

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting16th March 2017

1. Title of Item/Report

Development of Tees Valley Regional Adoption Agency

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report on the Development of Tees Valley Regional Adoption Agency.

The report informed Members of the national policy agenda in relation to adoption and the local response to develop a Tees Valley Regional Adoption Agency with the assistance of a grant from the Department for Education.

Adoption reform was a key priority for the Government building on work commenced under the coalition government through its publication Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes (January 2013). This publication outlined a vision for a new adoption system with a key focus on tackling the adopter recruitment challenge calling for a system where there were fewer organisations recruiting and assessing adopters but operating on a much greater scale.

Over the past 18 months, the momentum in the reform of adoption services has increased through the following actions:

- The introduction of the Adoption Leadership Board and Regional Adoption Boards;
- The passing of the Education and Adoption Act making provision to require joint arrangements for carrying out local authority adoption functions in England; and
- The publication by the Department for Education in March 2016 the document 'Adoption: A Vision for Change' which outline the Government's vision of an adoption system where:

- Decisions about placements are always made in children's best interests;
- Service delivery has at its heart innovation and practice excellence;
- Social workers are highly skilled professionals who make high quality, evidence based decisions and do not tolerate damaging delay for

children in their care;

- Matches are made without unnecessary delay;
- Every adoptive family has access to an ongoing package of appropriate support with a right to high quality, specialist assessment of need;
- The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart of national and local policy decision making and delivery of services.

As part of the reform of adoption services, the Department for Education (DfE) committed funding to stimulate change in the sector supporting early adopters of regional adoption agencies to accelerate their development and early implementation. The DfE had provided financial and practical support too local areas to develop regional adoption agencies and all projects had been allocated a coach from the Department's delivery partner, Deloitte and Mutual Ventures.

In October 2015 the Tees Valley local authorities submitted an expression of interest to the Department for Education for an adoption reform grant to scope the development of a Tees Valley Adoption Service. Initially this project was being led by Middlesbrough Borough Council, however, since January 2016, Hartlepool Borough Council had fulfilled the lead authority role.

In April 2016 the Tees Valley Regional Adoption Agency (TVRAA) submitted a Transition Plan to DfE providing outline proposals, work completed to date and a high level implementation plan for the forthcoming year. This was a requirement for accessing DfE grant funding to support the development and implementation of the RAAs nationally.

Included in the Transition Plan were a draft vision and set of objectives developed by the local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies that make up the TVRAA Management Board based on engagement with adopters and staff. At this stage initial options for the TVRAA delivery vehicle were considered and evaluated against the identified strategic objectives for the RAA and it is proposed further work be done on two options:

- (i) That the TVRAA should be constituted as a separate legal entity controlled and 'owned' by the participating local authorities and partners.
- (ii) One local authority hosts on behalf of the five Tees Valley Local Authorities. Stockton would be willing to host if this were the preferred option.

In order enable local authorities to continue developing on the work undertaken to develop the transition plan, the DfE provided interim

funding for May and June 2016 whilst longer term funding decisions were taken. During this period, the DfE amended its funding arrangements for RAA projects and determined to create five 'demonstrator sites' that would receive full funding to be the first regions to develop RAAs. All remaining RAA areas received an allocation of £100k between July and October to continue to develop their RAA model. TVRAA was not identified as a demonstrator site and therefore decided to continue to develop the design of the TVRAA and prepare an outline business case for the RAA.

Between July and November a significant amount of work had been undertaken on the design and future model for the TVRAA resulting in the development of process maps in relation to the ideal child / adopter journey, roles and functions of the RAA, processes and pathways and an Outline Business Case for the RAA was attached to the report.

The Outline Business Case (OBC) set out potential benefits and risks of establishing and delivering a regional adoption agency, an overarching vision and associated operating principles and the processes, roles and functions that were required to deliver it. The process of developing the OBC had been used as an opportunity to build consensus on an optimum model for the delivery of a regional adoption agency through:

- Identification of best practice across Tees Valley based on qualitative performance analysis and qualitative practice workshops;
- The co-productive design process in which the ideas and ambition had come from the people who deliver adoption and children's services in Tees Valley; and
- Anchoring the service design in the needs of those who experience adoption, namely children, adopters and birth parents.

A governance structure was in place for the programme headed by the RAA Management Board made up of the Directors of Children's Services and senior managers from local VAAs and key partner agencies. Beneath this sits an implementation group of managers leading adoption work across the Tees Valley and a 'Customer Design Authority' which was made up of adopters and adoption experienced individuals.

The workstreams had been identified as follows:

- Practice and organisational design
- Commercial, legal and governance
- Human Resources
- Finance
- Performance
- Property

- ICT

From January 2017, work would start in earnest on the development of the full business case for the RAA through the creation of a series of workstreams that would effectively organise and coordinate activity to deliver the programme through to go live and beyond. It was proposed that this was a staged process across three phases:

- January – May 2017 – Detailed design, transition planning and development of Full Business Case to enable the necessary local approvals to be secured for implementation;
- June – November 2017 – Formation of and transition to the new RAA model including necessary consultations.
- November 2017 – June 2018 – Go live and focussed optimisation of the new model.

It was noted that not all of the Tees Valley local authorities had a dedicated adoption services. Within some of the authorities, these were an integrated team with the fostering service. Through the workstreams, these issues would be addressed to consider how to provide resilience both to the RAA and retain an appropriate level of capacity within the fostering services.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The work being undertaken to develop a regional adoption agency be noted.
2. The Council's commitment to the ongoing development of a Tees Valley Regional Adoption Agency be confirmed.
3. Cabinet receive a further report on this development where a key decision will be required to move to the creation of the Tees Valley Regional Adoption Agency.
3. Reasons for the Decision
Best practice indicates that a multi-agency approach is the most effective way of making decisions about how best to deal with children and their families to secure the best possible outcomes.
4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected
None.

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None.

6. Details of any Dispensations

N/A

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight, 24 March 2017

Proper Officer
20 March 2017