



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
Cabinet	
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## **Regional Permanency Arrangement Development (Phase One)**

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### **1. Summary**

- 1.1 This report sets out the progress made in the formation of the Together4Children Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) between Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council and provides detail around the plans.

### **2. Recommendations**

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services to negotiate and agree the terms of the Permanency Partnership Agreement.
- 2.2 Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to make further decisions in relation to the formation of the Together4Children Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services.
- 2.3 Approves that the Together4Children Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) Regional Financial Formula for 2020/21 and 2021/22 is set on the basis that each Partner contributes 100% of "in scope" budgets (Adoption Services), as disaggregated from the 2019/20 budget. Therefore, Shropshire Council's contribution to Adoption Services will continue to be £487,660.

- 2.4 Delegates to the Executive Director of Children's Services to further progress the proposal for the Permanency Partnership to go beyond adoption and to develop a regional model of wider permanence which includes Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) and notes that further recommendations will be made to Cabinet in due course with a view to bringing these wider functions formally within the scope of the Permanency Partnership.

## REPORT

### 3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

(NB this will include the following: Risk Management, Human Rights, Equalities, Community, Environmental consequences and other Consultation)

- 3.1 The Education and Adoption Act 2016 includes a statutory requirement to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by the 1st April 2020. Should the Council fail to enter an arrangement, the Secretary of State for Education has the power to direct one or more named Local Authorities to decide for any or all their adoption functions to be carried out on their behalf by one of the Local Authorities named, or by another agency. This is outlined in section 15 of the Education and Adoption Act 2016. There is a range of human and reputational non-financial benefits, but it is important to note that these benefits are only achievable long-term. These includes:

- Increased numbers of children adopted because of a greater range of Adopters leading to long term improved outcomes for Looked After Children
- Increased number of Looked After Children who achieve emotional (attachment), physical (stability) and legal permanence (in respect of who discharges parental responsibility) which gives our children a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity.
- Increased number of Looked After Children with "harder to place" characteristics achieve emotional (attachment), physical (stability) and legal permanence (in respect of who discharges parental responsibility) because of the opportunities to explore potential new ways of working through a regional arrangement.
- Increased numbers of children who achieve early permanence, supported through a regional approach.
- Improve the long-term outcomes of children by achieving emotional (attachment), physical (stability) and legal permanence (in respect of who discharges parental responsibility).

- Reduced numbers of placement breakdowns because of the development of a regional approach to Effective Practice and the development of specialist, innovative and outcome focused models of practice and support only available through a regional operating model.

3.2 Increased numbers of children achieving permanence, will better prepare Looked After Children for the transition to adulthood, leading to wider benefits to society, the economy and the public purse.

#### **4. 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 previous Cabinet Report and Regional Outline Business Case (OBC).

4.2 The four Local Authorities are clear that any development proposals for the future partnership arrangements must not lead to increased financial costs or pressures to any of them. The four Local Authorities are also clear that no Local Authority will be disadvantaged financially because of the development of this arrangement.

4.3 In line with the Education and Adoption Act 2016, the Partnership will develop a Regional Financial Formula. The vast majority of this Regional Financial Formula will continue to be managed within individual Local Authorities with accountability to the Regional Management Board. A small number of Budgets relating to the functions of the Central Regional Permanency Hub will be hosted by Staffordshire County Council (SCC) with accountability to the Regional Management Board.

4.4 It is recommended (subject to Cabinet consideration) that the Regional Financial Formula for 2020/21 and 2021/22 is set on the basis that each Partner contributes 100% of “in scope” budgets (Adoption), as disaggregated from the 2019/20 budget.

4.5 The “in scope” budgets (Adoption) relate to following areas of practice:

Local Authority Adoption Agency Staffing	Adoption Workforce Training & Development
Adoption Agency Administrative Support	Adoption Agency Infrastructure/Corporate Recharges
Adopter Recruitment	Adopter Assessment
Adoption Family Finding	Adoption Panel & ADM
Post Adoption Support/Permanency Support	Adoption Service Commissioning
Inter-Agency Placement	Adoption Support Fund (ASF)

4.6 The “in scope” budget for Shropshire Council is £487,660.

4.7 It is also recommended (subject to Cabinet consideration) that there will be no further financial recourse to any Local Authority in the Partnership, in respect of services in scope of the Phase One Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). Partner Local Authorities will remain responsible for any additional cost pressures (through, for example, significant increases in predicted demand for services).

4.8 The proposed financial approach will ensure financial certainty for the Partnership in the short term, whilst ensuring that Local Authorities are insulated from potential financial risk as a result of the new arrangement. Adopting this proposed arrangement will allow the Partnership and the four Local Authorities to take informed financial decisions in the medium and long term, ensuring the Regional Permanency Arrangement will achieve financial sustainability to meet the changing needs of Looked After Children and the challenges facing the four Local Authorities.

4.9 The proposed model allows the Partnership to be able to adjust the Regional Financial Formula to take account of further functions coming into scope, as previously set out in the previous Cabinet Report and Regional Outline Business Case (OBC). Further recommendations will be made to Cabinet in respect of bringing these further functions within the scope of the Partnership.

## 5. Background

- 5.1 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).
- 5.2 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).
- 5.3 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 (RAAs) by 2020.
- 5.4 In April 2017, Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council came together because of the 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'). This Partnership focuses on 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.
- 5.5 In March 2019, Cabinet approved the formation of a Regional Permanency Arrangement (following the consideration of an Outline Business Case). To maximise the potential benefits of the new delivery model, and to manage the risks, Cabinet agreed to pursue a well organised and sequenced plan to achieve go live of Phase One (2019 – 2020), Phase Two (2020 – 2022) and Phase Three (2022 – 2024).
- 5.6 The Together4Children Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) continues to be developed in line with the decisions taken by Cabinet in March 2019. The development of this arrangement continues to be reflective of the Regional Outline Business Case (OBC) considered by Cabinet.
- 5.7 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).

- 5.8 In April 2019, the Partnership entered the Regional Permanency Transformation Programme (Phase One) which has initially focused on the development of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020.
- 5.9 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.

## **6 Progress:**

- 6.1 In co-production with Stakeholders, the Permanency Partnership has developed the “Together4Children” regional brand. This regional brand reflects the vision, mission, values and strategic outcomes of the Permanency Partnership.
- 6.2 The Partnership has appointed a Regional Head of Operations who is responsible for the Regional Permanency Arrangement. The Regional Head of Operations has a single line of accountability to the Regional Management Board and undertakes a range of key functions across the four Local Authorities.
- 6.3 The Regional Head of Operations is continuing to engage the Regional Permanency Partnership in broader opportunities for transformation and development. This includes representing the region to the Department of Education (DfE), at the National RAA Leaders Group and the West Midlands Regional Adoption & Special Guardianship Leadership Board.
- 6.4 The Partnership has formed a Regional Senior Leadership Team (SLT) which brings together Service Leads responsible for Adoption, Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardianship from each Partner. The purpose of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is to deliver permanency services for families that are locally determined but at the same time have clear links to wider local, regional and national priorities.
- 6.5 Information governance will be integrated in all aspects of the Regional Permanency Arrangement and up to date and comprehensive intelligence and performance data is used regularly with Partners to plan and assess impacts of the Partnerships decisions.
- 6.6 Academic research and analyses are used to optimise performance and outcomes with automated analytical insight where possible. The

Partnership is continuously adapting and improving using research as evidence in line with strategic objectives.

- 6.7 Through funding provided by the Department of Education (DfE), a team of Regional Development Officers is continuing to embed new ways of working across the Partnership with a focus on innovation, effective practice and service improvement.
- 6.8 A network of Regional Business Workstreams have been established. These workstreams are focusing on aligning our infrastructure for Adoption. This includes activity relating to governance, legal infrastructure, finance, resources, workforce, I.C.T, digitalisation, information governance and strategic commissioning.
- 6.9 The Partnership has also developed a network of Regional Practice Workstreams which are focusing on aligning our Adoption practice. This includes activity relating to adopter recruitment, adopter assessment, achieving early permanence, the child's permanency journey, permanency support, adoption decision making, adopter training and development and family finding, together with the alignment of all policies, procedures, guidance, delivery structures, systems, processes and practices to enable the workforce from the four Local Authorities to work together.
- 6.10 The Partnership is testing new ways of working, including the development of an Early Permanency Project, a Post Adoption Support Project and most recently the Partnership have received a DfE Grant to test new ways of working for Fostering through the Mockingbird Practice Model.
- 6.11 The Partnership continues to be on track to deliver a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by the 1st April 2020.

## **7 Governance:**

- 7.1 The Partnership has established a Regional Governance System which is aligned to ensure Partners continue to have a demonstrable focus on achieving permanence for Looked After Children.
- 7.2 The Regional Management Board (the 'Board') is accountable for the Regional Permanency Arrangement and continues to provide strategic leadership. The Board includes representatives of each Partner and takes decision by consensus. Decision making is taken in line with local governance and decision-making arrangements.

- 7.3 The Board is chaired by Shropshire's Director of Children's Services (on behalf of the four respective Local Authorities) and includes Assistant Directors/Strategic Leads responsible for permanency. As Staffordshire County Council will be the Host Authority for the Regional Permanency Arrangement, the Board will not be chaired by a Staffordshire representative.
- 7.4 Members of the Regional Management Board will be appointed by each Partner and will have the appropriate delegations to undertake the following functions (in the constraints of local decision-making arrangements):
- 7.4.1 To approve the Regional Permanency Strategic Plan, Annual Business Plan, Annual Financial Plan and Regional Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS);
  - 7.4.2 To agree how the functions in the Partnership are to be provided and funded. This includes how the Central Permanency Hub and Locality Permanency Hubs are established, composed and funded;
  - 7.4.3 Approve the Commissioning intentions and activity of the Regional Permanency Partnership;
  - 7.4.4 To approve Regional Policies, Procedures, Guidance, and Strategies in respect of the functions of the Regional Permanency Partnership;
  - 7.4.5 To appoint the Regional Head of Together4Children and take decisions relating to staffing and personnel matters in accordance with the individual Council's agreed policies and personnel procedures.
  - 7.4.6 To exercise, within the approved budget, the day to day administrative and operational management of those services, staff and resources within the Together4Children Regional Permanency Partnership (as approved by Cabinet).
- 7.5 The Regional Governance System is underpinned by clear strategic plans in place to manage future demand, develop quality services, deliver value for money and achieve appropriate efficiencies and cost savings.
- 7.6 The Regional Governance System is developing a clear approach to using evidence and analysis to understand demand, regional sufficiency planning and inform future planning and commissioning of services, relating to permanency.



- 7.7 In addition, the Lead Cabinet Members for Children & Young People, along with Directors of Children's Services (DCS) have formed a Strategic Partnership Network. This network continues to provide political, member led leadership to the development of the Partnership and the Regional Permanency Arrangement.

## **8 The Regional Workforce:**

- 8.1 The Partnership is seeking to bring together the workforce of each Adoption Service to form the Together4Children Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). This workforce will continue to be based in the Local Authorities of the Partnership.
- 8.2 The workforce will adopt a common purpose which will be supported by an integrated delivery model. Staff from the four Local Authorities will have shared priorities and will be empowered to take personal responsibility and ownership to work across the regional boundaries. This will continue to be focused on improving outcomes for children.
- 8.3 Staff will continue to be employed within each Local Authority and will not be transferred to another alternative delivery vehicle at this time. As part of the arrangement, the Partnership is however proposing to more closely align the functions and activities of the workforce in each Local Authority to enable more effective regional working.
- 8.4 The Partnership is also proposing, where appropriate, to explore opportunities for secondments to the Central Regional Permanency Hub (hosted by Staffordshire County Council). The secondments will fulfil specific regional roles and functions within the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).
- 8.5 The Partnership is intending to engage with staff (in scope of the Partnership) through appropriate locally agreed processes, including appropriate engagement with Trade Unions in early 2020.
- 8.6 Key decisions in relation to workforce alignment will be taken by the Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.
- 8.7 The workforce will have access to the learning and development opportunities at the right time, including a range of evidence-based programmes and training from a range of Partners to support the formation of the Together4Children Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

<b>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</b>
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Cabinet Paper 20 March 2019 North Midlands Adoption & Permanency Partnership and Appendix 1 - Outline Business Case
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<b>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</b>
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Cllr Ed Potter
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<b>Local Member</b>
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All Members
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<b>Appendices</b>
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