



CLLR BERNIE MOONEY

CABINET
26 FEBRUARY 2018

REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY

Councillor Bernie Mooney Cabinet Member - Children and Families, said:

“It is vital we are able to offer fast and safe support to those children who need to be adopted. Working with our partners throughout the City Region should mean we are able to offer more support to more children, through a quicker and more efficient service.”

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the creation of a regionalised adoption service across Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral with effect from 1 April 2018. The regionalisation of the adoption services in the Liverpool City Region is a mandatory requirement as set out in the Education and Adoption Act 2016. The four authorities have worked together over the last two years to develop AiM (Adoption in Merseyside) which will be hosted by Knowsley Council with Sefton Council taking on the role of Commissioner on behalf of the other four authorities and holding the host to account. This will result in the staff of the other three authorities, including Wirral being seconded into Knowsley Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of the Cabinet are recommended to:-

- (a) Agree the proposed host model arrangements for Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral Regional Adoption Agency,
- (b) Agree that employees from Wirral are seconded into Knowsley as the host authority from 1 April 2018;
- (c) Note the intention for the service to go live on 1 April 2018;

- (d) Delegate authority to the Director for Children Services and Deputy Director: Children's Care Services to finalise the terms on which Wirral Borough Council will provide and deliver a shared administration of adoption services with the other participating authorities and in consultation with the Assistant Director: Law & Governance and the Director for Finance & Investments to complete all financial agreements and other legal documentation as may be required to be executed by the Council to implement the transition.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 To make Wirral compliant with National Legislation and Guidance.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In June 2015, the Department for Education issued its publication: 'Regionalising Adoption'. This set out the Government's aim for "all children with an adoption plan to find a loving, stable home as quickly as possible." The view expressed was that the national system was not working well enough for children waiting to be adopted, particularly for children that are harder to place. Regionalising Adoption also indicated that further development of the adoption support market is needed so that the right services are available to adoptive families wherever they live. Start-up funding of £4.5m was made available to support partnerships wishing to be considered early on to take forward their proposals.
- 2.2 In addition to the proposal for providing start-up funding, the Government indicated that it intended to bring forward legislation in the Education and Adoption Bill to compel unwilling local authorities to join Regional Adoption Agencies to do so. In these circumstances, it seemed therefore to be sensible to look to develop a willing coalition of authorities in the North West and Merseyside region.
- 2.3 The Government subsequently legislated to provide powers in the Education and Adoption Act 2016 to require local authority adoption services to regionalise where they were not making voluntary plans to do so by 2020. Planning is required to have started by 2017 with entry into a regional adoption agency being completed by 2020.
- 2.4 A paper asking for approval to proceed with the regionalisation of the adoption services of Liverpool, Knowsley, Sefton and Wirral went to each individual Local Authority cabinet between April and June 2017. Approval was granted by all four Local Authorities with an understanding that a further paper would be taken to cabinet before the go live date which would outline the full scope of the service and more detail about all the key decisions and risks.
- 2.5 Since then detailed work, which is outlined below, has been managed by the Programme team with significant contributions from officers from all four Local Authorities. This work has been overseen by the members of the Strategic Board.

3.0 WORK UNDERTAKEN SINCE THE LAST CABINET UPDATE

- 3.1 As mentioned above a significant amount of work has been undertaken since this was last reported to Cabinet in March 2017. The programme has been managed through eight separate work streams, each with a lead and membership from across the four Local Authorities. The work streams have met regularly to progress the following:

Work stream	Lead authority
Information Technology	Knowsley
Human Resources	Wirral
Commissioning and Performance	Knowsley and now Sefton
Finance	Liverpool and now Knowsley
Estates	Liverpool
Communications	Liverpool
Legal	Liverpool and now Knowsley
Operational Delivery	Knowsley
Learning and Development	Sefton

- 3.2 The initial proposal was for Liverpool to host the service but this has been kept under review and ongoing discussions have taken place at the Strategic Board. Due to changes in personnel at a Senior Manager Level within Liverpool's Children's Social Care over the last six months and also based on the Ofsted judgements of each of the Local Authorities services it is now proposed that Knowsley will host the service with Sefton acting in the Commissioning role. Knowsley is the only service that has a good Ofsted judgement with the others all requiring improvement.
- 3.3 A comprehensive review of existing caseloads and resources in each Authority to support the workload has been undertaken this identified that two of the Authorities needed to commit to additional resources to ensure that AiM could deliver a Good performing service from the outset. Wirral was identified as requiring additional resource. There has been a small increase of capacity with the addition two family support workers posts for two years. One post is funded through the reduction in hours of a couple of team members. This is required due to a significant rise in the number of children being placed for adoption. Adoption is one of the ways that we aim to achieve permanent homes for our children looked after. Increasing capacity in the adoption team for the next two years allows the required family finding to take place in a timely way. The detailed structure chart for the new service is attached at appendix 1 to this report.
- 3.4 A financial review of existing budgets and resource requirements has taken place and an agreed costing model has now been agreed by the partners. In the short term there are some additional costs of establishing the service. This will be covered in the finance section of the report.
- 3.5 The decision for Knowsley to host the service has resulted in further consultation taking place with Liverpool employees who will now be seconded to Knowsley. This consultation took place in November 2017 and is now complete.

4.0 GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- 4.1 It is proposed that the operation of AiM will be overseen by a Management Board consisting of Assistant Executive Directors from Children Services in each of the Local Authority areas. In the interest of continuity the Board will be chaired by Paul Boyce on behalf of the Directors of Children Services.

- 4.2 The Management Board will be responsible for the continued strategic development, leadership, performance and evaluation of AiM. The Management Board will also be responsible for the co-ordination of the appointment of any staff into the service.
- 4.3 The Management Board will meet bi-monthly and the terms of reference will form part of the schedule of documents required for the service. One of the key areas of scrutiny will be the performance of AiM and the national performance indicators for AiM.
- 4.4 An Operational Group has been established and will continue to oversee and monitor the operational development and delivery of AiM. This group will consist of relevant Heads of Service and will meet bi-monthly reporting to the Management Board on all aspects of the service.
- 4.5 The Head of Service for AiM was appointed in July and will jointly report into the Head of Permanence in Knowsley and the Assistant Director for Social Care in Liverpool.

5.0 LEGAL AND OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR AIM

- 5.1 A draft legal agreement has been developed for an initial three year period which outlines the framework for the service. It describes how partners will engage with each other during the lifetime of the agreement and expectations in terms of governance, performance and the management of risk. It also outlines the terms under which one or more partners can terminate the agreement.
- 5.2 There is a schedule of documents that support the legal agreement.

These are:

- The secondment agreement
- Service specification
- Information sharing agreement
- Risk sharing agreement
- The role of the host authority
- Governance and terms of reference
- Complaints procedure

- 5.3 All the documents listed above are under active scrutiny and will be reviewed at a special meeting of the Strategic Board. Following this meeting Knowsley, as the host authority, will then instruct its legal services department to draw up the documentation and ensure that all documents are signed by each authority.
- 5.4 Agreed joint practice standards and procedures have been developed and have been shared with staff. They focus on care planning for children, family finding, matching and preparation for adoption. Another focus is the recruitment and assessment of adopters and adoption support.

- 5.5 The following activities will continue in each of the respective local authority areas:
- Relationships with Social Care teams
 - Adoption Support
 - Links with Voluntary Adoption Agencies
 - Early identification and tracking of children
 - Selection/matching meetings
 - Family finding activity
- 5.6 The benefits of these activities remaining in each authority will be reviewed during the first twelve months of operation with a view to AiM taking on a wider role in the future.
- 5.7 Further work is needed to review and consolidate the different authorities Adoption Allowance Policies but in the first year this will remain the responsibility of each authority separately.
- 5.8 All parties have agreed to a financial model based on their proportion of activity. However, in the first full year of operation each Council will invest their current total spend on adoption in terms of staffing, commissioning and activity. There is also a commitment to review contributions on an annual basis to ensure that each party is able to demonstrate value for money and demonstrate that their contribution is equitable.
- 5.9 Following a formal consultation process with all employees and all relevant Trades Unions it has been agreed that all current employees be seconded from their current employer into Knowsley. All affected staff have been given an opportunity to attend consultation events together with their Trade Union representatives. As part of the stakeholder events staff have influenced how AiM will operate and have assisted in developing the Brand. No staff have been displaced or have been unsuccessful in securing a role within AiM.
- 5.10 AiM will in time operate using a single data base and record system. Work is underway to develop this system with the current IT provider. In the mean time staff in AiM will adopt the agile working practice used in Knowsley and will be issued with the same equipment provided to children social care and family first staff in Knowsley. This will enable practitioners to work remotely and across the regional footprint when required. The office location for AiM will be at the New Hutte Centre in Halewood. This centre has been equipped with 30 hot desks and will operate as the administrative centre for AiM. Inter-Country Adoptions will continue to be a commissioned as a specialist service. The premises will be sub leased to Knowsley Council from the Torrington Drive Community Association.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

- 6.1.1 The current annual Budget of the Adoption service in Wirral is £0.697m excluding support service recharges such as Finance, IT and other central recharges and will be updated in 2018/19 to take account of pay awards.

6.1.2 At the current time the funding arrangement will be for all four authorities to contribute their existing budget to the RAA. There are some additional costs arising as a result of the creation of the new Agency, the cost of this is £0.155m in total for all four Local Authorities, the costs relate to information technology, premises costs and the cost of the new head of service for the RAA. Wirral's additional contribution and costs for the additional support workers required is £0.11m and will be met from the additional resources identified within the Children's Services Budget. It is envisaged that these additional costs will be need to be met for at least the first two years of operation. During the two year period AiM will need to undertake a service review to identify any efficiencies arising from the new ways of working.

6.2 Other Resource Implications

6.2.1 All existing Adoption team employees will be seconded into Knowsley as host of AiM on their current conditions of service and continue to be paid by their home local authority.

6.2.2 Each local authority has carried out a service review in order to confirm which roles and employees should be seconded to the RAA City Region Agency. All relevant employees have attended a number of stakeholder events since September 2016 and have had the opportunity to air any concerns and questions with their own senior managers and their trade union representatives. Formal consultation is now concluded.

6.2.3 AiM will see colleagues from the four local authorities working as a single team. The team will adopt agile working and be issued with IT equipment that is portable and can be used in client homes, employee homes and anywhere else that is required. The office location for AiM will be established at the New Hutte Centre in Halewood and this will be equipped with 30 hot desks.

6.2.4 The agile nature of the work requires the employees to be able to access all IT services from any location. Funding for the investment in IT and other equipment has come from the Department of Education project budget. An IT plan, led by the IT workstream lead is being implemented for the new service along with the purchase of an electronic and bespoke regional adoption case management system.

6.2.5 The Hub base will be at New Hutte in Halewood. The premises will be sub leased to Knowsley Council from Torrington Drive Community Association who have instructed solicitors to manage the completion of the lease in conjunction with Legal services in Knowsley. Staff will be able to work in New Hutte by either using a hot desk or break out area and will be expected to be at the hub base regularly to be able to build the shared regional service effectively. All staff will be expected to attend team meetings and training and development sessions. Staff will also continue to have access to Local Authority premises when they need to attend meetings with Local Authority colleagues or adopters or are required to complete functions within their home Local Authority.

6.2.6 Work has been completed to ensure the new Hub base is sufficiently networked and enabled to meet the demands of the City Region Agency and to make certain that the relevant employees have access to new equipment which will allow them to work agilely from a variety of settings.

6.2.7 The new Agency will work on a hub and spoke model. The Hub will be sited at New Hutte in Halewood and the spokes will be the current local authorities' office buildings.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 A number of documents have been produced to reflect the agreed governance, management and operating principles.

8.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed on the implications of the Regional Adoption Agency and identified that there is largely a positive impact. The creation of the service will enable improved performance.

8.2 The proposed model will provide greater opportunities for children with diverse needs to be matched with adopters more promptly due there being access to wider resources.

9.0 COMMUNICATION ISSUES

9.1 A communication strategy is in place to support the development and implementation of the RAA. To date, stakeholders (including partner agencies, adopters and staff) have been engaged in the co-creation of the Agency. There will be a formal launch of the Agency in early 2018. There will continue to be a need to communicate regularly with the affected workforce and this is currently being undertaken through team meetings and formal stakeholder events.

10.0 RELEVANT RISKS

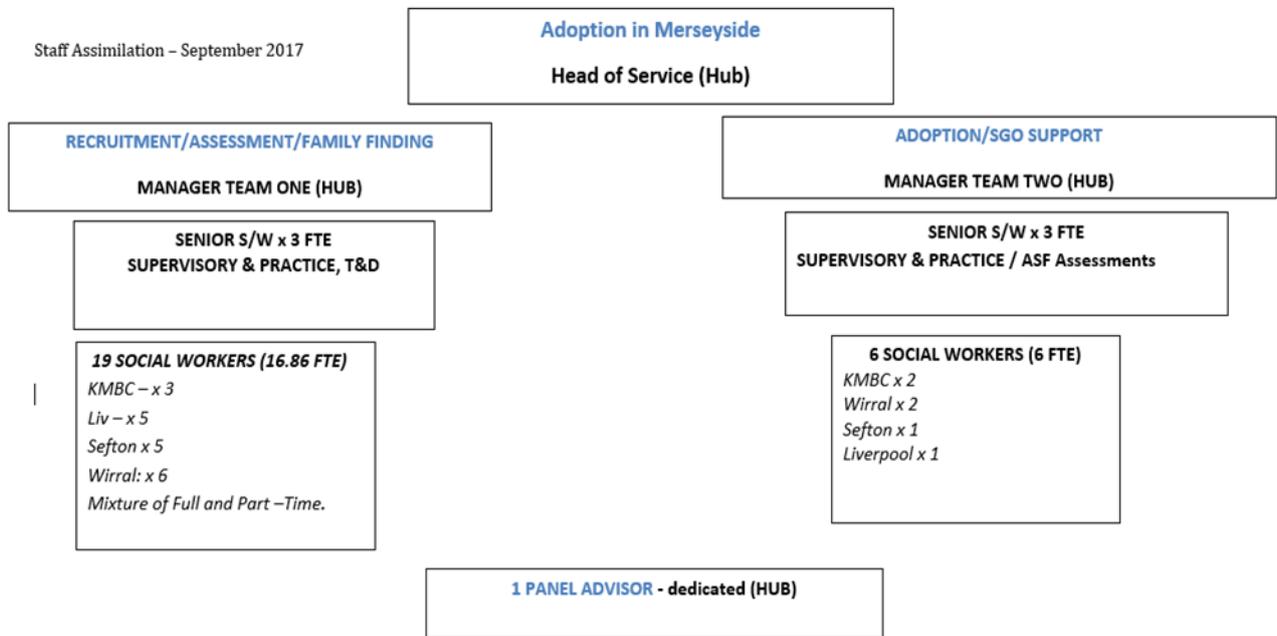
10.1 A risk log is monitored and updated as part of the project. This is reported to the Strategic Board on a regular basis.

REPORT AUTHOR: Simone White
Deputy Director: Children's Care Services
Telephone: 0151 666 4293
Email: simonewhite@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Regional Staffing Structure and Functions of Adoption in Merseyside

Staff Assimilation - September 2017



STAFF WORKING ACROSS BOTH TEAMS

SUPPORT WORKERS – (SUPERVISED BY SENIOR S/W) 10.63
PANEL ADMIN /BUSINESS SUPPORT / MARKETING (HUB) 2.5 (x 1 Panel x 1.5 Business Support)

