

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE (FORMAL)	AGENDA ITEM No. 8
21 JULY 2021	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Wendi Ogle-Welbourn, Executive Director People and Communities	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Lynne Ayres Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education, Skills and the University	
Contact Officer(s):	Joanne Banks Head of Regional Adoption Agency	Tel. 01223 699216

REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Ricky Cooper Assistant Director Fostering, Regional Adoption and Specialist Young People’s Services	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that Corporate Parenting Committee:</p> <p>1. Corporate Parenting Committee are asked to note the detail of the report and raise any questions with Lead Officers</p>	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report was requested by the Corporate Parenting Committee

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Committee Members with an update on the new arrangements for delivering adoption for Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Councils.

3. TIMESCALES

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

4.1 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Regional Adoption Agency

On the 1 December 2020 the Regional Adoption Agency for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough went live with Cambridgeshire being the host. Even though we may only be 6 months in there have been a lot of positive achievements that can be built on.

4.2 The aims of the service have continued to be:

- Have a key role in the early permanency planning agenda within both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire and be instrumental in the care planning for children who have a plan for adoption
- Recruit adopters who can meet the needs of the children with adoption plans (specifically older children, sibling groups and children with additional vulnerabilities)
- Offer high quality support to adopters, birth parents and carers and all parties involved with the children
- Ensure a culture of continuous challenge, innovation and improvement
- Provide an accessible service to all parties affected by adoption and special guardianship (adopters, adoptees, birth families, foster carers, guardians and children in their care)
- Develop a coherent and robust 'Local Offer' that provides the right support, at the right time to Adopters and Special Guardians

4.3 The current structure for the Regional Adoption Agency has continued in line with the proposals in the consultation where there are four distinct teams dedicated to delivering key focussed activity.

4.4 **Recruitment and Assessment:**

4.5 This service area recruits, assesses and supports prospective adopters to meet the needs of children waiting in each authority in line with their developed recruitment and marketing plan. In addition, the service undertakes annual reviews as required, assesses and supports parents or partners and family relatives who wish to adopt a child on a non-agency basis and foster carers who are seeking to adopt a child in their care. The team have 3 Senior Practitioners and 6 Social Workers.

4.6 Having seen the success of the Recruitment Office role in Fostering the team have appointed successfully to a post in the Regional Adoption Agency. Lottie Ettling took up the post in April 2021 and takes a lead on the new enquiries whilst working with Tony Darnell, Communications Manager Fostering & Adoption, to develop promotional and marketing material to enable a further increase in those coming forward to adopt, in particular for the harder to place children.

4.7 The team have seen a consistent increase in enquires (155 enquires in 6 months) and applications to adopt (24 in 6 months) leading to a high number of adopters in assessment (49 as of the 31st May 2021). This gives the Council the opportunity to increase the number of children for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to be placed with adopters within the Regional Adoption Agency. The key moving forward is to understand the profile of the children needing adoptive parents so the team can adapt the profile of the adopters being assessed. This may need to be explained further

4.8 **Family Finding:**

This part of the service continues to take the lead responsibility for all aspects of the linking and matching of children with adopters. The service also provides support and advice to the child's Social Worker about the adoption process, coordinates other family finding activities and crucially increases the opportunities for children to be adopted who are older, have additional vulnerabilities or who are within sibling groups. Tracking children with a potential or actual adoption plan and reporting on adoption timescales against national and local indicators also takes place within this part of the service. The team is tracking 111 children with 59 children having an active family finding plan for adoption. Over the 6 months they have supported the presentation of 24 children to be presented at Adoption and Permanence Panel who have been subsequently successfully matched with their adoptive parents.

4.9 **Adoption and Special Guardianship Support:**

This service area undertakes assessments of Adopter and Special Guardian support needs or commissions these if required, undertaking applications to the Adoption Support Fund for children. The team also takes lead responsibility for reviewing financial allowances provided to families to inform what future allowances should be provided. The core offer also includes: social events for children and young people, social/training events for adoptive parents, advice and signposting for adoptive families, independent support and advice to birth relatives, counselling

and information to adopted adults post 18 years and independent support to birth parents including a letter box exchange service.

4.10 **Panel and Quality Assurance:**

This service area administers and supports Adoption Panels which recommend the approval of prospective adopters, matches between children and adopters and provides professional advice on best practice and regulations to the Agency Decision Makers within both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. The Agency Advisor plays a key role in maintaining a high standard of practice and performance through the quality assurance of all services areas within the Regional Adoption Agency. The panel have remained a very active part of the Regional Adoption Agency having had 14 panels sit in the first 6 months in which they have heard 13 Adopter Approval Applications and 17 applications to match children with their adoptive parents. There have been positive steps towards joining Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Adoption Panels together. The Regional Adoption Agency currently has 3 Panel Chairs and 1 vice chair with a broad range of panel members who have supported the continued success in approving adopters and adoptive matches. There is an awareness of the need to recruit new members to panel and particular focus on social workers. We are pleased that we have recruited one additional panel member who is planning to start to sit on panel in August 2021. Following the retirement of the Agency Advisor, Andy Cussell, attempts were made to recruit a permanent Agency Advisor. Unfortunately, we have been unsuccessful. However the Acting Head of the Regional Adoption Agency is temporarily fulfilling this role whilst continued attempts are made to secure a permanent person into post.

4.11 **Management Team**

The team has now successfully recruited to all management posts within the Regional Adoption Agency with Ricky Cooper taking the Assistant Director post to develop the strategic vision. The team has appointed an interim to the Head of the Regional Adoption on an acting up basis with Joanne Banks having recently moved into post on the 10th June 2021. The team has been successful in appointing a permanent Team Manager to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Team in which Kelly Johnson took up this post on the 10th June 2021. More recently the team has also been able to appoint the Team Managers for the Recruitment and Assessment Team as well as the Family Finding Team on an acting up basis. Christine Clipston is the Team Manager for the Recruitment and Assessment Team and Kat Heath is the Team Manager for the Family Finding Team both of whom will take up these posts on the 5th July 2021. I would like to welcome all of the new Team Managers who will support the evolution and delivery of the Regional Adoption Agency.

4.12 There has already been some initial evaluation of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approaches to adoption, both of which have 'Good' services and they will join together practice and processes to work towards achieving an outstanding service. The new management team will come together to develop a clear strategic vision and plan for the Regional Adoption Agency for the coming 6 months.

5. CONSULTATION

5.1 Consultations with the Regional Adoption Agency for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough regarding harmonisation of terms and conditions was launched on 23rd March 2021 and concluded on the 29th April 2021.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

6.1 It is anticipated that new models of service delivery across adoption will have a positive impact on the recruitment and assessment of, and support to, adopters which will improve the lived experience of children in adoptive placements.

We are already seeing an increase in the number of enquires for those interested in adopting as well as those starting the journey to become adoptive parents.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

7.1 There are no recommendations made within this report

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 None

9. IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Financial Implications

9.2 No financial implications.

9.3 Legal Implications

9.4 No – the report is for information.

9.5 Equalities Implications

9.6 Carbon Impact Assessment

There is a neutral impact indicated in this report

9.7 Children in care

This reports relates to children who are placed for adoption, and then adopted.

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