

## Corporate Parenting Committee

18 December 2020

### Update on Regional Adoption Agency – Adopt Coast to Coast



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## Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care, Durham County Council

### Electoral division(s) affected:

Countrywide

### Purpose of the Report

- 1 The Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt Coast to Coast is a Partnership Model agreement reached by Durham, Cumbria and Together for Children/Sunderland to work collaboratively to develop and deliver their respective adoption services under the leadership of the Regional Adoption Agency Head of Service whose joint appointment all have agreed.

### Executive summary

- 2 In November 2020, the 3 Local Authority Cabinets agreed the Partnership Model.
- 3 Significant work has been undertaken since the Cabinet decision in December 2018 which approved further work to develop a hosted model. A number of practical issues were raised about the hosted model due in the main to the large geographic footprint of the proposed Coast to Coast Adoption Agency.
- 4 Following discussions with the Department for Education (DfE) it was agreed to look at alternative models that were being developed nationally. This time period has enabled the Local Authorities to explore a newer RAA Model that provides a better fit for Adopt Coast to Coast.
- 5 The Partnership Model is one which the respective Local Authorities believe enables the necessary collaboration to achieve the vision set out by the Government. Adopt Coast to Coast as a Partnership Model will be delivered through a Hub and Spoke structure.
- 6 The Hub will initially be based in County Durham and has been kept deliberately small and cost effective. It will consist of the RAA Head of Service and a Communications and Marketing Officer and will have

access to a number of support services such as Performance and Finance which will be provided in kind from each of the three partners. The Hub costs will be shared equally by each Local Authority.

- 7 There will be three spokes:
  - (a) Cumbria
  - (b) Durham
  - (c) Together for Children
  
- 9 Staff in the spokes will continue to be employed by their existing organisations and work together to achieve the shared vision for Adopt Coast to Coast:

*“children will achieve their full potential within a loving and secure family, and everyone affected by adoption will receive a high-quality innovative and sustainable service”*
  
- 10 The RAA Head of Service was appointed and took up the post on 1 September 2020. The line management of the RAA Head of Service will be undertaken by Head of Children’s Social Care, Durham County Council.
  
- 11 The Key milestones for the project are:
  - (a) Shadow Go Live – 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021
  - (b) Live – 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021
  
- 12 To meet the Government’s deadline for go live (early Spring 2021) there has been a significant investment of time in developing an agreed model of practice for Adopt Coast to Coast. The modelling has had the advantage of the learning from the RAA’s that have gone live both regionally and nationally.
  
- 13 The workstreams which cover all aspects of the development of Adopt Coast to Coast are now meeting regularly to plan and implement the necessary practice changes ahead of go live.

### **Recommendation(s)**

- 14 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to note the contents of the report.

## **Background**

- 15 The Government's vision the future of adoption services and provision in England encompasses:
- (a) A system where children are matched with the most suitable adopter as quickly as possible.
  - (b) Improved targeted recruitment taking place at an efficient scale to provide a pool of 'adoption ready' adopters large enough and well enough matched to the needs of children waiting.
  - (c) Improved and sufficient high-quality adoption support services available nationwide.
  - (d) Potential for efficiency savings avoiding duplication and operating on a greater scale.

## **Main implications**

- 16 Key priorities prior to go live
- Ensure the IT solution for recording enquiries is in place
  - Adopt Coast to Coast's website is launched to support the recruitment activity
  - Develop and gain approval for the recruitment strategy that supports each Local Authority's sufficiency duty
  - Staff engagement
  - Wider stakeholder engagement and awareness raising
  - Early linking and matching solutions are in place

## **Conclusion**

- 17 Please note the progress made on delivering the Regional Adoption Agency and the key priorities ahead of go live.

## **Other useful documents**

- Cabinet report 'Regional Adoption Agency – Full Business Case' dated 18 November 2020

## **Author**

Paula Gibbons

Tel: 03000 265 235

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Council is under a legal duty to maintain an adoption service for its area. The Department for Education have expressed their desire for Local Authorities to establish Regional Adoption Agencies with partner LAs and Voluntary Adoptions Agencies. Failure to do so may lead to a direction for the Secretary of State to enter into such an arrangement

### **Finance**

The finance model proposed for Adopt Coast to Coast is that the current Adoption Service's budget shall remain in each respective Local Authority.

The hub costs will be the responsibility of the RAA Head of Service, and each Local Authority will contribute 1/3 of these, c£50K.

### **Consultation**

As part of the development work prior to the formal launch the RAA Head of Service will take the lead in developing and maintaining the active participation of Stakeholder groups who are affected by Adoption.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and will be regularly reviewed up to and post go live.

### **Climate Change**

None

### **Human Rights**

None

### **Crime and Disorder**

None

### **Staffing**

Two new posts are being created in the Hub; the RAA Head of Service post is recruited to and the Communications and Marketing Officer is to be advertised. There are no other implications for staffing in the 3 hubs as all current staff within the three Local Authority Adoption services are remaining employed within their own Local Authorities.

**Accommodation**

None

**Risk**

The Partnership Model significantly reduces the risk of developing and embedding a Regional Adoption Agency approach. However, identifying and managing the associated risk of the Partnership will be covered in legal agreements.

**Procurement**

N/A