

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE

28TH OCTOBER 2013

REPORT OF THE INTERIM CORPORATE DIRECTOR – CHILDREN

DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Members on the current plans to establish a National Adoption Service for Wales, supported by Regional Adoption Collaboratives.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority

- 2.1 The report links to the following corporate priorities:

- Working together to raise ambitions and to drive up educational achievements
- Working with children and families to tackle problems early
- Working together to help vulnerable people to stay independent
- Working together to tackle health issues and encourage healthy lifestyles

3. Background

- 3.1 Adoption must be seen in the broader context of planning placements and permanence for children and as part of an integrated system of services for meeting their needs and promoting their well-being. Adoption Services as a whole are complex, provided to a wide range of service users from very young children who are being placed for adoption to older adults who are seeking to be re-united with their birth families.
- 3.2 There is a clear requirement that children in care must have plans for permanence in place which consider the full range of permanence options and which are put into effect with appropriate urgency.
- 3.3 Corporate Parenting Committee will be aware that the creation of a National Adoption Service is one of the key policy strands of the Welsh Government and that, if enacted, The Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Bill will allow Ministers to prescribe arrangements by local authorities.
- 3.4 Working closely with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), ADSS Cymru, a functional model for delivery of Adoption Services across Wales, has been produced. A copy of this report is attached at Appendix 1. The model was endorsed by the Expert Advisory Group on Adoption established by Welsh Government. The outline proposal developed by ADSS Cymru was agreed in principle by Leaders at WLGA Council in April.

3.5 Subsequently, in a Written Statement on 25th April 2013, the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services endorsed the proposals for achieving a National Adoption Service and the development of a Functional Model for the delivery of services across Wales, as presented by ADSS Cymru and the WLGA. A copy of the Written Statement is attached at Appendix 2.

4. **Current situation / proposal.**

4.1 The proposals outlined in detail in Appendix 1, provide an ambitious but realistic pathway for creating an effective and responsive National Adoption Service. This will help to ensure:

- A new direction for the delivery of Adoption Services that is particularly suited to the Welsh context.
- Timely implementation of the improvements required.
- An increase in the pace of collaboration and the capacity to build sustainable services for the future.
- A reduction in bureaucracy and a streamlining of service delivery.
- An improvement in service accessibility for all key stakeholders.
- Maintenance of the essential integrity and coherence between all elements of Adoption Services, to prevent a mismatch between the needs of children requiring adoption placements and the adopters being recruited.
- Long term and lasting improvements to address the weaknesses identified in some elements of current service provision.
- A central place for the significant contribution made by the Voluntary Sector as valued co-producers and delivery partners.
- Collective opportunities for local authorities to respond effectively to rising pressures within the care system.

4.2 The proposal will be underpinned by a National Standardised Performance Framework that will allow the National Adoption Service to identify, review and highlight key performance measures. The framework will set performance thresholds and make clear the Welsh Government's minimum expectations for timeliness in the adoption system for both the child and prospective adopter.

4.3 The **National Adoption Service** will be responsible for:

- Establishment of a National Board.
- Monitoring the delivery of services in accordance with the national performance framework.
- Producing an Annual Report and action plan.
- Developing a national marketing and awareness raising strategy.
- Providing a single point of contact for anyone seeking information about adoption.
- Providing a database of information.
- Developing and maintaining a National Adoption Register.
- Co-ordination of Adoption Panels, Panel Members, Pre-Approval Training, Post Adoption Support Services and provision of the Independent Review Determination Service.
- Acting as a Centre of Excellence for Adoption in Wales.

4.4 The functional model proposes that five **Regional Adoption Collaboratives** are established, to deliver the functions of the National Service including:

- Ensuring compliance with legislation, regulation and the performance management framework.
- Recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters.
- Ensuring appropriate matching of children.
- Provision of the whole range of support services including birth parent counselling, step parent adoptions, intermediary services and letterbox contact.
- Ensure effective links are maintained with local authorities Children's Social Services.

4.5 The proposed five regional collaboratives are:

- **North Wales** – Wrexham, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire and Ynys Mon;
- **South East Wales** – Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Newport and Caerphilly;
- **West & Mid Wales** – Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Powys;
- **Western Bay** – Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea; and
- **Mid & South Wales** – Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda-Cynon-Taff.

4.6 One local authority within each collaborative will act as the lead authority for the delivery of the regional roles and functions and will host the service. The Senior Responsible Officer from the lead/host authority will be a member of the National Board.

4.7 These collaboratives are currently at different stages of development.

Heads of Service for Swansea, Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot have been meeting regularly with local authority lead officers for adoption to consider the design and delivery aspects of the Western Bay Regional Collaborative. At the time of writing this report, no decision had been made as to which authority will be the lead authority for the delivery of the regional roles/functions and will host the service.

4.8 It is planned that all five Regional Collaboratives will be established by April 2014.

4.9 In addition, each **local authority** will retain responsibility for the following:

- Assessment, care planning and reviewing of Looked After Children and young people.
- Ensuring the Agency Decision Maker functions are fulfilled.
- Assessment of the Adoption Support needs of children for whom the plan is adoption.
- Involvement in the matching and linking of children and adopters.
- Providing birth parent counselling.
- Making applications to the Courts for appropriate orders.
- Attending Adoption Panels where proposed matches are being considered.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

- 5.1 Adoption services are governed by a number of detailed Statutory Regulations and it is acknowledged that changes to these Regulations will be required in due course. However, progress in implementing key aspects can be made pending the required changes. In advance of any legislative requirements that may be included in the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Bill, each local authority will need to make its own decision regarding the case for change.
- 5.2 Existing policy and procedures will need to be reviewed and revised to incorporate the impact of local, regional and national delivery of adoption services.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 There are no equality issues arising from this report.

7. Financial Implications.

- 7.1 A Task and Finish Group will be established with representatives from Welsh Government, ADSS Cymru, Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW), British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), Voluntary Adoption Agencies and each of the five Regional Collaboratives. The purpose will be to produce a robust change programme for implementing the functional model.
- 7.2 It is recognised that Programme Management capacity is required to drive through these changes in a timely fashion and the Deputy Minister has awarded £50k to ADSS Cymru to support the implementation.
- 7.3 At this stage, it has not been possible to ascertain whether the development of the National Adoption Service is likely to create any savings to local authorities or to quantify such savings (if there are any).
- 7.4 The following key milestones have been agreed:
- Membership of the Task and Finish Group and explanation provided to them regarding their roles and responsibilities.
 - Identification of the five 'Lead Authorities'.
 - Development of a common Implementation Plan format.
 - Support the 'Lead Authorities' in their role.
 - Outline business components for the infrastructure of the National Service.
 - Regional Implementation Plans in place

8. Recommendation.

That Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee:

- Notes the contents of this report; and

- Endorses the proposals for achieving a National Adoption Service in Wales as detailed in the report of the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) Cymru;

The recommendations above are made in order to assure Committee that the Council's statutory functions in relation to providing an Adoption Service are fully met, in accordance with legislation and guidance and the ADSSC and the Welsh Government's plans for creating a National Adoption Service.

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Background documents

Appendix A Proposals for Achieving a National Adoption Service in Wales and Development of the Functional Model – ADSS Cymru, April 2013.

Appendix A1 National Adoption Service – Functional Model

Appendix B Written Statement by the Deputy Minister – 25th April 2013