

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET
16 MARCH 2017

REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM

CABINET DECISION

Children and Young People – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor McCoy

DEVELOPMENT OF TEES VALLEY REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY

1. Summary

To inform Cabinet 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.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:

- (1) Note the work being undertaken to develop a regional adoption agency and confirm the Council's commitment to the ongoing development of a Tees Valley Regional Adoption Agency.
- (2) Note that Cabinet will 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 Recommendations/Decision(s)

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. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members) should consider whether they have a personal interest in any item, as defined in **paragraphs 9 and 11** of the Council's code of conduct and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with and/or taking account of **paragraphs 12 - 17** of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 16** of the code, in any business of the Council he/she must then, **in accordance with paragraph 18** of the code, consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest and the business:-

- affects the members financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code, or
- relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the member or any person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code.

A Member with a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, may attend the meeting but must not take part in the consideration and voting upon the relevant item of business. However, a member with such an interest may make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to that business before the business is considered or voted on, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under a statutory right or otherwise (**paragraph 19** of the code)

Members may participate in any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have an interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, where that interest relates to functions of the Council detailed in **paragraph 20** of the code.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

It is a criminal offence for a member to participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest (and where an appropriate dispensation has not been granted) **paragraph 21** of the code.

Members are required to comply with any procedural rule adopted by the Council which requires a member to leave the meeting room whilst the meeting is discussing a matter in which that member has a disclosable pecuniary interest (**paragraph 22** of the code)

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SUMMARY

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is asked to:

- (1) Note the work being undertaken to develop a regional adoption agency and confirm the Council's commitment to the ongoing development of a Tees Valley Regional Adoption Agency.
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DETAIL

1. Adoption reform is 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.
2. 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;

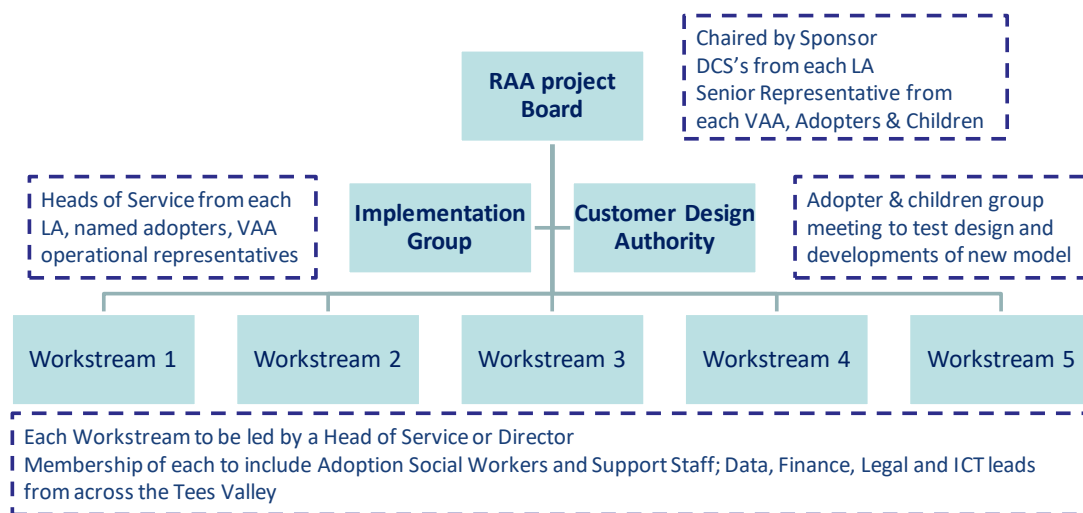
- Every adoptive family has access to an ongoing package of appropriate support with a right to high quality, specialist assessment of need;
 - The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart of national and local policy decision making and delivery of services.
3. As part of the reform of adoption 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 has provided financial and practical support to local areas to develop regional adoption agencies and all projects have been allocated a coach from the Department's delivery partner, Deloitte and Mutual Ventures.
 4. 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 has fulfilled the lead authority role.
 5. 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.
 6. 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.
 7. 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.

PROPOSALS

8. Between July and November a significant amount of work has 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 (attached at Appendix 1).
9. The Outline Business Case (OBC) sets 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 are required to deliver it. The process of developing the OBC has 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 has 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.

10. A governance structure is 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 is made up of adopters and adoption experienced individuals.



The workstreams have been identified as follows:

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

11. From January 2017, work will start in earnest on the development of the full business case for the RAA through the creation of a series of workstreams that will effectively organise and coordinate activity to deliver the programme through to go live and beyond. It is proposed that this is 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.

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

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

13. None.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

14. TVRAA has received a grant from the Department for Education to develop and implement the model for a Tees Valley Adoption Service. The costs of the project are fully met by the grant. Within the full business case that will be presented to Cabinet later in the year, a full financial model will be outlined. There is an expectation within all the local authority partners that the RAA will not cost more than the current arrangements to deliver adoption services across Tees Valley.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

15. There are no legal considerations arising from this report. There are however significant legal implications involved in the creation of the Tees Valley RAA and these will be covered in the decision making report that will be presented to Children's Services Committee later in the year.

RISK ASSESSMENT

16. There are risks associated with any significant change management programme such as this. The outline business case has identified potential risks within the project and provides a risk matrix detailing a risk rating and mitigating actions. Going forward, the risks will be effectively managed through the Management Board and governance arrangements.
17. As detailed in the Outline Business Case, there can be fluctuations in the number of children who require an adoptive placement as this is dictated by need and decision making of the court. The cost benefit scenario detailed at chapter eight illustrates the potential range of performance and financial outcomes from combining adoption services under the RAA. This provides guidance on the potential opportunities and risks to inform the decision on and potential approach to further design and transition work. In the preparation of the full business case, further detailed analysis of numbers of children waiting for adoption will be completed to ensure that the new service has the capacity to meet current and future predicted need.
18. If the Tees Valley local authorities decides not continue with the development of the TVRAA there is a risk that the Government will use its powers under the Education and Adoption Act 2016 to require the local authorities to make joint arrangements for the provision of adoption services without the benefit of a grant to support this process.

COUNCIL PLAN POLICY PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

19. Protecting the vulnerable through targeted intervention.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

20. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to maintain an adoption service within their area. The Local Authority is not obliged to provide all the facilities itself and may make use of services provided by other adoption agencies, who are permitted to provide such services.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

Consultation with Lead Member.

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Education related?

No

Background Papers

None

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Lead Cabinet Member will be briefed.

Property

Not at this stage.