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| CABINET | AGENDA ITEM No. 4 |
| 30 NOVEMBER 2020 | PUBLIC REPORT |

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| Report of: | Wendi Ogle-Welbourn: Corporate Director, People and Communities | |
| Cabinet Member(s) responsible: | Lynne Ayres, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education, Skills and the University | |
| Contact Officer(s): | Lou Williams: Service Director, Children & Safeguarding | Tel. 01733 864139 |

REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY: CONFIRMATION OF ARRANGEMENTS

| RECOMMENDATIONS | |
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| FROM: Corporate Director, People and Communities | Deadline date: N/A |
| <p>It is recommended that Cabinet authorises the Council to enter into a Partnership Agreement with Cambridgeshire County Council for the establishment of a regional adoption agency for the initial period of 1 December 2020 until 30 November 2030 and subject to a further extended period as agreed between the authorities.</p> | |

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is submitted to Cabinet following a referral from the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education, Skills and the University.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to confirm the arrangements for the Regional Adoption Agency, which includes adoption and post adoption services, and which is being established between Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council.
- 2.2 All local authorities are required to establish Regional Adoption Agencies by 31 March 2021. Cabinet previously agreed in principle to the establishment of regional adoption arrangements between Peterborough and Cambridgeshire on 23rd July 2018.
- 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

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| 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 The government requires all local authorities to have established regional adoption arrangements by March 31 2021.

- 4.2 Cabinet previously agreed in principle to the establishment of a Regional Adoption Agency between Peterborough and Cambridgeshire in July 2018. At this time, the plan was for this agency to be operated by a Voluntary Adoption Agency following a procurement exercise.
- 4.3 The outcome of the procurement exercise was that no voluntary agencies successfully met the requirements. The two local authorities subsequently requested that the Department for Education agree that the two authorities continued to develop regional adoption arrangements, but with these now being hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council.
- 4.4 The Department for Education agreed to this request, which is very good news for adoption services for children in the two authorities. A partnership agreement between the two authorities has been developed that covers all aspects of the operation of the Regional Adoption Agency.
- 4.5 Under the arrangements, a small number of staff [around 10FTE] working within the current Peterborough Adoption Service will transfer to Cambridgeshire County Council under TUPE arrangements.
- 4.6 The development of this shared approach to adoption between the two councils meets the requirement of Government and fits very positively with the development of shared services within children's services more broadly.
- 4.7 Limiting regional adoption arrangements to Peterborough and Cambridgeshire means that the resulting adoption service remains very closely aligned to the rest of children's services in the two authorities. This is important, since adoption services need to be able to recruit adopters able to meet the needs of the profile of children coming into care. Early discussions between those parts of the service that are responsible for safeguarding children and adoption services result in less delay in matching children in need of adoption with suitable adoptive families.
- 4.8 The existing adoption services in the two authorities are both rated as 'Good' and bringing them together into a single service offers real opportunities to build on the strengths of each.
- 4.9 Joining the adoption services also means that we can build resilience across the two, and be in a better position to, for example, respond to requests for post adoption support from those who have been affected by adoption – most often adoptive parents who are experiencing some difficulties and are seeking support in meeting the needs of their children.
- 4.10 Both authorities will review the arrangements in the 6 months prior to March 31st 2022, and will agree on the long term arrangements for the services.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Staff affected by these proposals have been fully consulted.
- 5.2 An update relating to the plan for a Regional Adoption Agency to be hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council was included in the Children and Safeguarding Service Director Report to Children and Education Scrutiny in March 2020.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 6.1 Confirming the earlier agreement in principle to the development of the Regional Adoption Agency will benefit children in need of adoption, and enable us to provide better post adoption support. The Regional Adoption Agency will help to raise the profile of adoption locally, and children awaiting adoption in both authorities will benefit from a larger pool of adopters, from which suitable adopters can be identified to meet individual needs.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

7.1 Government guidance is for all local authorities to establish regional adoption arrangements by March 31 2021. The Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Regional Adoption Agency satisfies these requirements and will deliver improved outcomes for children in need of adoption and others in need of post adoption support.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 As noted above, the original intention was to seek a Voluntary Adoption Agency to operate the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Regional Adoption Agency on behalf of the two authorities. This could not progress as there were no suitable applications. The status quo is not an option since the Government required all authorities to develop regional adoption arrangements.

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

9.1 The development of the Regional Adoption Agency is part of the broader sharing of services overseen through the shared services board. Taken together, the development of shared services including the Regional Adoption Agency delivers a small saving to Peterborough City Council.

Legal Implications

9.2 The Council is entering into the Partnership Agreement pursuant to its powers set out in;

- Section 1 Localism Act 2011;
- Section 101 (1)(b) Local Government Act 1972;
- Regulation 5 of the Local Authorities (Arrangements for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations SI 2012/1019;
- Section 111 Local Government Act 1972;
- Section 1 Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 (power to enter into contracts);
- The Education and Adoption Act 2016;
- Adoption and Children Act 2002;
- Children and Adoption Act 2006;
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005;
- Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005;
- Children Act 1989;
- Local Authority Social Services Act 1970;
- Special Guardianship Regulations 2005

Equalities Implications

9.3 There are no equalities implications arising from these proposals.

Carbon Impact Assessment

9.4 Neutral impact – while there may have been some benefit as a result of reduced patterns of visiting to children and families in the lockdown period, this is likely to be temporary and activities will revert to or close to historic levels as more usual patterns of working return.

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

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