



CHILDREN AND LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE 27 February 2018

Subject Heading:

Regionalisation of adoption services in London & the Adoption Support Fund

SLT Lead:

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Policy context:

Development of adoption services in the UK in light of the governments legislation.

SUMMARY

This report seeks to update Havering's Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee about Havering's involvement in the regionalisation of adoption services in London and give an overview of the Adoption Support Fund that is available for all local authorities with adoption support services.

The number of children adopted has fallen in London, and economies of scale are needed, as well as an improvement in the consistency of adoption support services across London. Adoption performance across London is variable and adoption costs can vary from £34,000 to as much as £75,000 per adoption.

Havering is part of the East London Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) which includes Barking and Dagenham; Newham; Waltham Forest and Tower Hamlets. As a local authority, Havering has expressed an intention to host the East London RAA. Local Authorities within the East Region support this approach.

This report will set out the current vision and function of the East London RAA and will in principle seek approval to pursue the strategy of not only joining but being the lead authority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The Sub-Committee to note in principle that Havering will participate in and lead the East London RAA.***

- 2. A further detailed report to be produced outlining progress, risk and expectation to seek formal permission for Havering to lead and participate in the East London RAA.***

REPORT DETAIL

Regional Adoption Agencies

Background

The Government has set the deadline for local authorities joining a RAA by 2020. An in principle agreement for Havering to lead the East London RAA will enable the business case to be explored further, and allow timely request for the final decision to proceed to be made without compromising Havering's ability to discharge statutory duties in relation to adoption.

The government's focus on the adoption services in the UK viewed the current system for children and families as:

- highly fragmented
- operating at a very small scale
- unable to make the best use of the national supply of potential adopters
- more vulnerable to peaks and troughs in the flow of children
- not cost effective or efficient

The Department for Education (DfE) paper, Regionalising Adoption (2015) proposed the move to regional adoption agencies. The Vision is to ensure the voice of children and adopters is at the heart of policy making and service delivery.

A Regional Adoption Agency being:

- Local authorities adoption services joining together,
- Voluntary adoption agencies joining local authorities or
- Potentially adoption services operating **outside** of local authority control.
- Regional adoption agencies to be at the forefront of excellent and innovative practice, taking the opportunity of setting up a new system to redesign ways of working.
- Regional adoption agencies to deliver all adopter recruitment, matching and support function

The benefits of moving to the RAA

- Speed up matching
- Improve adopter recruitment and adoption support
- Access to more potential adopters

- Reduce costs / increase efficiencies around savings
- Improve the life chances of vulnerable children.
- Reduce risk of post code lottery
- Offer more resilience to service from the scale or volume

Local improvements

- Havering can improve performance and practice inconsistencies
- Improve the strategic management of the service
- Improve the strategic development of adoption services
- Create a powerful regional voice for adoption
- Ensure a culture of excellence in adoption practice

The government has reinforced their policy ambition through provisions in the Education and Adoption Bill.

Through the document Adoption: A Vision for Change, the DfE highlighted the need to draw on the best of both the statutory and voluntary sectors to ensure that systems are designed around the needs of children. It also reinforced the vision to ensure that the voice of children and adopters is at the heart of policy making and service delivery.

What does this mean for London?

Following the publication of the DfE's paper the Department invited councils and Voluntary Adoption Agencies to submit Expressions of Interest in becoming part of new regionalised arrangements. In response, the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) submitted a London proposition in late 2015. The DfE subsequently approved the ALDCS proposition as a "scope and define" project.

The Project at that time represented by the ALDCS consisted of:

Local Authorities

Barking & Dagenham, Barnet, Bexley, Brent, Bromley, Camden, City of London, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith & Fulham, Haringey, Harrow, **Havering**, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea, Kingston-upon-Thames, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, **Newham**, Redbridge, Richmond-upon-Thames, Southwark, Sutton, **Tower Hamlets**, **Waltham Forest**, Wandsworth, and Westminster.

Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) & adoption Support Agencies:

Action for Children,

Adoption Plus
Barnardo's
Coram
Family Futures
Intercountry Adoption Centre
PACT
PAC-UK
SSAFA
TACT

Other organisations:

London Councils (hosting project management)

National Academy for Parenting Research

Kings College London and National Adoption and Fostering Clinic

South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (LAB member)

Adoption UK

The ALDCS set up and chaired a Regionalisation Project Steering Group that has driven the development of the initial recommendations outlined in Project proposal. The Regionalisation Steering Group sits under the governance of ALDCS and makes operational decisions to drive the project forward. An ALDCS reference group (5 DCS members) has also been set up to support the Regionalisation Steering Group Chair with ensuring that the views of London as a whole are represented at a senior level.

In 2016 ALDCS Regionalisation Project Steering Group in conjunction with the London adoption Leadership Board put together the Vision for London document which looked at:

The Opportunity for London

- Highlighting a focus on achieving the best outcomes for all London's children in need of an adoptive placement and reducing any current postcode lottery of provision across the capital.

Outcome performance for children and adoptive families

- It showed that based on the current outcome performance (2015/16), the majority of London boroughs do not achieve the national average waiting time from entry to care to moving in, and there is wide variation in performance on this metric and the timeline from placement order to matching.

Cost and efficiency performance

- For local authorities, the vision cites a need to support cost efficient and effective delivery that enables future flexibility.
- The cost of adoption per child varied greatly
- It showed for local authority adoption agencies that adoption is a very small service within many boroughs, which may result in inefficiencies and may reduce focus on this area within staff training and development.

Development of the service and the potential delivery models

The Regionalisation Steering Group considered a number of options for the delivery model, and recommended two for further investigation. In order to be able to advise London's local authorities, ALDCS sought legal advice regarding the proposed London scheme. In addition, they held two events for elected members, as well as engagement with adopters, prospective adopters, and adopted young people.

The following delivery vehicles were considered as part of the options appraisal process at either the pan-London level or the creation of multiple regional agencies:

- Single LA hosting on behalf of other LAs
- New LA owned entity (LA Trading Company)
- LA-VAA joint venture
- Outsourcing to existing London VAAs

Within the above delivery models, a number of structures were considered:

- Fully centralised: a single London body
- Hub and spoke: central hub for London-wide co-ordination, commissioning and delivery, with sub-regional spokes for delivery and local commissioning under the same organisation.
- Tiered approach: top strategic tier, second strategic/ operational tier, third delivery tier.
- As-Is Plus: current arrangement with more formalised partnerships.

After receiving legal advice in regards to the various models and the implications for local authorities, stakeholder involvement looking at London's delivery model and potential structure The Regionalisation Project Steering Group recommended that the model be a LA trading company delivery model with a strategic VAA partnership operating in a hub and spoke structure.

Where are we now?

With the support of the Regionalisation Project Steering Group London is now working on the development of four local authority hosted regions and a central regional hub.

Each region will be a fully functioning regional adoption agency in its own right with its own governing body consisting of members from the local authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies in that region.

Each region has been tasked to:

- Breakdown of Agency adoption costs
- Recruitment of project manager for each region
- Develop a Communication's group/lead, IT group/lead and HR group/lead for the region, which will feed into the central hub and project group.

Havering Focus

Havering has proposed to lead the RAA for the East Region. Pooled and dedicated services for adoption will deliver better outcomes for children through:

- Ability to share best practice
- Stronger leadership
- Services become more resilient
- Promote consistency in report writing, assessments and court work
- As part of establishing the East London RAA the following will be considered:
- To promote staff engagement and consider the delivery model (Business case being put together)
- Need to consider the creation of sufficient political consensus
- Need to understand the political context in which RAA will be delivered
- HR and legal – how will this be aligned across the LAs (Terms & Conditions)
- Staff – will they all sit in one place or remain within their respective boroughs
- Management and supervision of staff
- Financial contributions towards RAA
- Ofsted position in inspecting RAAs
- Recruitment and engagement with potential adopters
- Exploration of placements for children with complex physical needs
- Governance arrangements and engagement with lead members across the RAA
- Consultation with Specialists to advise and guide service offer/ structures
- Use of adopter /adoptee feedback to shape service provision

Havering will be working in corporation with other local authorities within the East London region. This means there will be less competition and more collaboration,

which will provide greater scope for financial efficiencies and significantly improve outcomes for children and young people. Within the court arena, a RAA should be in a position to promote a more coherent and joined up working with the courts.

An Overview of the Adoption Support Fund

In May 2015 in support of local authorities and adoptive families in need of support services, the government set up the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). The fund, initially worth £19.3 million is for adoptive in need of therapeutic services, such as cognitive therapy, play and music therapy, and intensive family support – helping children to recover from their previous experiences and attach or maintain this attachment with their adoptive families during their childhood/young adult years.

The Fund is available for children up to, and including, the age of 18 (or 25 with a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education Health & Care Plan), who have been adopted from local authority care in England or adopted from Wales but are living in England. The ASF is intended to complement and not substitute the post order support services from local authorities.

Access to the ASF is made via a local authority completing an assessment of need for families requiring support. The summary of support need is then the basis of an application to the ASF which is completed online. All interventions paid for by the ASF will have to meet identified outcomes.

Due to the success of the fund which showed a high demand for therapeutic support services for adoptive families and their children, the government agreed to continue funding the ASF till 2020 and an additional £2m was made available to support families and their children for 2016/17. A cap of £5,000 per family was put in place and where there was a need for an application above this, it is now required local authorities agree to jointly match fund anything over the £5,000 cap.

In 2017/18 the ASF has been opened up to children in special guardianship placements in need of therapeutic support. In August 2017 the DfE published a report (*The Evaluation of the Adoption support Fund*) highlighting the success of The Fund. The report reported that so far £52m had been released through the fund so far, reaching 22,000 children and 18,000 families.

Summary

Havering's Adoption and Support service has one part time worker offering post order support services for both adoptive and SGO families. Requests from Havering families for therapeutic support from the ASF are growing year on year. Referral from special guardianship families is still low but is expected to increase in Havering as families are informed and the review of SGO families is embedded as a service within the Adoption and Permanence Team.

The Government's commitment to the fund continues until March 2020. The nationwide success of the fund has shown the need by families for therapeutic support services many of which are not available through local authority adoption support services. This is particularly the case for small service provisions such as Havering's. London's future RAA will potentially offer a strategic approach to supporting post order families but due to the level of need, complexity and cost of therapeutic support there is still an expectation that the services offered by the new RAAs will still need support from a fund such as the ASF.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

There are currently no implications to report as this report is for noting only

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None