

HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 9TH SEPTEMBER 2014

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON ADOPTION SERVICES

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on developments both locally and nationally relating to Adoption Services and follows on from the previous reports presented to Scrutiny in September 2013 and February 2014.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Adoption plays a critical role 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 are fully aware that the development of a National Adoption Service underpinned by regional service delivery is a key policy strand for the Welsh Government and is referenced within the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act.
- 2.4 Members will also be aware that the South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) covering the five Gwent Local Authorities of Blaenau-Gwent, Monmouthshire, Newport, Torfaen and Caerphilly was established and became fully operational on 1st April 2014.

3. THE REPORT

3.1 National Adoption Service

- 3.2 As a reminder for Members, the National Adoption Service is 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.

3.3 Welsh Government invited Local Authorities to express interest in hosting the National Service and in June 2014 announced that they were awarding the contract to Cardiff City Council. For information Caerphilly considered the invitation but on balance decided not to apply to be considered.

3.4 The recruitment of a National Head of Service is currently underway and the appointment is likely to be confirmed by the end of September.

3.5 A key component of the National Service is the establishment of a National Adoption Register and Welsh Government have awarded the contract for this to the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) and the Register became operational in June 2014.

3.6 Regional Adoption Service – SEWAS

3.7 SEWAS is 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.

3.8 Work has been completed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the new regional service and the interface with those aspects of the service that 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.

3.9 The establishment of SEWAS effectively brought together three existing Adoption Services into one new service managed by Blaenau Gwent. Given the size of the region and the volume of work it has been agreed that two Adoption Panels will operate. Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Monmouthshire already have a joint Panel so a new Panel has been established to support Caerphilly and Newport.

3.10 The new service is establishing itself well and continues to be a forerunner across Wales in terms of implementation and operational delivery. Operational and Strategic Boards are in place to ensure effective implementation and resolution of any issues as they arise. It is important to note that Welsh Government have acknowledged the success of our regional collaborative.

4. LINKS TO STRATEGY

4.1 Social Services and Well Being [Wales] Act

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 ongoing in light of implementation of the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act.

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 EIA process does not need to be applied.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Gwent Directors of Social Services agreed the resource levels for the new service and ensured that it can be delivered within existing budgets. The only additional cost incurred by all five Local Authorities was the need to fund accommodation for the service.
- 7.2 The total cost of the service is £1,372,851. Based on an agreed funding formula Caerphilly's contribution is £324,969. As stated above this includes the additional accommodation costs.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Staff from Caerphilly's Adoption Service have been successfully transferred to Blaenau Gwent under TUPE transfer arrangements. There are no outstanding personnel or HR issues.

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 in implementing both the National and Regional Adoption Services.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 To ensure Members are fully appraised of the 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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