

From: Peter Oakford, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services

Andrew Ireland, Corporate Director of Social Care, Health and Wellbeing

To: Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee – 22 January 2016

Decision No: 15/00004

Subject: **ESTABLISHMENT OF A VOLUNTARY ADOPTION AGENCY**

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A

Electoral Divisions: All

Summary: This brief report updates the Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee on the progress of the earlier intention to establish a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) for Kent in partnership with Coram. On the basis of the reasons outlined in this report, it is not at this point possible for Kent County Council to pursue the VAA option. The present contractual arrangements with Coram cease on 22 January 2016 and cannot be renewed further without a full tendering process. Kent County Council will therefore re-assume responsibility for the management of our Adoption Service from 23 January 2016 with the intention of our continuing to work with Coram under a new Development and Innovation Partnership Agreement.

Recommendation(s): The Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE:**

- a) it has not been possible to progress the option to develop a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) for Kent.
- b) plans for the further management and development of the Adoption Service.
- c) that the proposed decision (15/00004) will now be abandoned.

1. Introduction

1.1 In 2011 Kent County Council commissioned an independent review of its adoption services from Sir Martin Narey, the former Chief Executive of Barnado's. As a result of his recommendations, the council entered into a management arrangement with Coram in January 2012 for the delivery of its adoption functions.

- 1.2 The council's partnership with Coram has been a beneficial one with significant improvements in performance both in relation to adopter recruitment and placement of children for adoption. Aspects of innovative practice in the delivery of adoption services have also been developed as part of this partnership, most notably in relation to Post Adoption Support Services.
- 1.3 In light of the fact that the contractual arrangements with Coram would conclude in January 2016, a report was brought to Committee in January 2015 to seek approval for the longer term development of a Voluntary Adoption Agency with the specific intention of this being led by Coram on the basis of our established and successful working partnership.

2. Establishment of a Voluntary Adoption Agency in Kent

- 2.1 Following on from the in principle endorsement by this Committee in January 2015 to establish a Voluntary Adoption Agency in Kent, more detailed dialogue was undertaken, most specifically with Procurement and Legal Services. Advice provided from both of these bodies unequivocally indicated that it would not be permissible for the council to progress such a significant contractual arrangement without a formal tendering process.
- 2.2 A specification was drawn up to encompass the core adoption activity of adopter recruitment, adoption panels, family finding, post adoption support and non-agency adoption. The tendering process was undertaken in July 2015, at the close of which only one submission was received, from Coram.
- 2.3 It was not possible to proceed with contract award as the submission made by Coram did not meet all of the conditions.
- 2.4 Under guidance provided by Procurement, the council had the option of pursuing further dialogue with Coram on the basis that they were the only respondent to the tender. This opportunity was taken, culminating with a formal meeting between council officials and senior Coram representatives in November 2015. At the culmination of this meeting, Coram confirmed they felt unable to pursue these conversations further as they considered the risks involved too great.
- 2.5 In the light of the fact that the present contractual arrangements with Coram conclude on 22 January 2016 and cannot be renewed further, it is unavoidable that the council re-assumes responsibility for the management of its adoption services. The council has reacted accordingly and the present Interim Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting has agreed to remain with us for a further six months as Head of Adoption Services to oversee the transition whilst substantive appointments can be made.
- 2.6 The council is mindful of the considerable benefits that have arisen from our work with Coram and we are seeking to maintain our working relationship through a further Partnership Agreement for Development and Innovation in Adoption Services under the framework of an Adoption Development Board. The detail of this remains under discussion with Coram. At a national level there is a strong expectation from Central Government that Local Authorities develop regional consortiums for adoption services alongside voluntary sector bodies so this arrangement will leave Kent well placed to explore future opportunities at a regional level.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 There will be financial costs associated with the envisaged Development and Innovation Partnership with Coram which remain to be fully scoped. However, all costs will be met from within the existing cash envelope for Adoption Services.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 The Service has worked closely with Procurement and Legal Services colleagues in the progression of this issue and the forward proposals. It is understood that single tender action will be permissible in respect of the continued engagement of Coram's services in the manner outlined.

5. Equalities Implications

- 5.1 None identified.

6. Corporate Implications

- 6.1 None identified.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations: The Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE:**

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- b) plans for the further management and development of the Adoption Service.
- c) that the proposed decision (15/00004) will now be abandoned.

8. Background Documents

Report to Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee –
20 January 2015 <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s50698/B4%20-%20Establishment%20of%20a%20VAA.pdf>

9. Contact details

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