

## HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 10TH SEPTEMBER 2013

**SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE FOR WALES**

**REPORT BY: ACTING CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to appraise Members of the plan to establish a National Adoption Service for Wales, supported by Regional Adoption Collaboratives and outline the development of the South East Wales Regional Collaborative.

### **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 Members 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.
- 2.4 Working closely with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), ADSS Cymru produced a functional model for delivery of Adoption Services across Wales. A copy of this report is attached at Appendix A. 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.
- 2.5 Subsequently, in a Written Statement on 25<sup>th</sup> 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 B.

### **3. THE REPORT**

#### Relevant Issues and Options

- 3.1 The proposals outlined in detail in Appendix A, 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.

3.2 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.

3.2.1 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.

The functional model proposes 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.

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.

These collaboratives are currently at different stages of development.

### 3.2.2 **The South East Wales Regional Collaborative**

A South East Wales Regional Development Group has been established and Heads of Children's Services and Service Managers from Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouth Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent are developing a new model of service delivery.

At present Caerphilly and Newport have dedicated Adoption Teams, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Monmouth have combined to create a Tri-partite Adoption Service.

The proposal is to bring the three Adoption Services together to create the South East Wales Regional Collaborative.

The Regional Development Group has established a number of task groups, which are supporting the development of the collaborative, consultation events with existing staff have been held to assist with the creation of a new model of service delivery.

Work is ongoing to develop detailed proposals for the structure of Regional Collaborative model and the cost of various options. When this is completed a further report will be provide to members for approval.

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

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

- 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.

### 3.2.3 **National Resource Implications**

A Task and Finish Group has been 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 is to produce a robust change programme for implementing the functional model.

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.

The following key milestones were agreed.

- Membership and brief of the Task and Finish Group
- Identification of the five Lead Authorities
- Development of a common Implementation Plan format
- Support Lead Authorities in their role
- Outline business components for the infrastructure of the National Service
- Regional Implementation Plans in place

### 3.2.4 Legal Implications

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.

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

4.1 Social Services and Well Being [Wales] Bill.

#### **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 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.

#### **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The Gwent Directors of Social Services are to meet to consider the implications of delivering a regional service with no additional financial resources being provided by Welsh Government to develop Regional Collaboratives.

6.2 A further paper will be brought to HSCWB Scrutiny when the financial modelling is completed.

#### **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 Staff in Caerphilly's Adoption Service, Caerphilly's HR Department and Unison have all been involved in the first phases of the consultation process for the new model.

#### **8. CONSULTATIONS**

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

#### **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 That Members note the contents of this report and 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.

9.2 That Members note the progress of the development of the South East Wales Regional Adoption Collaborative.

#### **10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 That members are fully apprised of the National and Regional Adoption Service Developments.

#### **11. STATUTORY POWER**

11.1 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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Councillor Robin Woodyatt, Cabinet Member for Social Services

#### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1 Proposals for Achieving a National Adoption Service in Wales and Development of the Functional Model – ADSS Cymru, April 2013.  
Appendix 2 Written Statement by the Deputy Minister – 25<sup>th</sup> April 2013.