

Update on Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 14 July 2021

From: Head of the Regional Adoption Agency – Joanne Banks

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: n/a

Key decision: No

Outcome: For Members to be briefed on the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

Recommendation: The Sub-Committee is recommended to:

- a. Note the content of the report, and
- b. Raise any questions with the lead officer

Officer contact:

Name: Ricky Cooper
Post: Assistant Director Fostering, RAA and Specialist Young People's Service
Email: ricky.cooper@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 699609

Member contact:

Names: Councillor Anna Bradnam
Post: Chair
Email: anna.bradnam@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 706398 (office)

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an outline of the structure of the Regional Adoption Agency and the progress around the staffing issues. There is also information on the work undertaken in the first six months since the Agency started on 1 December 2020.

2. Background

2.1 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Regional Adoption Agency

On the 1 December 2020 the Regional Adoption Agency for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough went live with Cambridgeshire being the host. Even though we may only be 6 months in there have been a lot of positive achievements that can be built on.

The aims of the service have continued to be:

- Have a key role in the early permanency planning agenda within both Peterborough in Cambridgeshire and be instrumental in the care planning for children who have a plan for adoption
- Recruit adopters who can meet the needs of the children with adoption plans (specifically older children, sibling groups and children with additional vulnerabilities)
- Offer high quality support to adopters, birth parents and carers and all parties involved with the child
- Ensure a culture of continuous challenge, innovation and improvement
- Provide an accessible service to all parties affected by adoption and special guardianship (adopters, adoptees, birth families, foster carers, guardians and children in their care)
- Develop a coherent and robust 'Local Offer' that provides the right support, at the right time to Adopters and Special Guardians

3. Main Issues

- 3.1 The current structure for the Regional Adoption Agency has continued in line with the proposals in the consultation where there are four distinct teams dedicated to delivering key focussed activity.

Recruitment and Assessment:

- 3.2 This service area recruits, assesses and supports prospective adopters to meet the needs of children waiting in each authority in line with their developed recruitment and marketing plan. In addition, the service undertakes annual reviews as required, assesses and support parents or partners and family relatives who wish to adopt a child on a non-agency basis and foster carers who are seeking to adopt the child in their care. The team have three senior Practitioners and six Social Workers.
- 3.3 Having seen the success of the Recruitment Officer role in Fostering we have appointed successfully to a post in the Regional Adoption Agency. Lottie Ettlign took up the post in April 2021 and takes a lead on the new enquiries whilst working with Tony Darnell, Communications Manager Fostering & Adoption, to develop promotional and marketing

material to enable a further increase in those coming forward to adopt, in particular for the harder to place children.

- 3.4 We have seen a consistent increase in enquires (155 enquiries in 6 months) and applications to adopt (24 in 6 months) leading to a high number of adopters in assessment (49 as of the 31st May 2021). This gives us the opportunity to increase the number of children for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to be placed with adopters within the Regional Adoption Agency. The key moving forward is to understand the profile of the children needing adoptive parents so we can adapt the profile of the adopters being assessed.

Family Finding

- 3.5 This part of the service continues to take the lead responsibility for all aspects of the linking and matching of children with adopters. The service also provides support and advice to the child's Social Worker about the adoption process, coordinates other family finding activities and crucially increasing the opportunities for children to be adopted who are older, have additional vulnerabilities or within sibling groups. Tracking children with a potential or actual adoption plan and reporting on adoption timescales against national and local indicators also takes place within this part of the service. They are tracking 111 children with 59 children having an active family finding plan for adoption. Over the 6 months they have supported the presentation of 24 children to be presented at Adoption and Permanence Panel that have been subsequently successfully matched with their adoptive parents.

Adoption and Special Guardianship Support

- 3.6 This service area undertakes assessments of Adopter and Special Guardian support needs or commissions these if required, undertaking applications to the Adoption Support Fund for children. They also take lead responsibility for reviewing financial allowance provided to families to inform what future allowances should be provided. The core offer also includes: social events for children and young people, social/training events for adoptive parents, advice and signposting for adoptive families, independent support and advice to birth relatives, counselling and information to adopted adults post 18 years and independent support to birth parents including a letter box exchange service.

Panel and Quality Assurance

- 3.7 This service area administers and supports Adoption Panels which recommend the approval of prospective adopters, matches between children and adopters and provides professional advice on best practice and regulations to the Agency Decision Makers within both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. The Agency Advisor plays a key role in maintaining a high standard of practice and performance through the quality assurance of all services areas within the Regional Adoption Agency. The panel have remained a very active part of the Regional Adoption Agency having had 14 panels sit in the first 6 months in which they have heard 13 Adopter Approval Applications and 17 applications to match children with their adoptive parents. There have been positive steps towards joining Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Adoption Panels together. The Regional Adoption Agency currently has 3 Panel Chairs and 1 vice chair with a broad range of panel members that has supported the continued success in approving adopters and adoptive matches. There is an awareness of the need to recruit new members to panel and particular focus on

social workers. We are pleased that we have recruited one additional panel member who is planning to start to sit on panel in August 2021. Following the retirement of the Agency Advisor, Andy Cussell, attempts were made to recruit a permanent Agency Advisor. Unfortunately, we have been unsuccessful however the Acting Head of the Regional Adoption Agency is temporarily fulfilling this role whilst continued attempts are made to secure a permanent person into post.

Management Team

- 3.8 We have now successfully recruited to all management posts within the Regional Adoption Agency with Ricky Cooper taking the Assistant Director post to develop the strategic vision. We have appointed an interim to the Head of the Regional Adoption on an acting up basis with Joanne Banks having recently moved into post on 10 June 2021. We have been successful in appointing a permanent Team Manager to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team in which Kelly Johnson took up this post on the 10th June 2021. More recently we have also been able to appoint the Team Managers for the Recruitment and Assessment Team as well as the Family Finding Team on an acting up basis. Christine Clipston for the Recruitment and Assessment Team and Kat Heath for the Family Finding Team who will both take up these posts on the 5th July 2021. I would like to welcome all of the new Team Managers who will support the evolution and delivery of the Regional Adoption Agency.

Performance

- 3.9 Over the past 6 months there have positive indicators with 155 enquiries to adopt and with minimal marketing so there is a sense that with targeted marketing we should see this increase. We have had 24 applications to be assessed as adoptive parents so we currently have 49 adopters being assessed. In conjunction with this the agency has successfully approved 16 applications to adopt at panel so there are positive indicators that the Regional Adoption Agency will continue to grow the pool of adoptive parents.
- 3.10 The family finding team are currently tracking 111 children with 59 having an active plan for adoption. 23 children have been placed in adoptive placements and 26 Adoption Orders were granted.
- 3.11 There has already been some initial evaluation of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approaches to adoption who both have 'Good' services and joining together of practice and processes to work towards an outstanding service. The new management team will come together to develop a clear strategic vision and plan for the Regional Adoption Agency for the coming 6 months.

4. Alignment with corporate priorities

- 4.1 A good quality of life for everyone
There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.2 Thriving places for people to live
There are no significant implications within this category.

4.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's children
There are no significant implications within this category.

4.4 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2050
There are no significant implications within this category.

5. Significant Implications

5.1 Resource Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

5.7 Public Health Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

5. Source documents

It is a legal requirement for the following to be completed by the report author.

5.1 None