



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
Cabinet	
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North Midlands Adoption & Permanency Partnership

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This paper sets out Shropshire Council's engagement in establishing a Regional Adoption Agency and seeks Cabinet approval to proceed.
- 1.2 In April 2017, responding to the requirement to form a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council joined together to facilitate a collaborative working arrangement, through the establishment of the North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership.
- 1.3 The Partnership came together because of the four Local Authorities shared vision to create an arrangement which goes beyond Adoption (as required in the Education and Adoption Act 2016) and includes Fostering, Special Guardianship and Connected Persons. The Partnership has a shared mission to lead the local, regional and national agenda in respect of achieving permanence for all Looked After Children who require it.
- 1.4 The Partnership is proposing a collaborative Regional Permanency Arrangement which combines the expertise of the four Local Authorities. Working together to find local, caring, stable and loving homes for Looked After Children who require permanence, giving a child a sense of stability, continuity, commitment and identity.
- 1.5 The Partnership will be a unique arrangement, creating a sustainable system which operates on a regional footprint, maximising resources, capacity and flexibility, which leads to improvements in service delivery, effective practice and long-term outcomes for children, whilst maintaining the independence of each individual Local Authority.

- 1.6 This Partnership received a significant transformation grant from the Department of Education (DfE) to pursue this new innovative way of working.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet acknowledge the statutory requirement to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by the 1st April 2020, as set out in the Education and Adoption Act 2016.
- 2.2 Cabinet approve the formation of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) between Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.
- 2.3 Cabinet approves the Outline Business Case (OBC) which sets out the ambition of Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council to go beyond adoption and develop a regional model of wider permanence which includes Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO).

REPORT

3.0. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

3.1. Context:

- 3.1.1. Most children will have their need for stability and nurturing met by their birth parent(s) and will not require support from, or come to the attention of, Local Authority Children's Services. A small number of children will come into the care of the Local Authority and will require long term provision away from their birth parent(s).
- 3.1.2. Where children require long term care, Local Authority Children's Services will prioritise the achievement of permanency. Permanence, in the context of Children's Social Care, is defined as a framework of emotional (attachment), physical (stability) and legal permanence (in respect of who discharges parental responsibility).
- 3.1.3. Failing to achieve permanency for Looked After Children can lead to a detrimental impact on their short, medium and long-term outcomes, including a direct impact on their sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. This can often result in placement breakdowns and disruptions leading to children requiring specialist, intensive and costly placements/services, causing direct financial pressure on Local Authorities.

- 3.1.4. In June 2015, the Coalition Government prioritised the achievement of permanence through Adoption. “Regionalising Adoption”, published by the Department of Education (DfE), set out the Governments direction for the formation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA’s) by 2020. The DfE’s expectation is that larger delivery models should be able to pool resources and share best practice to better target the recruitment of prospective adopters and speed up the matching and placement of children for adoption.
- 3.1.5. Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council initially came together in 2015 to consider opportunities for the development of a Regional Adoption Agency (with consideration to a wider Regional Permanency System). Following engagement with the DfE, the two Local Authorities were not invited to join the Regionalisation of Adoption Programme on the basis that the proposed partnership arrangement was too small in terms of scale.
- 3.1.6. Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council initially came together in 1997 to develop a Joint Adoption Service (JAS) across the two Local Authorities which has continued to develop and evolve.
- 3.1.7. In 2015, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council joined the City of Wolverhampton Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council to develop the Adoption@Heart Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council were actively engaged in the project until February 2017, when they concluded that being part of the arrangement was not in their best interests. Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council were supported by the DfE to leave the arrangement to pursue a wider model of permanence.
- 3.1.8. Responding to the Education and Adoption Act 2016, Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council joined together in April 2017 to facilitate an innovative, dynamic, forward thinking collaborative working arrangement which focuses on all permanence options, through the establishment of the North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership.
- 3.1.9. The Partnership recognises that only a small number of children enter the Adoption System and a much larger group require long-term permanence through mainstream fostering, Connected Person’s Fostering and Special Guardianship.
- 3.1.10 The Partnership is seeking to achieve improved outcomes for Looked After Children requiring permanency by operating on a regional

footprint, that maximises resources, capacity and delivers flexibility, leading to improvements in sustainable service delivery whilst maintaining the independence of each Local Authority.

3.1.11 This Partnership is the first of its kind in the country and has received a significant transformation grant from the Department of Education (DfE) to pursue this new innovative way of working, which is focused on improving the long-term outcomes of all Looked After Children requiring permanency.

3.2 Proposed Regional Permanency Arrangement:

3.2.1 It is proposed to create a regional arrangement across Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council with the creation of a joint service delivery model. The arrangement will focus on finding local, caring, stable and loving homes where Looked After Children achieve permanence.

3.2.2 Through a phased Regional Permanency Transformation Programme, we will align permanency functions relating to Adoption, Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardians between 2019 and 2024. This will ensure that governance arrangements, delivery structures, systems, processes and practice enable the workforce from the four Local Authorities to work together, ensuring all children entering care will receive a consistently high level of organisational commitment, leading to better outcomes for children.

3.2.3 The Regional Permanency Arrangement will operate through a hub and spoke model which enables Local Authorities to benefit from a network of regional delivery whilst maintaining their own individual independence. This will ensure the Partnership reflects the local landscape, adapted as necessary to the needs of individual Local Authorities, whilst demonstrating clear links to the local Children & Families System.

3.2.4 The proposed model demonstrates learning from delivery adopted by Integrated Children & Families Services across England in relation to the principles of multi-agency teams, integrated working and governance. Such ways of working have been successfully embedded within Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH), Multi Agency Early Help Partnerships, West Mercia YOS, Stoke-on-Trent YOS and the Staffordshire YOS.

3.2.5 Staff will continue to be employed and based within each Local Authority and will not be transferred to another alternative delivery vehicle. We will however, where appropriate, seek to explore

opportunities for secondments where it is in the best interests of the Partnership.

- 3.2.6 Statutory responsibilities relating to Looked After Children will continue to sit with Local Authorities (i.e. Corporate Parenting, Agency Decision Maker and Care Planning, Placement and Case Review).

4.0. Financial Implications

- 4.1. In proposing the development of a Regional Permanency Arrangement, the four Local Authorities are clear that it provides an opportunity to achieve a range of financial benefits in the medium term, as outlined in the Outline Business Case (OBC).
- 4.2. The four Local Authorities are clear that any future partnership arrangement cannot lead to increased financial costs or pressures because of the development of this Partnership. The four Local Authorities are also clear that no Local Authorities will be disadvantaged financially because of the development of this arrangement.
- 4.3. During the design phase of the Regional Permanency Transformation Programme, we will develop a financial formula to underpin the Regional Permanency Arrangement. This formula will be outlined in detail and will be included in the full business case which will require Cabinet approval by the 31st December 2019. This financial formula will be equitable and will ensure Local Authorities are not funding services/provision for Looked After Children for whom they are not responsible for.

6.0. Additional Information

6.1. Delivering Our Regional Permanency Arrangement.

- 6.1.1. The development of this OBC has provided a valuable opportunity for the four participating Local Authorities to achieve greater consensus on the collective vision, outcomes, priorities and success measures along with our proposed new operating model.
- 6.1.2. To maximise the potential benefits of the new operating model, and to manage the risks, it is recommended that permanence functions will form part of the arrangement at different stages, through a well organised and sequenced plan to achieve go live of phase one (2018 – 2020), phase two (2020 – 2022) and phase three (2022 – 2024). Each stage will be subject to Cabinet approval.
- 6.1.3. Our proposed model has received endorsement from the DfE and the partnership has been awarded a transformation grant to deliver the change and ensure focus on creating a RAA. This grant will be

available until 2020 and has secured additional specialist capacity to underpin the development of our proposed new way of working.

6.2. Next Steps.

- 6.1.1. If approved, the programme will move into the design phase of the new operating model which prepares the detail for phase one to go live in April 2020.
- 6.1.2. We will continue to engage stakeholders, including the workforce, Looked After Children, Adopters, Foster Carers, Special Guardians, Designated Family Judges, Family Justice Boards and CAFCASS, partners, residents and other stakeholders to co-produce the development of this operating model which focuses on permanence.
- 6.1.3. Lead Cabinet Members for Children & Young People, along with Directors of Children’s Services (DCS), will be invited to quarterly strategic partnership meetings to continue to provide political, member led leadership to the development of our Partnership and the Regional Permanency Arrangement.
- 6.1.4. We will return to the Cabinets of Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council with a full business case in respect of a Regional Permanency Arrangement by the 31st December 2019.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Education and Adoption Act 2016

“Regionalising Adoption” (DfE June 2018)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Nick Bardsley

Local Member

ALL

Appendices

Appendix A: Regional Outline Business Case (OBC)

