

CABINET	AGENDA ITEM No. 6
4 February 2019	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Wendi Ogle-Welbourn - Executive Director: People and Communities	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Sam Smith- Cabinet Member for Children's Service	
Contact Officer(s):	Helene Carr - Head of Children's Commissioning	Tel. 07904 909039

Regional Adoption Agency Services

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Executive Director: People and Communities	Deadline date: Cabinet - 04 February 2019
<p>It is recommended that Cabinet delegate authority to the Executive Director of People and Communities to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vary the existing contract with The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT) relating to adoption services; via a Notice of Change (NOC) 2. Authorise the decision for Cambridgeshire County Council to appoint a Voluntary Adoption Agency on behalf of the Council; 3. Enter into a Partnership Agreement with Cambridgeshire County Council, and authorise any subsequent variations required; 4. Authorise the Director of Governance or authorised legal officers to enter into any other legal documentation necessary to document the contractual, and other legal arrangements in relation to Regional Adoption Agency services. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is submitted to Cabinet at the request of the Executive Director for People and Communities.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to request Cabinet authorise the delegation of duties to the Executive Director for People and Communities as listed above.

The report is being presented following a report to cabinet on 23 July 2018 - Permanency Service and Arrangements for Regional Adoption, which included a brief overview of the proposals to develop a Regional Adoption Agency in line with expectations of the Department for Education affecting all top tier authorities in England. A commissioning and procurement exercise has been jointly undertaken between the two authorities and a competitive tendering process is underway.

- 2.2 This report is for Cabinet to consider under its Terms of Reference No. 3.2.1 'To take collective responsibility for the delivery of all strategic Executive functions within the

Council's Major Policy and Budget Framework and lead the Council's overall improvement programmes to deliver excellent services.'

3. **TIMESCALES**

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. **BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1 A contract to deliver a range of services including fostering, adoption and various functions associated with the assessment and support of permanent carers providing care to children under Special Guardianship Orders was awarded to TACT, in 2017. The new service was launched on 1 April 2017, with a number of members of staff transferring to TACT under TUPE arrangements.
- 4.2 In 2015, the Government announced its intention to establish new Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) across the country by 2020. The rationale for introducing RAAs is based around the belief that existing structures have in-built inefficiencies linked to their scale of operation, and that there are barriers around adoption created by individual local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies working separately to deliver the same core aspects of adoption provision.
- 4.3 Establishing RAAs is expected to deliver a system with a larger footprint, improving adoption recruitment, matching and support and avoiding duplication. More formalised collaborative working will help drive innovation, sharing of best practices and staff development. It is also anticipated that the new structure will give a stronger voice to children and adopters.
- 4.4 The government has said that Regional Adoption Agencies must be fully operational by 2020 at the latest. Every top tier Local Authority must be able to demonstrate significant progress by early 2019.
- 4.5 The Department for Education confirmed in the summer of 2018 that a Regional Adoption Agency consisting of Peterborough and Cambridgeshire passed the necessary tests. A small amount of funding has been allocated to support some implementation costs including legal costs.
- 4.6 In both authorities, adoption services are currently provided by Voluntary Adoption Agencies – TACT in Peterborough and Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption in Cambridgeshire. Both adoption services are recognised as 'good' by Ofsted, our vision is to build on the strengths of each authority, share best practice and develop an outstanding adoption service across the region and beyond
- 4.7 Given this background, and the commitment of both authorities to developing innovative approaches with partners to deliver services where this makes sense because it delivers better outcomes for children, better value for money, or both, we have agreed in principle with the Department for Education that we will develop a Regional Adoption Agency hosted by a Voluntary Adoption Agency.
- 4.8 In order to progress the RAA, a notice of change will need to be agreed with TACT to remove the adoption services function from the existing contract. Irrespective of the award of contract to the successful bidder, this is a new commissioned provision under specific contractual terms and conditions covering adoption functions across the two

local authorities.

- 4.9 A Partnership Agreement will be formalised and agreed between the parties, prior to the award of contract. The purpose of this agreement is to set out the local authorities obligations and liabilities in relation to the regional adoption services.
- 4.10 Peterborough and Cambridgeshire have worked closely to develop a service specification and associated contract documents, with Cambridgeshire acting as the lead commissioner for the purposes of this particular contract. Oversight and scrutiny of this activity has been through the RAA Governance Steering Group chaired by the Assistant Director - Commissioning. Cambridgeshire County Council advertised the services in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). The procurement process is being undertaken in accordance with the light touch regime of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The tender documents have been issued to prospective bidders and the tender bids are due to be submitted in December 2018.
- 4.11 The award of the RAA contract by CCC to the successful bidder is likely to be in April 2019, with a mobilisation period factored in prior to contract commencement on 1 August 2019.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 There is a wealth of skill, knowledge and experience regarding adoption across both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire, not least amongst those who have adopted, have been adopted and those working within the sector. Therefore in September 2018 both authorities created the opportunity for people to come together and contribute to the development of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Regional Adoption Agency through informal consultation, sharing ideas and workshops. The outcome of these sessions helped to inform the service specification and design of the regional adoption agency.
- 5.2 In addition, the project team engaged Adoption UK to ensure the voice of adopters was heard at every stage of our commissioning activity. Adoption UK have assisted by facilitating engagement with a selected group of adopters to provide a suite of evaluation questions based on the experiences of adoptive families. The same adopters are due to evaluate and score responses from the perspective of 'what works for adoptive families'. This work will help to inform the decision about what organisation will deliver the RAA.
- 5.3 Adoption UK are a national charity independent from both local authority and with no affiliation with any particular voluntary adoption agency.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 6.1 The authorisation of the requests to Cabinet will;
1. Ensure the appropriate governance framework is in place via the Partnership Agreement to support the management of the RAA contract.
 2. Enable the existing contract for the provision of the Permanency Service to be varied to reflect the extraction of the adoption functions, as listed within the existing contract.
 3. Ensure that the successful Voluntary Adoption Agency will be in a position to deliver a RAA within timeline to improve the ability of each authority to recruit, assess and approve adopters for those children identified as having adoption as their permanency plan. This would negate the reliance on inter agency arranged adoptions [in particular within CCC].
 4. Create efficiencies by bringing two services together in terms of management

costs and overheads.

5. Deliver improved progress in relation to the Adoption Scorecard indicators, specifically in relation to a reduction in delay between a child's plan for adoption, and an adoption order being made.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

7.1 The development of Regional Adoption Agencies is a Government requirement; the agreement to deliver this based on a partnership between Peterborough and Cambridgeshire offers a model that is in line with current direction of travel for both authorities, as will be underpinned by a formal Partnership Agreement. Bringing adoption services together in this way also offers the opportunity for benefits in the recruitment of adopters and matching of children.

7.2 In order to secure this objective, both authorities have worked collaboratively to deliver a RAA within dedicated timescales. Appropriate governance arrangements have been in place throughout the commissioning activity both via the RAA Governance Board, and Joint Commissioning Board.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 The government have said that RAAs will need to be fully operational by 2020 at the latest, and every Local Authority will need to demonstrate significant progress by early 2019. There are few alternative options available to the authority given the DfE mandate that Regional Adoption Agencies will be in place across England by 2020. Peterborough and Cambridgeshire are in the third wave of authorities to develop a Regional Adoption Agency service model.

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

9.1 The DfE has awarded a grant of £125k to aid in the development of the RAA and its associated legal and support costs. This grant runs from July 2018 through to July 2019.

The amount of the contract that has been allocated to the RAA from Peterborough is £582,567 which will be extracted from the TACT budget for each year of the contract.

Legal Implications

9.2 The legal implications are set out within the report.

Equalities Implications

9.3 There are no equalities implications, either positive or negative.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

10.1 None.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 None.