

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TAKEN BY:

**Roger Gough,
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and
Education**

DECISION NO:

19/00047

Unrestricted

Key decision: YES

Subject: Kent, Bexley and Medway Regional Adoption Agency

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, I agree to:

- I. delegate responsibility to the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services to:
 - a. Complete the full business case for regionalisation (for presentation and sign off by Cabinet in October 2019); and
 - b. Formulate the detailed design of the Regional Adoption Agency model (between now and October 2019) in collaboration with Medway Council and the London Borough of Bexley.

Reason(s) for decision:

In March 2016, the government announced changes to the delivery of adoption services setting a very clear direction that all local authorities' adoption services must be delivered on a regionalised basis by 2020. The premise of regionalisation is to:

- Increase the number of children adopted.
- Reduce the length of time children wait to be adopted.
- Improve post-adoption support services to families who have adopted children from care.
- Reduce the number of agencies that provide adoption services, thereby improving efficiency and effectiveness.

It is proposed that a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) is created through combining the adoption services for the three authorities of Kent, Bexley and Medway. These agencies wish to build on the success of their existing services to improve performance in meeting the needs of children who require permanence through adoption, by bringing together the best practice from each authority within the RAA. It is proposed that Kent will be the lead authority for the RAA.

The Kent, Bexley and Medway RAA intend to use the Department for Education criteria to guide the outline scope and delivery of the model.

Equality Implications

The next three months of project work will produce both the detailed design of the model and the numbers of staff in scope. At present, it is not possible to complete an equalities impact assessment as it relies having information on the above. A completed equalities impact assessment will accompany the full business case that is scheduled for presentation and sign off at Cabinet Committee in October.

Financial Implications

The 2018-19 budget for the delivery of adoption services in Kent was £2,905,500. Further financial modelling work is currently taking place to agree a completely accurate financial contribution to the RAA in

2019-20. This work will take place alongside annual budget setting and review in each local authority. It is expected that Kent County Council will contribute no more than their agreed adoption budget for 2019-20. The full detail of this contribution will be presented in the full business case in October.

The RAA will aim to move from current spend to an activity-based spending model by year 3 of implementation. The exact mechanism is still being agreed by the executive board and finance colleagues, but early indications suggest that the spending model will be:

- 100% existing budget in year 1
- 66% existing budget and 33% activity based in year 2
- 33% existing budget and 66% activity based in year 3
- 100% activity based in year 4

From the work completed to date by the finance work stream the following principles are suggested as a basis for the development of the activity-based funding formula:

- There should be no overall increase in spend on adoption services.
- The quality of the service should be at least as good as it is now.
- Interagency fees will be abolished between participating local authorities.
- A transition arrangement to take authorities from current spend to a formula driven spend is acceptable.
- The funding mechanism must be acceptable to all participating local authorities.
- The funding mechanism must be acceptable to the host Local Authority (Kent County Council).
- It must be transparent, open and based on published data.
- Services not included will be explicitly identified (e.g. Adoption Allowances).

Interagency fees within the RAA member authorities, will be abolished from the day the RAA goes live, it may be necessary to have a mechanism to recognise the adopter contribution versus the number of children awaiting placement at this point (i.e. if an authority joins with a surplus of adopters they may receive some financial compensation for the work done to recruit and assess them or if they join with a shortfall of adopters to children requiring placements there may need to be an additional charge). The RAA Executive Board will start to monitor performance in these areas ahead of the launch and agree a process for dealing with this issue.

Legal Implications

Legal advice on the emerging model will be sought as the business case is drafted. The cabinet report and full business case, scheduled for presentation and sign off in October 2019, will include the legal implications of joining the regional adoption agency.

There will be a robust partnership and risk sharing agreement that will underpin the model. This agreement will be reviewed and agreed by both the executive board and legal departments in each of the three local authorities.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

A report on the regional adoption agency was originally brought to the Kent Children's Health and Social Care Cabinet Committee on 6th September 2016. The recommendation and decision was to consider the content of the report and endorse in principle the proposal to enter into formal dialogue with Medway Council and the London Borough of Bexley with a view to establishing a Regional Adoption Agency.

A report was brought to the Children's, Young People & Education Cabinet Committee on 7th September 2017. This report asked the Committee to endorse the progress of partnership working and the continued development of a Regional Adoption Agency with the London Borough of Bexley and Medway Council.

A report was presented to the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee decision

on 28 June 2019, the Minute extract is as follows:

120. 19/00047 - Kent, Bexley and Medway Regional Adoption Agency
(Item 10)

Ms Skinner (Head of Adoption) and Ms Smith (Assistant Director – Corporate Parenting) were in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Smith introduced the report which set out the proposed decision to create a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) through combining the adoption services for the three authorities of Kent, Bexley and Medway.

Ms Smith and Ms Skinner then responded to comments and questions from Members, including the following: -

- a) Ms Smith confirmed that the accountable person in relation to the Kent, Bexley and Medway RAA and the oversight of the practice within the three local authorities would be the Head of the RAA, who had not yet been appointed.
 - b) Ms Smith said that each local authority would continue to report in the same way in relation to their adoption data and equally each local authority would be expected to report back to Members within their individual local authority on their adoption data, although statutory returns would continue to be produced for the adoption data for the entire RAA as well as individually.
 - c) Ms Smith confirmed that a partnership board would hold the delivery of regional adoption services to account, underpinned by a robust risk sharing and partnership agreement. She added that Mr Dunkley would be a part of the partnership agreement between Kent, Bexley and Medway.
 - d) Ms Skinner said that RAA would be created for the purpose of building upon the success of existing services to improve performance in meeting the needs of children who required permanence through adoption.
 - e) Ms Skinner talked about the challenges faced in regard to the creation of a new RAA and the steps that were being taken to ensure that potential risks were minimised. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that the three local authorities worked in tandem and that policies and procedures were followed. Mr Dunkley reiterated comments made by Ms Skinner and expressed his views in relation to the creation of RAA's and the positive effect that they had on local authorities and support that they offered.
 - f) Mr Dunkley reiterated Ms Skinner's comments regarding the challenges that local authorities could be faced with in relation to the creation of a new RAA and talked about the strategies that were in place relating to pooling and joint appointments in order to minimise risks.
2. The Chairman confirmed that a regular report was submitted to Kent County Council's Corporate Parenting Panel in relation to RAA's.
 3. RESOLVED that the decision proposed to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education to:
 - a) complete the full business case for regionalisation (for presentation and consideration by CYPE Committee in October 2019); and

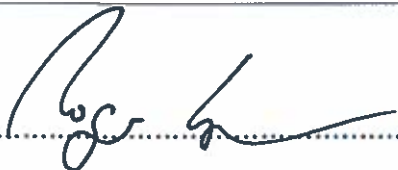
b) formulate the detailed design of the Regional Adoption Agency model (between now and October 2019) in collaboration with Medway Council and the London Borough of Bexley,

be endorsed.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

All alternatives have been explored and the creation of a regional Adoption Agency between Kent, Medway and Bexley is the preferred option as explained in the report to the Children and Young People Cabinet Committee on 28 June 2019.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer: None



23 July 2019

signed

date