

Report to:	Cabinet	Date of Meeting:	4 November 2021
Subject:	Adoption in Merseyside (AIM) extension of contract		
Report of:	Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member - Children's Social Care		
Is this a Key Decision:	Yes	Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

This report is to obtain agreement to the extension of the partnership agreement for AIM (Adoption in Merseyside) until 31 March 2022 and note that the partnership arrangements will be subject to a full review before any new arrangements are put in place.

Recommendation(s):

- (1) The current partnership agreement for AIM (Adoption in Merseyside) be extended until 31 March 2022; and
- (2) Note that the partnership arrangements going forward will be the subject of a review and will be the subject to a further report to Cabinet in due course.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

The current partnership agreement expired on 31 March 2021 and arrangements to extend the agreement were not implemented due to the impact of Covid-19.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

None

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

Sefton Council's share of the regional adoption agency's total costs is £0.524m. This has been captured and agreed within the financing model for the 21/22 financial year, per the 21/22 Budget Paper taken to the AiM Strategic Board on 26th March 2021. As such, the adoption costs associated directly with AiM for the remainder of 21/22 are expected to be kept within existing budget.

A review of the funding formula might impact on the budget contributions that each authority makes but this will be undertaken in consultation with the relevant finance officers from each authority.

(B) Capital Costs

There are no additional capital costs associated with this paper.

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets): There are no resource implications as the service hosted by Wirral council	
Legal Implications: none	
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.	
Climate Emergency Implications: The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	N
Have a neutral impact	Y
Have a negative impact	N
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Y

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: Children's social care department protects those children who are most vulnerable and require protection through Child in Need, Child Protection and Looked After plans including those children that go on to be adopted.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities:n/a
Commission, broker and provide core services:n/a
Place – leadership and influencer:n/a

Drivers of change and reform:n/a
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity:n/a
Greater income for social investment: n/a
Cleaner Greener n/a

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.6541/21) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.4742/21) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

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Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In April 2017, Cabinet gave approval for the creation of Regional Adoption Service in Merseyside. At this time, it was agreed that Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, and Wirral would form an agency with Knowsley acting as host. It was agreed that the agency would operate in shadow form during 2017/18 and then became fully operational on 1 April 2018.
- 1.2 At this time a three-year partnership agreement was entered into and this expired on 31 March 2021. Due to the pandemic it has not been possible to review this arrangement. The other councils who form part of AiM, are seeking to keep the contract for a further year. It is recommended that the existing partnership arrangements are extended until 31 March 2022 whilst a review of the arrangements takes place. A further report will be brought back to consider the future partnership arrangements.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Adoption in Merseyside (AIM) was formally launched on 1 April 2018 and is the Regional Adoption Agency for Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, and Wirral. Knowsley is the host authority. AiM's governance arrangements were put in place which included a strategic board chaired by a Director of Children's Services and attendance from the Assistant Executive Directors from the other three authorities. There is also an operational management group consisting of the Heads of Service responsible for adoption in the respective authorities.
- 3.2 As the partnership agreement has now lapsed. It is recommended that an initial twelve-month extension is put in place whilst a wider review of the service and existing arrangement is undertaken.
- 3.3 The areas for review are as follows:
 - Review the host arrangements of AIM that will be in place from 01 April 2022
 - Review of the Governance arrangements, including Terms of Reference and Governance Structure. The existing arrangements will be distributed to Board Members for review.
 - Review of support service arrangements. When AIM was created each of the authorities agreed to provide some support service functions. It is now appropriate to review the support service arrangements to ensure the host can fully support AIM.
 - A review will be undertaken of the partnership agreements to ensure they are fit for purpose. This will include a review of the funding model that underpins AIM.