



Report of: Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

Meeting of:	Date:	Ward(s):
Executive	7 February 2019	ALL

Delete as appropriate:		Non-exempt
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SUBJECT: A Regional Adoption Agency for North London

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 Decision to agree the business case for the progression of a Regional Adoption Agency. Decision to agree proposals for the hosting of the agency by LBI and the way in which the service will be delivered, governed and financed.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To agree the Business case for the North London Regional Adoption Agency.
- 2.2 To agree the proposals for the hosting of the service on behalf of the London Boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney and Haringey.
- 2.3 To approve the proposed financial model and the service delivery model outlined in the business case.

3. Background

- 3.1 The move towards the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies is led by a national agenda to better target the recruitment of prospective adopters and speed up the matching and placement of children for adoption.

All Local authorities are expected to become part of a Regional Agency by April 2020.

- 3.2 In March 2018 The DfE introduced the legislation that allows them to direct a local authority into a RAA if there is no progress being made.

DfE Grant monies have been made available to assist the project in its development phase.

- 3.3 Agreement in principle to progress 4 Regional Adoption Agencies pan London was obtained in December 2017. An Implementation Board for North London (with Director/Assistant Director representation from the 6 Boroughs) has met regularly to progress the project plan and develop the business case.

- 3.4 Sign off of the business case is now required in order to progress the project to Go Live status.

Current anticipated Go Live date is July 1st 2019.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial implications:

A thorough forensic analysis of each Boroughs financial spend on adoption services has been undertaken, with resulting challenges and peer-to-peer reviews. Boroughs have not been asked to contribute sums over and above their confirmed relevant spend on adoption. Total confirmed contributions will sufficiently fund the proposed new service, including staff and non-pay (excluding items detailed in the Partnership Agreement) and overheads attributed to the hosting of the agency.

4.2 Legal Implications:

In March 2016, the government announced changes to the delivery of adoption services proposing that all local authorities' adoption services be delivered on a regionalised basis by 2020. This followed a range of national policy changes since 2012, including the 2015 Regionalising Adoption paper by the DfE that sought improvements in adoption performance.

Under Section 3ZA of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (as inserted by section 15 of the Education and Adoption Act 2016 with effect 7 March 2018) the Secretary of State is empowered to direct one or more named local authorities to make arrangements for any, or all, of their adoption functions to be carried out on their behalf by other local authorities named, or by another agency. In effect, this provision requires local authorities to join together to form regional adoption agencies.

The above power enables the Secretary of State to allow local authorities to transfer their adoption functions to the host authority for another authority or adoption agency. The functions are as follows:

- a) The recruitment of persons as prospective adopters;
- b) The assessment of prospective adopters' suitability to adopt a child;
- c) The approval of prospective adopters as suitable to adopt a child;
- d) Decisions as to whether a particular child should be placed for adoption with a particular prospective adopter;
- e) The provision of adoption support services.

As indicated earlier in the report, it has previously been agreed in principle that a North London regional adoption agency (Adopt London North) be established with Islington appointed as the host authority with the other authorities' adoption functions being delegated to Islington.

The new regional adoption arrangements for ALN will be governed by a board, and be subject to an inter-authority legal agreement between Islington and the other north London authorities which sets out the terms of the arrangement.

The approval of the business case is an integral part of the establishment of ALN.

4.3 Environmental Implications

The proposed Regional Adoption Agency would have environmental impacts associated with offices (including energy, paper and water use, and waste generation) and staff travel (vehicular emissions and contributing to congestion). Combining the six services could result in a reduction in the office-related impacts, but may also result in a net increase in travel-related impacts with services being delivered from a single headquarters.

4.4 Resident Impact Assessment:

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

A Resident Impact Assessment has not been completed because this project covers all 6 Boroughs of North London. However, the intended impact of the policy and regionalisation of Adoption services in North London is to ensure timely decision making, increase in the number of adults wishing to adopt and improved services for all adopter families in the Region. The recipients of this regionalised service are some of the most vulnerable in the Boroughs. Improvements in the way adoption services are delivered will minimise disadvantage and inequality across the region and promote better understanding of support available.

5. Reason for recommendations

- 5.1 The development of a Regional Adoption Agency is a mandatory requirement and one which if not progressed risks intervention from government.

The ability to pool resource and target adopter recruitment will address the shortfall in adopter households which has been an issue across North London and particularly Islington over the past 3 years.

Targeting recruitment to meet the needs of those waiting will reduce timescales and associated costs of a child remaining in care.

Improvements in the support of adopter families and their children will reduce the risk of placement disruption and a return to the care system for some children.

Establishing a service where staff focus entirely on the specialism of adoption will improve the quality and timeliness of services on offer to those requiring them.

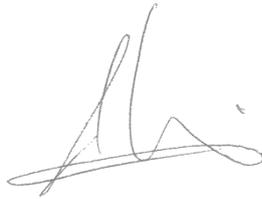
Appendices: None

Background papers: None

Final report clearance:

Signed by:

7 February 2019



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