeshire hosting the service.
- 1.5. This report provides an update to Members about the proposed Regional Adoption Agency to be hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council.

2. Main Issues

Regional Adoption Agencies

- 2.1. The Government requires all local authorities to have implemented regional adoption agencies by March 31st 2021. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough together are only just large enough to be considered a 'region' and indeed, most regional adoption agencies consist of four and more local authorities.
- 2.2. Regional Adoption Agencies are expected to raise the profile of adoption locally, and to enhance the provision of adoption services to children waiting for suitable adoptive families and for those who need post adoption support.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Regional Adoption Agency

- 2.3. The first thing to say is that given the way that services have become increasingly shared between the two local authorities over recent years, the ability to satisfy Government requirements through developing a Regional Adoption Agency consisting of the two authorities is a real benefit to both, and in retrospect, a much better outcome than the original plan for hosting by a voluntary adoption agency.
- 2.4. The benefit of the Regional Adoption Agency working across only the two authorities is that adoption services will remain close to the rest of children's services. This is even more the case in the context of our model of shared leadership and some other shared functions across the two authorities.
- 2.5. Adoption services need to remain in close contact with the rest of children's social care services so they can understand the profile of children needing adoption, and recruit suitable adopters to meet any changing need.
- 2.6. The context of an increasing range of shared services also means that the Regional Adoption Agency will be able to benefit from seamless access to shared recruitment and marketing functions in the two authorities in order to attract potential adoptive families.
- 2.7. Because Cambridgeshire County Council will host the Regional Adoption Agency, the service will be operated within the shared leadership arrangements of the two authorities. In arms-length arrangements, there is always a risk that the commissioned service develops in ways that mean that its priorities begin to diverge from the priorities of the commissioning authorities. A fully hosted service avoids any such risk.

- 2.8. The arrangement will mean that a small number of Peterborough staff [around 10 FTE] will transfer under TUPE arrangements to Cambridgeshire, with Peterborough making the appropriate financial contributions to the costs of operating the new service.
- 2.9. Most importantly, developing the Regional Adoption Agency will benefit children waiting for adoption and others affected by adoption and living in the two authorities. This is because children will immediately benefit from a larger pool of adopters.
- 2.10. Adoption services in both local authorities were judged as 'Good' by Ofsted in their last inspections. Joining them together will enable both to benefit from best practice in each, while creating a more resilient service overall.
- 2.11. Some activities and functions including recruitment and assessment activities for prospective adopters and post adoption support can be carried out jointly as opposed to the current position where these activities are duplicated in each authority.
- 2.12. Families, children and adults in need of post adoption support will also benefit from a larger shared service, able to offer a broader range of support which is also, importantly, local to where they are living.
- 2.13. The shared head of service for the Regional Adoption Agency will be able to raise the profile of adoption in both authorities with, among others, the local courts.
- 2.14. This approach is therefore able to offer the advantages of a larger, more resilient service that builds on the respective strengths of the current two services. Children needing suitable adoptive placements and others affected by adoption and in need of support will benefit, while the agency itself will remain aligned to the rest of the shared children's service in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
- 2.15. Both authorities will review the arrangements in the 6 months prior to March 31st 2022, and will agree the long term arrangements for the services.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 A good quality of life for everyone

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Adoption provides the most secure form of legal permanence for children. Generally, adoption is only an option for young children, and relatively few are placed for adoption compared with overall numbers in care. Well-matched adoption arrangements deliver some of the best outcomes for children unable to remain with their birth families.

3.2 Thriving places for people to live

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Promoting the best outcomes for children and young people means that they are most likely to make a positive economic and social contribution into adulthood.

3.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's children

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Most children do best when they grow up within their own families. Our services work hard to ensure that the majority of children thrive in this way.
- In a very small number of situations, children cannot safely remain with their parents. For young children [typically under 5 years of age] where there are no other family members available, adoption provides the majority with the best start in life and the most secure alternative permanent family arrangement available.

3.4 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2050

There are no significant implications within this Priority

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- Developing the Regional Adoption Agency with Peterborough results in a financial advantage to Cambridgeshire if considered in isolation.
- Establishing the Regional Adoption Agency is part of a broader alignment of shared services, however, that includes some elements of a shared fostering and quality assurance service.
- Considering this programme in full, there is a small net increase in cost to Cambridgeshire. This is predominantly the result of Cambridgeshire needing to increase investment in our quality assurance functions.
- This small net increase in costs can be met within existing budgets and should be considered within a context where savings are also now being made elsewhere in children's services

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

There are no significant implications within this category

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

There are no significant implications within this category

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

There are no significant implications within this category

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

There are no significant implications within this category

4.7 Public Health Implications

There are no significant implications within this category

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Roger Brett

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement? N/A

Name of Officer: N/A

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or LGSS Law? N/A

Name of Legal Officer:

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?

N/A

Name of Officer:

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

N/A

Name of Officer:

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? N/A

Name of Officer:

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health N/A

Name of Officer:

5. Source documents

5.1 [Children and Young People Committee 10 July 2018](#)