



## HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE & WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 11TH FEBRUARY 2014

**SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTH EAST WALES ADOPTION SERVICE (SEWAS)**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES**

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the development of the regional South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) hosted by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council on behalf of Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouthshire and Torfaen Local Authorities.

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 In September 2013, Members received a report on the development of a National Adoption Service, which is a key policy strand for the Welsh Government and is referenced within the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Bill.
- 2.4 Working closely with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), ADSS Cymru produced a functional model for delivery of Adoption Services across Wales, which supported the establishment of a National Adoption Service underpinned by the regional delivery of services. This model was endorsed by Welsh Government in a Written Statement by the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2013.
- 2.5 The Directors of Social Services across South East Wales established a Regional Development Group involving the Heads of Service, to plan the implementation and resourcing of a new regional service. This report serves to update Members on the developments so far.

### 3. THE REPORT

- 3.1 As a reminder for Members, 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.

3.2 The Regional Adoption Collaboratives i.e. SEWAS, will be responsible for the delivery of the following functions:

- 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.

3.3 Work is now underway to ensure there is clarity regarding roles and responsibilities of the new regional service and the interface with those aspects of the service that will remain with the Local Authorities including:

- Assessment and 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.

3.4 As Members will be aware, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Monmouthshire already manage a joint Adoption Service with both Newport and Caerphilly providing their own services through dedicated teams. The establishment of the South East Wales Adoption Service will effectively join the three existing Adoption Services covering the five Local Authorities into one new service managed by Blaenau Gwent. Given the size of the region and the volume of work it is intended to operate two Adoption Panels. Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Monmouthshire already have a joint Panel so a new Panel will be established to support Caerphilly and Newport.

3.5 The new service will comprise of the following staffing:

- 0.5 Service Manager
- 2 Team Managers
- 2 Assistant Team Managers
- 16.5 Social Workers
- 1 Scale 6 Administrator
- 2 Scale 4 Administrators
- 2 Scale 3 Administrators

3.6 The Regional Development Group established a number of task groups and have held consultation events with existing staff to assist with the development of the new model of service delivery. The following key milestones have been achieved:

- Financial resourcing for the new service – this is detailed in section 7 below.
- Recruitment to the post of Service Manager is underway – ring fenced to staff affected.
- Accommodation for the new service has been secured at Mamhilad.
- Work has commenced on establishing a joint Adoption Panel to serve the Caerphilly and Newport areas.
- Development of a detailed project plan will be the responsibility of the Service Manager when appointed.

3.7 The intention from Welsh Government was for all the regional services to be operational from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014. Although the Service Manager will be appointed shortly, the confirmation of posts and transfers of staff will take longer and is unlikely to be completed by 1<sup>st</sup> April. This is reflective of the situation across Wales.

#### **4. LINKS TO STRATEGY**

4.1 Social Services and Well Being [Wales] Bill

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

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 support any changes that are deemed necessary.

#### **6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required because the issues covered are for information purposes only, therefore the Council's full EIA process does not need to be applied.

#### **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 The Gwent Directors of Social Services have agreed the resource levels for the new service and have ensured that it can be delivered within existing budgets. The only additional cost incurred by all five Local Authorities has been the need to find accommodation for the new service. This equates to an additional cost of £15,156 for each Local Authority.

7.2 The total cost of the new service is £1,372,851. Based on an agreed funding formula Caerphilly's contribution will be £324,969. As stated above this includes the additional accommodation costs and has been budgeted for in 2014/15.

#### **8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 Staff in Caerphilly's Adoption Service, Caerphilly's HR Department and Trade Unions have all been involved in the first phases of the consultation process for the new service. These processes will now gain momentum as the new service is implemented. Decisions regarding secondment of staff or TUPE transfer of staff will form part of the formal consultation process with all staff affected.

## **9. CONSULTATIONS**

9.1 The views of those consulted have been incorporated into the report.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 That Members note the contents of this report and the progress made to date on implementing the new South East Wales Adoption Service.

## **11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

11.1 That members are fully appraised of the Regional Adoption Service developments.

## **12. STATUTORY POWER**

12.1 To ensure that the Council's statutory functions in relation to providing an Adoption Service are fully met, in accordance with legislation and guidance.

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