

RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISION

Tuesday, 18 April 2017

Decision No: (CAB 16/17 18649)

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| DECISION-MAKER: | CABINET |
| PORTFOLIO AREA: | CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE |
| SUBJECT: | ADOPTION SOUTH CENTRAL- REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY |
| AUTHOR: | Lissa-Marie Minnis |

THE DECISION

- (i) To agree in principle that Southampton Adoption Service should transfer to the Adoption South Central Regional Adoption Agency (ASC RAA) on 1st April 2018, subject to recommendation (v) below.
- (ii) To agree in principle that ASC RAA will operate via a shared service model with Hampshire County Council operating as the host authority. All four local authorities will have equal executive representation in governance arrangements to be determined and agreed.
- (iii) To agree in principle to make a financial contribution to the operating cost of ASC RAA. Determination of the contribution will be based on two key principles:
 - Authorities' financial contributions to the RAA will be calculated using a 'fair funding model' based on the level of service provided to each, and approved by each authority.
 - Authorities' financial contributions to the RAA in the first two years will be capped and will not exceed the agreed budget spend of 2016/17 (including fee subsidy, Adoption Support Fund or other grants).
- (iv) The set up costs for the ASC RAA will not exceed the development grant allocated by the DfE for this purpose.
- (v) A further report setting out the financial, staffing and governance implications will be brought back to Cabinet for agreement prior to entering into any final arrangements to deliver the service through an RAA.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

1. At the national RAA learning event on 22 September 2016 a message from the Minister of State for Children and Families, Edward Timpson, MP, stressed strongly that the Government remains fully committed to the RAA programme, anticipating that all LAs will be part of an RAA by 2020. As a manifesto commitment this policy retains a high priority. Any local authorities or voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) who do not engage with the programme will miss out

on early development funding and/or may be required to join an RAA not of their choosing at a future date.

2. The Project Board for ASC has identified the benefits of a regional adoption agency as being:
 - Reduction of fragmentation through creation of larger agencies – a consolidated regional service will certainly reduce instances of fragmented provision. ASC will bring together current services which are necessarily variable due to differences between agencies, and in some cases cannot be delivered efficiently due to issues of geography or scale.
 - Improved timeliness and efficiency of matching of children with adopters, especially hard to place – ASC will have instant access to a larger pool of adopters for all children who have an agreed plan for adoption, increasing speed and appropriateness of placement.
 - Increased recruitment of potential adopters and development of specialised training to increase numbers able to take hard to place children – pooling budgets for recruitment, assessment and training of adopters will enable provision of more targeted and specialist services. The competitive element of adopter recruitment between the four authorities will be removed, allowing more coherent and targeted campaigns. Efficient and timely training and assessment of adopters will be more viable across the larger area.

Development of higher quality, more flexible, responsive and efficient adoption support services – uptake of adoption support services under ASC should be proportionately greater, allowing more specialist training and support events to be run across the region, increasing the level of choice for all adoptive families. Reduce direct costs through efficiencies and economies of scale and indirect costs by reducing numbers of children who do not achieve adoption – efficiencies will follow from pooling of some management and back office costs. Furthermore the improved timeliness and rate of adoptions and reduced numbers of disrupted placements will provide significant savings to other services within each authority.

DETAILS OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

1. The four local authorities involved will effectively commission the delivery of adoption and adoption related services from ASC. Consideration has therefore been given to different strategic delivery options for ASC. The options considered were:
 - A single LA hosting on behalf of the other LAs
 - Joint Venture between Local Authorities (a separate legal entity along the lines of a Local Authority Trading Company)
 - Joint Venture between the Local Authorities and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies (a separate legal entity, effectively the creation of a new 'regional VAA').
2. An early options appraisal of these three options was undertaken in February 2016, at the prompting of the DfE. The Project and Governance Boards agreed that this process had been entered into prematurely, without sufficient clarity around the intentions for the RAA programme nationally nor sufficient reflection on local needs and context. Nonetheless this process proved useful as a starting point for review of the options.
3. Further detailed discussions followed during 2016. The Governance Board

concluded that the preferred option for ASC was for services to be delivered through a Partnership model, with Hampshire County Council acting as host authority. The decision to proceed with the option of a Local Authority Hosted Service is due to the fact structural change to achieve single point of accountability should be as simple and painless as possible for the majority of staff within the region while still providing assurance that the aims of the ASC can be met. The benefits are that it builds on existing infrastructure, governance, expertise and capacity, as well as being the most cost effective model.

4. ASC will not be established as an independent entity, but will have its own clear identity, both internally (delivering a comprehensive and consistent level of service across the region through a fully regionalised staff structure) and externally (having a strong brand and public facing image distinct from each of the four authorities).
5. The key rationale for selecting this option is that it provides the flexibility and opportunity for innovation, while minimising the costs and complexity inherent in establishing a separate entity. It has also been selected on the understanding that it can be built on and improved over time – establishment of a separate entity (in the form of a local authority trading company or a community interest company) is not the currently preferred model, it may be that in future this is an appropriate direction of travel for ASC. This will be a likely option if ASC establishes itself as an effective and long term provider of adoption services for the region and/or if additional services are brought within scope of ASC (for example provision of SGO services, some fostering provision or other).

OTHER RELEVANT MATTERS CONCERNING THE DECISION

None.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.

CONFIRMED AS A TRUE RECORD

We certify that the decision this document records was made in accordance with the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2000 and is a true and accurate record of that decision.

Date: 18 April 2017

Decision Maker:
The Cabinet

Proper Officer:
Judy Cordell

SCRUTINY

Note: This decision will come in to force at the expiry of 5 working days from the date of publication subject to any review under the Council's Scrutiny "Call-In" provisions.

Call-In Period expires on

Date of Call-in *(if applicable) (this suspends implementation)*

Call-in Procedure completed *(if applicable)*

Call-in heard by *(if applicable)*

Results of Call-in *(if applicable)*