

## **FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** **SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** **THURSDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER 2013**

**REPORT BY:** **DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**SUBJECT:** **DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE FOR WALES**

### **1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.01 To seek Member's views of the plan to establish a National Adoption Service for Wales, supported by Regional Adoption Collaboratives.
- 1.02 To seek Member's views regarding the proposal that Wrexham will continue to act as the lead authority for the North Wales Adoption Service.

### **2.00 BACKGROUND**

- 2.01 Adoption must be seen in the broader context of planning placements and permanence for children and as part of an integrated system of services for meeting their needs and promoting their well-being. Adoption Services as a whole are complex, provided to a wide range of service users from very young children who are being placed for adoption to older adults who are seeking to be reunited with their birth families.
- 2.02 There is a clear requirement that children in care must have plans for permanence in place which consider the full range of permanence options and which are put into effect with appropriate urgency.
- 2.03 Members will be aware that the creation of a National Adoption Service is one of the key policy strands if the Welsh Government and that if enacted, the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Bill will allow Ministers to prescribe arrangements by local authorities.
- 2.04 Working closely with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), ADSS Cymru produced a functional model for delivery of Adoption Services across Wales. A copy of this report is attached at Appendix A. The model was endorsed by the Expert Advisory Group on Adoption established by Welsh Government. The outline proposal developed by ADSS Cymru was agreed in principle by Leaders at WLGA Council in April.

2.05 Subsequently, in a Written Statement on 25th April 2013, the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services endorsed the proposals for achieving a National Adoption Service and the development of a Functional Model for the delivery of services across Wales, as presented by ADSS Cymru and the WLGA. A copy of the Written Statement is attached at Appendix B.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

3.01 The proposals outlined in detail in Appendix A, provide an ambitious but realistic pathway for creating an effective and responsive National Adoption Service. This will help to ensure:

- A new direction for the delivery of Adoption Services that is particularly suited to the Welsh context.
- Timely implementation of the improvements required.
- An increase in the pace of collaboration and the capacity to build sustainable services for the future.
- A reduction in bureaucracy and a streamlining of service delivery.
- An improvement in service accessibility for all key stakeholders.
- Maintenance of the essential integrity and coherence between all elements of Adoption Services, to prevent a mismatch between the needs of children requiring adoption placements and the adopters being recruited.
- Long term and lasting improvements to address the weakness identified in some elements of current service provision.
- A central place for the significant contribution made by the Voluntary Sector as valued co-producers and delivery partners.
- Collective opportunities for local authorities to respond effectively to rising pressures within the care system.

3.02 The proposal will be underpinned by a National Standardised Performance Framework that will allow the National Adoption Service to identify, review and highlight key performance measures. The framework will set performance thresholds and make clear the Welsh Government's minimum expectations for timeliness in the adoption system, for both the child and prospective adopter.

3.03 The National Adoption Service will be responsible for:

- Establishment of a National Board.
- Monitoring the delivery of services in accordance with the national performance framework.
- Producing an Annual Report and action plan.
- Developing a national marketing and awareness raising strategy.

- Providing a single point of contact for anyone seeking
- information about adoption.
- Providing a database of information.
- Developing and maintaining a National Adoption Register.
- Co-ordination of Adoption Panels, Panel Members, Preapproval Training, Post Adoption Support Services and
- provision of the Independent Review Determination Service.
- Acting as a Centre of Excellence for Adoption in Wales.

3.04 The functional model proposes five Regional Adoption Collaboratives are established, to deliver the functions of a National Service including:

- Ensuring compliance with legislation, regulation and the performance measuring framework.
- Recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters.
- Ensuring appropriate matching of children.
- Provision of the whole range of support services including birth parent counselling, step parent adoptions, intermediary services and letterbox contact.
- Ensure effective links are maintained with local authorities Children's Social Services.

3.05 The proposed five regional collaboratives are:

- North Wales – Wrexham, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire and Ynys Mon;
- South East Wales – Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Newport and Caerphilly;
- West & Mid Wales – Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Powys;
- Western Bay – Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea; and
- Mid & South Wales – Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda-Cynon-Taff.

3.06 These collaboratives are currently at different stages of development but it is planned that all five Regional Collaboratives will be established by April 2014.

3.07 The North Wales regional collaborative has been in place since 01.04.10. [The North Wales Adoption Service] The Service is currently hosted by Wrexham and overseen by the 6 North Wales Heads of Children's Service who meet quarterly as the NAWAS Board. The current collaborative recently held a workshop to evaluate its operations and three workstreams have been established to take forward the actions arising from the workshop and ensure that we are prepared for the new arrangements. A copy of the NAWAS Annual

Report 2012-13 is attached as Appendix (c).

3.08 Within the future model each local authority will retain responsibility for the following:

- Assessment and care planning and reviewing of Looked After Children and young people.
- Ensuring the Agency Decision Maker functions are fulfilled.
- Assessment of the Adoption Support needs of children for whom the plan is adoption.
- Involvement in the matching and linking of children and adopters.
- Providing birth parent counselling, although in North Wales this is also provided as a collaborative via NWAS.
- Making applications to the Courts for appropriate orders.
- Attending Adoption Panels where proposed matches are being considered.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.01 That Members

- a) Note the contents on this report and;
- b) Comment on the proposals for achieving a National Adoption Service in Wales as detailed in the report of the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) Cymru
- c) Consider the proposal that Wrexham will continue to act as the lead authority for the North Wales Adoption Service.

By so doing Flintshire County Council can ensure that the Council's statutory functions in relation to providing an Adoption Service are fully met, in accordance with legislation and guidance.

#### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.01 A Task and Finish Group will be established with representatives from Welsh Government, ADSS Cymru, Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW), British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), Voluntary Adoption Agencies and each of the five Regional Collaboratives. The purpose will be to produce a robust change programme for implementing the functional model.

5.02 It is recognised that Programme Management capacity is required to drive through these changes in a timely fashion and the Deputy Minister has awarded £50k to ADSS Cymru to support implementation.

5.03 The following key milestones have been agreed:

- Membership and brief of the Task and Finish Group – June.

- Identification of the five Lead Authorities – June.
- Development of a common Implementation Plan format – July.
- Support Lead Authorities in their role – July.
- Outline business components for the infrastructure of the National Service – July.
- Regional Implementation Plans in place – August.

5.04 As the North Wales Adoption Service is already in existence the funding formula was agreed in 2009/10 and is as follows:

Wrexham 19.4%  
 Flintshire 22.4%  
 Denbighshire 14.0%  
 Conwy 16.5%  
 Gwynedd 17.6%  
 Ynys Mon 10.1%

[based on child population / adoption activity in 2009/10]

Flintshire's current cash contribution is £96,640 per annum, plus 2x FTE posts at £86,257 (with on costs) making the total Flintshire contribution £182,897. The overall operating costs for the consortium are £758,493. Flintshire's contribution is already met within existing base budget, so the impact is cost neutral.

**6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

6.01 None arising directly from this report.

**7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

7.01 None arising directly from this report.

**8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

8.01 None arising directly from this report.

**9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01 As the NWAS is already in existence the structure of the service is in place but currently subject to review following the evaluation workshop.

**10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01 See background.

**11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01 See background.

## **12.00 APPENDICES**

- 12.01 Appendix A - Proposals for Achieving a National Adoption Service in Wales and development of the Functional Model – ADSS Cymru, April 2013.
- 12.02 Appendix B - Written Statement by the Deputy Minister – 25th April 2013.
- 12.03 Appendix C - North Wales Adoption Service Annual Report 2012/13

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None.

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