

From: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

Shellina Prendergast, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Matt Dunkley CBE, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

To: Children's and Young People's Cabinet Committee/ Cabinet/ CMM/ Scrutiny Committee – 31st January 2022

Subject: Adoption Partnership South East, Regional Adoption Agency – Annual Report

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: Adoption Partnership South East Strategic Board

Future Pathway of report: The Annual Report will be shared with each partner local authority Member forums

Electoral Division: list the electoral division/s, and local Member/s affected:

Identify Members using this link:

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>

Summary

In 2015 the Government set out its vision and commitment to deliver a regional adoption system where adoption agencies would come together to deliver adoption services on a larger scale. CYPE Cabinet Committee agreed in September 2020 to proceed with plans to develop a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) comprising of the London Borough of Bexley, Kent County Council and Medway Council. Adoption Partnership South East (APSE) was launched on 1st November 2020.

The first RAA annual report provides information and an overview of the service, performance set against government targets and service and practice development for the period November 2020 - October 2021.

Recommendation(s):

The committee/board is asked to note and comment on the RAA annual report

1. Introduction

1. The Statutory Regulations require that Elected Members should be informed of the Adoption Agency's activity on a regular basis. The annual report

provides information that will assist Elected Members in respect of their responsibilities as Corporate Parents for Looked After Children.

2. The report should be read in conjunction with the Adoption Agencies Statement of Purpose, (SOP) which is attached to the main report as appendix 2. The SOP explains our values and principles, the services we provide and the way we provide them. The information provided meets the requirement of National Minimum Standards for Adoption, and the related regulations (Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Agencies (Misc. Amendments) Regulations 2003).
3. The agency is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 by:
 - Ensuring the provision of a high-quality adoption service which guarantees the best possible standards of care, safety and protection for children or young people who are looked after and who need adoptive placements.
 - Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services.
 - Working in partnership with adoptive families & other agencies ensuring the service is based on statutory requirements & good practice within the principles of value for money for the agency.

2 Body of the report

1. The report provides information regarding children's adoption journeys, adopters' journeys and reports the voice of adopted children and adoptive parents.
2. The report provides information about the timeliness for Kent children's adoption care plans and the progress made since the RAA went 'live'.
3. The report provides information about adopter recruitment and the number of people enquiring about adopting through APSE
4. The report provides information regarding adoption support services offered to children and families by the RAA, which have expanded within the last 12 months, with agreement from the Partnership Board to provide a consistent service across the region.

3 Financial Implications

1. A legal Partnership Agreement underpins each Partner's financial contribution to the RAA.
2. Regular monthly meetings are held RAA with Finance Officers from across the three local authority partner agencies, with the Head of Service to ensure there is transparency and accountability.

3. Quarterly RAA Board meetings are held, as outlined in the annual report, where Directors from each local authority partner review budget expenditure and forecasting.
4. The service has successfully operated within budget during its first year.

4. Legal implications

1. The work of the RAA is governed by:
 - Education and Adoption Act 2016
 - Care Planning, placement and Case and fostering services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
 - Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
 - Care Planning Regulations 2010
 - Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011)
 - Local Authority Regulations 2005
 - Adoption and Children Act 2002
 - Care Standards Act 2000.
2. The formation of a Regional Adoption Agency meets with government requirements.

5 Equalities implications

- 1 An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed before the RAA was launched.
- 2 The adoption service abides by equal opportunities legislation and the policies of each Partner. The service works positively and respectfully with all service users and partner agencies regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or age.
- 3 Every attempt will be made to secure an adoptive family which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs considering their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender, and disability considering the need to avoid undue delay.

6 Other corporate implications

- 1 Adoption Partnership delivers adoption services on behalf of the three partner local authorities. There is a requirement on the service to work closely with other teams and services within CYPE who provide a service to children in care and those who were previously looked after.

7 Governance

- 1 The RAA is operated under the terms of a Partnership Agreement, which confirms the legal and governance arrangements; the budget; staffing and funding contributions for the three local authorities. These are outlined in the Annual Report.

8 Alternatives considered

- 1 The development of the RAA is in line with Government requirements. The RAA Executive Board established prior to the launching of the RAA, considered various operating models and agreed on the current service model.

9 Conclusions

- 1 This report reflects the commitment and hard work of staff within Adoption Partnership South East. The move to a Regional Adoption Agency during a pandemic presented challenges, but staff rose to those challenges.
- 2 The service is child focused and strives to provide a timely, qualitative, and responsive service to achieve good outcomes for children and families. Hearing and responding to the voice of the child and the voice of adoptive parents is important to us and during the coming twelve months there are plans in place to develop and improve these further.
- 3 The service recognises the value of working together, both internally, and with the professional network within each of the partner local authorities and other organisations.
- 4 A significant amount of preparation took place before the launch of the RAA on 1st November 2020 which has proven to have been extremely helpful. The legal agreement provides clarity, and the service is supported by a robust governance framework, which is constructively challenging and supportive.
- 5 The service has successfully transitioned from three local authority adoption services in to one regional adoption service and is entering its next phase of consolidation and further development with enthusiasm and a commitment to children and their families.

10 Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s):

The committee/board is asked to note and comment on the annual report

11 Background Documents

- 1 The Regional Adoption Agency annual report November 2020 – October 2021 is attached and there are appendices within the report.

12 Contact details

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