

**ADOPTION WEST: PROPOSALS AND CONSULTATION
TO DEVELOP A REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY (RAA)**

Cabinet Date	20 th July 2016
Children & Young People and Strategic Commissioning	Cllr Paul McLain
Key Decision	Yes
Background Documents	Regionalising Adoption (June 2015) DfE Adoption: A vision for change (March 2016) DfE The Education and Adoption Act 2016 Adoption and Children Act 2002
Location/Contact for inspection of Background Documents	https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/437128/Regionalising_adoption.pdf https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/512826/Adoption_Policy_Paper_30_March_2016.pdf http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/6/contents/enacted http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/38/contents
Main Consultees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoptees • Adopters • Birth families • Local Authority, Voluntary Adoption Agency and Adoption Support Agency Staff • Health service commissioners and providers • Adoption panel members • Education services
Planned Dates	10 week consultation period Monday 25 th July to Monday 3 rd October 2016
Divisional Councillor	All
Officer	Helen Price Tel. no,8484 Email address helen.price@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Purpose of Report	To endorse outline proposals for Gloucestershire County Council with 5 other councils (Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire) to develop the Adoption West Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) and approve public engagement and consultation on these outline proposals.
Recommendations	<p>Cabinet to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Agree to support proposals for Gloucestershire County Council to join with Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and Wiltshire councils to develop Adoption West Regional Adoption Agency, and 2) Approve public engagement and consultation on the proposals outlined in this report
Reasons for recommendations	<p>Gloucestershire is required by recent government policy to be part of a regional adoption agency by 2020. To this end Gloucestershire has been working with 5 other councils (Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire) and a number of voluntary adoption agencies to create a regional arrangement. The group has now proposed an organisational arrangement to enable the RAA to be created and the proposed wider consultation offers the best opportunity for Gloucestershire to be fully involved in the proposed RAA to enable the County Council to comply with government requirements by 2020.</p>
Resource Implications	None currently, DFE are fully funding development costs. Overall adoption service budget is £908k.

National Background

The development of Regional Adoption Agency proposals is part of the government's national regionalising adoption agenda as set out in 'Regionalising Adoption' (July 2015), and further developed in 'Adoption; A Vision for Change' (March 2016). Proposals are also informed by the Education and Adoption Act 2016. Adoption is seen by the government, as the best way to offer children who are unable to live with their birth parents, lasting family relationships that will offer them secure futures.

'Regionalising Adoption' requires councils to establish Regional Adoption Agencies by the end of the Parliament in 2020 and invited expressions of interest from local partnerships. The paper included an emphasis on getting adoption/permanence right for harder to place children whilst ensuring adoption support is available and accessible to adoptive families.

The government expects to see voluntary adoption agencies actively included in regional arrangements, they are 'particularly keen to consider models that have an element of cross-sector collaboration'. Although not explicit, there is an expectation that the final regional agency organisational form will go beyond a traditional council run service.

Local response – Adoption South West

The Adoption West project developed from a steering group that formed in July 2013 to consider the possibility of more collaborative working to improve adoption delivery across a number of local authorities in the South West. Initial work was undertaken by Gloucestershire and Wiltshire before engaging the Institute of Public Care (IPC) to complete more detailed work. During 2014, following extensive staff and user engagement, plans were developed and it was agreed that work should be undertaken to move towards a collaborative model of providing adoption services. Participating councils sought to offer more scope to place children across the region and to offer a more consistent and flexible service to adopters.

As a consequence of the government policy changes in 2015/16 six local authorities from the original group (Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, Gloucestershire, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire) and six Voluntary Adoption Agencies/ Adoption Support Agencies revised these plans and began to plan for a more formal alternative delivery arrangement to meet government expectations. South Gloucestershire Council agreed to lead this work on behalf of the other councils.

The Adoption West plans were submitted to DfE in September 2015. Funding was agreed for resources to support the project including independent specialist legal, financial and technical advice. DfE continue to provide independent support and challenge to all plans and proposals.

The current governance structure for Adoption West developments is attached at Appendix 1. Gloucestershire is represented at all levels and on all groups. Directors and Lead Cabinet Members have been part of these discussions.

Proposed Organisational arrangements for Adoption West

A range of types of organisational arrangements were initially considered for Adoption West. Through a process of options appraisal, soft market testing and specialist advice the following three options were taken forward for more detailed analysis:

1. Hosted by a single LA on behalf of a number of LAs
2. Joint venture between LAs – public sector owned entity
3. Creation of a new VAA – public and third sector ownership

The options appraisal exercise highlighted the potential benefits and recommended option 2, a public sector entity, jointly owned by the six councils. The following key strengths were identified:

- The proposed structure creates a new entity which offers a neutral platform which affords all participating authorities equal status within the arrangements and avoids the perception of control which the required role of a "lead authority" can create.
- The proposed structure allows governance arrangements to be straightforward with all councils represented on the Board of Directors (the VAA / ASAs would have limited voting rights).
- The procurement position is more favourable as this type of organisation (that is wholly owned by the participating councils) will be exempt from competitive tender processes. Given the embryonic market in this area, the significant government focus on adoption and the likelihood of rapid developments and changes in this area of policy, this will be important in the medium term.
- Innovation and growth are better facilitated by this model. This may range from experimenting with new practice methodologies and trialling alternative evidence based practice models and programmes, through to embracing new technology and improving working practices such as team and service user communications.
- The flexibility offers the opportunity to build on good practice and services that are already provided to adopted children and adopters in some councils. It allows for this to become standard across the region and significantly more flexibility for adopters and adopted children than is currently possible.

A full business case for option 2 will be developed in the coming months. The preferred model and accompanying financial plans have been submitted to DfE in order to secure some transitional funding. It is a requirement to submit all proposals for regional adoption agencies to the DfE to secure funding and approval to proceed with next steps, such as consultation.

Proposed consultation

Alongside organisational arrangement proposals, significant progress has been made towards developing options for operational arrangements. Staff have supported the process through an engagement events and on-going communication with service managers. Adopters are represented as part of the governance group through Adoption UK. Fuller consultation with adopters, adopted children, staff, partners, members and the wider public is now needed.

The areas for consultation are as follows:

- The preferred organisational arrangements for Adoption West
- Operational considerations
- Voluntary Adoption Agency and Adoption Support Agency (VAA / ASA) roles and considerations
- Health provision, specifically in relation to adoption medical advice which is commissioned by a number of CCGs
- Financial planning, principles and processes
- Human resources implications (staffing, organisational structure, employee transfer and pensions)
- Service delivery locations and ensuing property requirements.

Engagement and consultation is planned to run for 10 weeks from Monday 25th July to Monday 3rd October 2016. The principal stakeholders include:

- Adopted children and young people
- Adopters
- Birth families
- Council, Voluntary Adoption Agency and Adoption Support Agency Staff
- Health service commissioners and providers
- Adoption panel members
- Education services

Plans are in place for more thorough engagement with adopters working with Adoption UK to facilitate surveys, focus groups and various forums. Likewise plans are in place to involve adopted children and young people in a more structured way. The outcomes of this engagement process will inform the development of proposals for a decision paper to return to this cabinet later this year.

Options

Option 1. To do nothing: Gloucestershire is required by government to work towards becoming part of a regional adoption agency. The government position is clear. The expectation that regional adoption agencies are in place by 2020 means that doing nothing is not an option.

Option 2. To proceed with the Adoption West plans as detailed and to consult on the proposals: The work so far in developing Adoption West has accorded with government expectations. Officers from Gloucestershire have been fully involved in developments. The proposals offer opportunities to improve adoption services for children and adopters in Gloucestershire. At this stage consultation of proposals is sought. Cabinet will have the opportunity to consider more detailed proposals and business cases in the autumn.

Option 3. To pursue an alternative regional adoption arrangement: The arrangements for Adoption West make sense geographically, for children and prospective adopters. Other councils in parallel with the Adoption West councils have been developing their own regional arrangements; Gloucestershire has not been involved with these developments and so would be joining any arrangements at a late stage. This could mean that arrangements will not reflect Gloucestershire's requirements or offer the same level of opportunity. Near neighbours include the West Midlands or Welsh councils. Wales has its own regional adoption arrangements which are already operational.

Risk Assessment

The development of a regional adoption agency risks dislocating adoption services from the social work teams which work with children. Services may become fragmented leading to delay for children. All participating councils are aware of this risk; engagement of social work teams for children is planned. Close monitoring of adoption delay and rates of adoption is now in place at national, regional and council level to closely track any changes.

Gloucestershire currently has direct control over its adoption service; regionalisation has the potential to dilute this. Being closely involved in developing Adoption West offers some mitigation to this risk, joining other arrangements at a later date could compound this risk.

The adoption service in Gloucestershire is good and performs above national averages. Any change (including regionalisation) to the service risks a dip in performance. This risk can be managed by careful transition planning which enables staff to continue to focus on local priorities, adopters and children.

The Bevan Brittan options appraisal report identifies a number of elements to consider in regard to employment and pensions and these will need to be assessed to ensure best value for money is achieved and any financial implications mitigated in the final business case.

Officer Advice

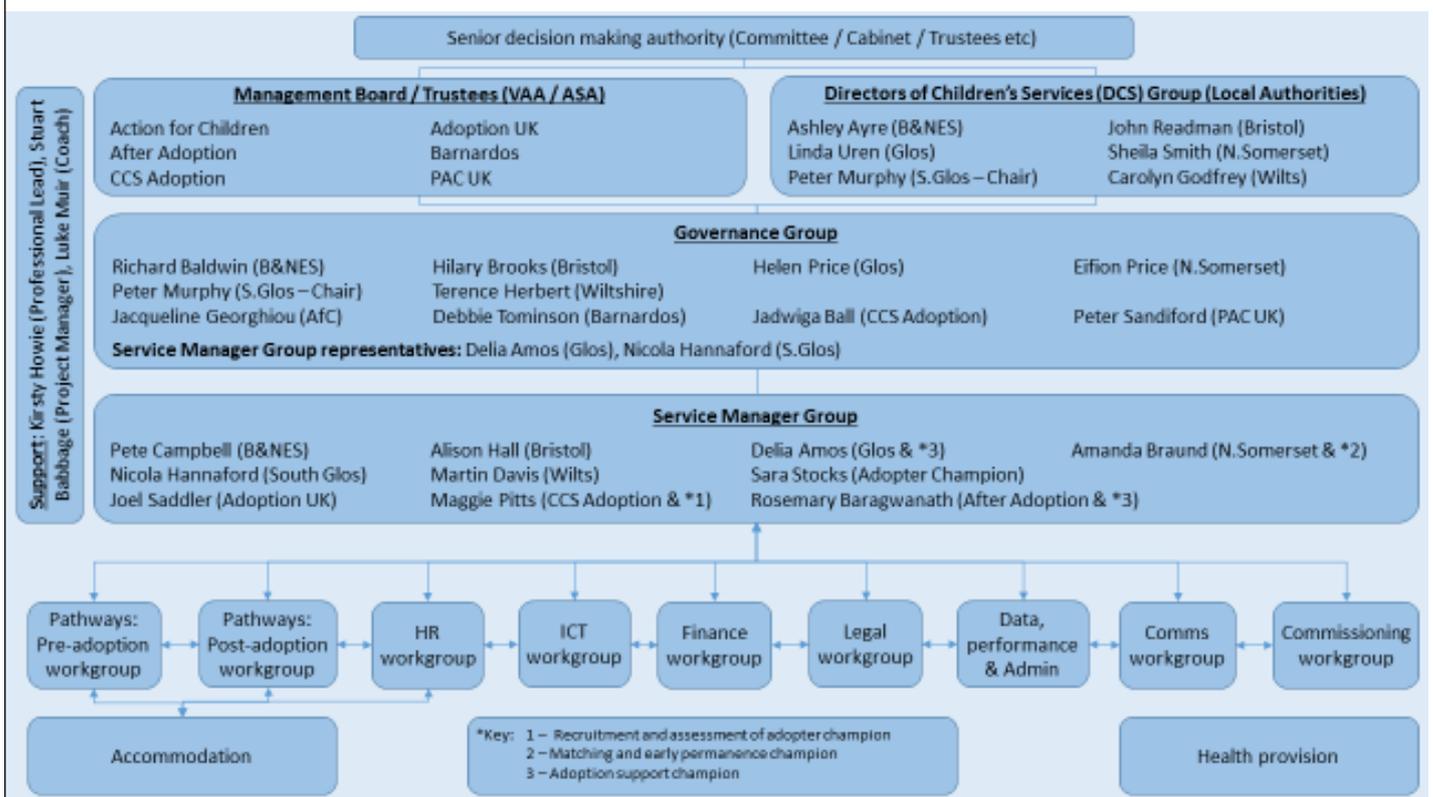
Officers advise proceeding with option 2. Gloucestershire is required by recent government policy to be part of a regional adoption agency by 2020. This option offers the best opportunity to be fully involved with the development of a regional adoption agency. Gloucestershire and Wiltshire were key early leaders of these developments prior to the more recent government

direction, understanding that to make adoption arrangements sustainable and accessible regional developments could be key. Gloucestershire officers have been fully involved in developments to date and have shaped the options proposed. Doing nothing is not an option, and joining other regional arrangements at this stage may not afford the same level of involvement in the final proposals. Cabinet will have the opportunity to consider more fully developed plans in the autumn, following fuller consultation and business case development.

Equalities considerations

The due regard statement indicates that Adoption West could offer some opportunities to impact positively on some protected characteristics. The arrangements for consultation will need to take account of the predominately female workforce who may have additional caring responsibilities. Likewise sensitivity in arrangements and consultation methods will be required to engage the full range of adopters and adopted children and young people. Cabinet Members should read and consider the Due Regard Statement in order to satisfy themselves as decision makers that due regard has been given.

Appendix 1



Report Title	Adoption West: Proposals and consultation to develop a regional adoption agency (RAA)
Statutory Authority	The Education and Adoption Act 2016 Adoption and Children Act 2002
Relevant County Council policy	Council Strategy priorities (2015-18): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a difference for the most vulnerable children, young people and adults. • Finding the best, most efficient way of delivering services. • Being there when needed most - reducing the length of episodes in are by helping children to find safe, secure homes through adoption, when they cannot be cared for by their birth families.
Resource Implications	None currently, DFE are fully funding development costs. Overall adoption service budget is £908k
Sustainability checklist:	
Partnerships	This proposal seeks to develop a regional adoption agency through partnership working with the six councils. All relevant partners are included in consultation proposals. Some key partners such as the NHS are already part of arrangements
Decision Making and Involvement	Adopters are represented as part of the governance arrangements for Adoption West. The planned consultation seeks to involve a wider cohort of adopters and adopted children
Economy and Employment	No significant impact
Caring for people	Proposals accord with the council's strategy priorities relating to caring for people. Specifically 'Being there when needed most' - reducing the length of episodes in are by helping children to find safe, secure homes through adoption, when they cannot be cared for by their birth families.
Social Value	Adopters provide safe, secure homes to children who need them. This long term commitment to becoming a family and providing lifelong support are reported to have significant benefits. Recent estimates to quantify the SRoI relating to a child being adopted suggests that this is worth some £410k per child over their lifetime. (PACT/Baker-Tilly/City University, London: 2011)

Built Environment	No impact
Natural Environment' including Ecology (Biodiversity)	No impact
Education and Information	No immediate impact, some long term evidence in relation to children achieving better in education and employment in later life.
Tackling Climate Change	Carbon Emissions Implications? Positive/ Neutral/ Negative Vulnerable to climate change? Yes/ No/ Maybe
Due Regard Statement	Has a Due Regard Statement been completed? Yes Yes - considerations included in main body of report A copy of the full Due Regard Statement can be accessed on GLOSTEXT via http://glostext.gloucestershire.gov.uk/uuCoverPage.aspx?bcr=1 Alternatively a hard copy is available for inspection from Jo Moore, Democratic Services Unit, e-mail: jo.moore@gloucestershire.gov.uk .
Human rights Implications	None
Consultation Arrangements	As detailed in report