
Report to:	Cabinet	Date of Meeting:	25 May 2017
Subject:	Regionalisation of Adoption in Merseyside	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Report of:	Director of Social Care and Health		
Is this a Key Decision?	Yes/	Is it included in the Forward Plan?	Yes/
Exempt/Confidential	No		

Purpose/Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with supporting information behind the national drive to create Regional Adoption Agencies across England and to set out the proposed model for the Merseyside Regional Adoption Agency across Knowsley, Wirral, Sefton and Liverpool.

Recommendation(s)

1. Endorse the proposed model for the Knowsley, Wirral, Sefton and Liverpool Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) including the recommendation that local authority staff are seconded into the RAA.
2. Note the intention for the new model to move into shadow arrangements during the third quarter of 2017 and go live in January 2018.
3. Approve the proposal to use the name AIM (Adoption in Merseyside) as the brand for the RAA going forward.

How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Objectives?

	<u>Corporate Objective</u>	<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community	x		
2	Jobs and Prosperity	x		
3	Environmental Sustainability		x	
4	Health and Well-Being	x		
5	Children and Young People	x		
6	Creating Safe Communities	x		
7	Creating Inclusive Communities	x		
8	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening Local		x	

	Democracy			
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Reasons for the Recommendation:

In June 2015 the Department for Education (DfE) published a White Paper that proposed local authorities should create Regional Agencies by 2020 (Regionalising Adoption- June 2015). The White Paper set out an expectation that local authorities should form firm proposals, in partnership with their voluntary partners, to align adoption services into a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). The Government commitment to this approach was developed further in the Education and Adoption Act 2016 which give the government the power to direct a local authority to enter into a RAA if it has not done so by the end of 2017

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

N/A

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

It is intended that costs associated with the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) will be met from existing adoption budgets. The exact cost of Sefton’s contribution towards the RAA is still to be agreed but it is anticipated that this will not require additional resources over and above those currently budgeted for within Sefton’s Adoption Service.

(B) Capital Costs

N/A

Implications:

The following implications of this proposal have been considered and where there are specific implications, these are set out below:

Financial	
Legal	
Human Resources	
Equality	
1. No Equality Implication	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Equality Implications identified and mitigated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Equality Implication identified and risk remains	<input type="checkbox"/>

Impact of the Proposals on Service Delivery:

The development of the Regional Adoption Agency will mean that Sefton Council will no longer operate as an adoption agency. The impact for local citizens will be minimized through a hub and spoke model with a regional hub base and a flexible spoke that will enable continued presence of the adoption service in each of the four local authority areas. The regionalisation of adoption is intended to reduce inefficiencies and the duplication of effort and create a system that better supports children whose best interests are served by adoption.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

The Head of Corporate Resources (FD 4620/17) and the Head of Regulation and Compliance (LD.3903/17) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

Informal consultation has been ongoing with all staff that are directly affected by the proposals. This will move to formal consultation with staff and Joint Trade Unions following Cabinet.

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Committee/Council/meeting.

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Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 Background to the regionalisation of adoption services.

In June 2015 the Department for Education (DfE) published a White Paper that proposed local authorities should create Regional Agencies by 2020 (Regionalising Adoption- June 2015). The White Paper set out an expectation that local authorities should form firm proposals, in partnership with their voluntary partners, to align adoption services into a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). The Government commitment to this approach was developed further in the Education and Adoption Act 2016 which give the government the power to direct a local authority to enter into a RAA if it has not done so by the end of 2017.

The White Paper set out the rationale for regionalisation based on an analysis of the current system which was described as fragmented and confusing. There are for example around 180 agencies (local authority and voluntary agencies) recruiting and matching adopters for only 5000 children per year.

The regionalisation of adoption is therefore intended to reduce inefficiencies and the duplication of effort and create a system that better supports children whose best interests are served by adoption.

2. Aims and objectives of a Merseyside Regional Adoption Agency

2.1 The key aims

- To match children who have adoption as their plan with an adoptive family that meets their needs in a timely manner.
- Ensure that all those affected by adoption receive the information, support and advice that they need to understand the adoption journey.
- Ensure that families are well prepared, enabled and supported to care for the children with plans for adoption.

The Merseyside RAA will focus on improving the child's journey through the adoption process and look to deliver high standards of practice delivered across all four local authority areas which in turn will lead to better outcomes for the child and adopter. These aims will be achieved through:

- The development of early placement finding processes which enable consistent planning and identification of children across the four local authorities.
- The recruitment of sufficient numbers of well prepared and resilient potential adopters by offering improved support and training through sharing and pooling resources.
- The further development and increased use of early permanence options such as concurrency and Fostering to Adopt.

- The development of a regional approach to the commissioning of the right levels and type of support for adopters and children from the beginning to build a thriving family environment.
- The development of a national infrastructure for recruitment and matching which will complement the working practices of the RAA.
- An increase in the potential for efficiencies and increased focus on the needs of children by sharing business processes, optimising the use of existing staffing resource and minimising the duplication of tasks.
- The development of a powerful regional voice for adopters and children to enable their full engagement in the coproduction of emerging and improved services within the RAA.

2.2 Key objectives:

- To be an effective, innovative and high performing service.
- To be efficient in management and operational structures.
- To commission strategically to support the work of the RAA.

2.3 The Merseyside Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

The proposal to develop a Knowsley, Wirral Sefton and Liverpool RAA was approved by the DfE in early 2016. Since then extensive work has been carried out through a Strategic Board consisting of senior staff from each agency and chaired by the Executive Director (Children) from Knowsley.

The Board has developed and tested a number of potential models for the RAA. This work has been managed by an interim manager for the RAA who was appointed in September 2016, a full time programme manager and project support assistant who were appointed in November 2016. Additional support was procured from Price Waterhouse Cooper who were brought in between September and November 2016 to complete a time limited piece of work scoping and assessing current services. They produced an in depth report which was presented to the strategic board in November.

The programme has been managed through eight separate work streams each with a lead and membership across the local authorities. The work streams meet monthly and are as follow:

- Information Technology-Knowsley
- Human Resources-Wirral
- Commissioning and Performance-Knowsley
- Finance-Liverpool
- Estates-Liverpool
- Communications-Liverpool
- Legal-Liverpool
- Operational Delivery-Knowsley
- Learning and Development-Sefton

The outcome of this work is a proposal that the RAA is hosted by Liverpool and that the governance, commissioning and performance management of the RAA is by Knowsley.

There has been full engagement at a senior level from each of the four local authorities during the development stage and from the commissioned voluntary adoption agencies. There is a consensus view that the above model is the best fit for the Merseyside RAA and this view is supported by the DfE.

All the above work and additional capacity has been funded by the DfE and in total £500k has been made available to ensure the project is delivered within agreed timescales.

2.4 The scope of the Merseyside RAA

The service will be delivered as a Hub and Spoke model with a regional hub base (yet to be determined) and a flexible spoke that will enable the continued presence of the adoption service in each of the four local authority areas to enable the service to work effectively with the other social work staff in the locality.

The main functions that will be delivered by staff in the Merseyside RAA from a Hub base will be:

- Recruitment of adopters and central access point
- Marketing
- Adoption panel and admin of panel
- Training and development of staff
- Pre and Post approval training(adopters)
- Management and supervision of staff
- Collection of data and management of performance
- Tracking, linking and matching of children
- Adoption support (arranged centrally but delivered locally)
- Special Guardianship order support for Liverpool and Wirral (not financial support)
- Regional commissioning of VAA support services

Activity continuing in the local authority areas:

- Continued relationships with children's social care teams
- Adoption support delivery
- Links with VAA commissioned services
- Early identification and tracking
- Selection/ matching
- Family finding activity

Inter country Adoptions will continue to be a commissioned specialist service and Step parent adoptions will remain within the local authority.

2.5 Potential name for the Merseyside Regional Adoption Agency

Across the country regional adoption agencies are starting to name themselves to give them a sense of regional and organisational identity. Names have been kept simple and

all include adoption as part of their name. At a staff stakeholder event in January 2017 a suggestion was made to senior managers that the new entity should be called AIM-Adoption in Merseyside. This suggestion was taken to the strategic board in February and is now being recommended to Members.

2.6 Human Resources

It is recommended that relevant members of staff are seconded into the Merseyside RAA on their current conditions of service and will continue to be paid by their home authority. Each local authority has carried out a service review and decided which roles and staff members should move over to the RAA. All staff have attended a number of stakeholder events since September 2016 and have had the opportunity to air their concerns and questions with their own senior managers, RAA managers and their union representative

Formal consultation by the HR workstream representatives will begin with staff in April 2017. The HR workstream is also looking at the development of a secondment agreement that is suitable for the development of the MRAA.

Staff who do not wish to work in the Merseyside RAA will be able to speak to their own senior managers and their home authority will decide what alternative employment/ other options are open to them. It is unlikely that redundancies will be an option as there will be vacancies to fill in the children's social care teams as a default option.

The HR workstream are also looking at the Job Descriptions for the main roles within the Merseyside RAA and what the differences and similarities are between them.

The operational development workstream has produced a staffing structure of the Merseyside RAA which has been shared with all staff and senior managers within the local authority areas. At this point it is not known whether staff will be required to apply for ring fenced roles within the Merseyside RAA or whether they will be expected to express a preference and interest in the role and area of adoption they wish to fill and be allocated a role accordingly. In the first year of the Merseyside RAA the staffing structure reflects the current staffing levels and roles that currently exist within the four local authority teams. It is expected, however, that in the first year of the Merseyside RAA there will be further consultation with staff and partners to look at reviewing the model of service based on an increased understanding of activity and need as a regional service which will be evaluated regularly by the Head of Service and the Strategic Board.

2.7 Financial Implications

The Finance workstream is reviewing the financial resources and associated costs of the current staffing structures. Agreement has been made at the strategic board that all four areas will put in their current budget allocation for staff for the first year. A future funding model for the Merseyside RAA is yet to be agreed. There are a number of options for funding that are being looked at across the country by RAA's. The DfE has not been prescriptive about how the ongoing funding of the RAA's should be determined other than that they need to be affordable and sustainable. The resource needed for administrative staff within the RAA is also still being reviewed.

It is proposed that in Year One the Merseyside RAA will be cost neutral in terms of staffing and that in Years two and three the agency will look for areas where efficiencies can be created due to streamlining and innovation of services and reduction of duplication of effort across the four LA areas.

The strategic board is also considering what additional, short term, financial resources are required to support the transfer of staff into another building and to fund additional corporate and infrastructure costs for the agency as it moves into a regional service.. The

finance workstream is also analysing the terms and conditions of the project grant funding from the DfE to ensure that the funding is used most effectively across the programme areas.

2.8 I.T issues

There are a number of key issues that the IT workstream for the Programme are managing and which are ongoing. They are:

- Ensuring that the hub base is sufficiently networked and enabled to meet the demands of the Merseyside RAA.
- Ensuring that staff have access to new IT equipment that allows them to work agilely from a variety of settings and to ensure they have secure access to the network from sites outside of local authority buildings.
- To work with Liquid Logic to develop an integrated IT system that allows the RAA to be able to track and manage the regional adoption processes as well as ensure that they retain sufficient access to the systems they require in their local authority areas.
- To ensure that staff have sufficient training and support in the new IT system and equipment to enable them to work effectively once they move into the Merseyside RAA

2.9 Physical Assets

Each local authority team currently houses its own adoption team. The Estates work stream has identified the following criteria to support the selection of the hub site.

- A location that is accessible by car and public transport for staff, adopters and partners that takes into account the need for some staff who may be travelling a further distance than their own LA base.
- Space to house 35+ staff plus on a hot desking basis.
- Meeting room space and room to hold training and events for adopters.
- A customer facing area/ reception and a building that is able to be opened outside of usual working hours.
- Access to some parking on site.
- A building that houses other services/ partners that will complement and enhance the work of the Merseyside RAA.

A number of site options were under consideration and a decision on the site has been reached by the Strategic Board. The site is rooms within the New Hutte Centre in Halewood, which is situated within the borough of Knowsley. The site already houses a children's centre and day nursery. Negotiations with the landlord of the building are underway to agree terms and final costs around accommodation.

2.10 Performance and Risks

The bringing together of four separate adoption services into a single entity is complex and not without risk.

Much progress has been made but there are still some key decisions for the Merseyside RAA to make. They are:

- To agree terms and costs for the hub base.
- The finalisation of what financial and Human Resources will be put into the agency by each local authority area in Year 1.

- The nature of the secondment arrangements.
- The appointment of a permanent Head of Service.

To ensure that these risks are managed a central risk log has been developed for the programme which is RAG rated, updated regularly and reported upon at the strategic board. The DfE are also providing national seminars and a Consultant acting as a coach to support RAA's to work through the complexities of bringing together adoption teams and managing the transition from local to regional working.

The Commissioning and Performance workstream will be focusing on developing a detailed service specification for the Merseyside RAA and a performance framework which will be crucial to be able to evaluate and hold to account the developing RAA in its first year and beyond.

2.11 Conclusion

It is the expectation of central government that there will be a RAA in Merseyside and across England by 2020. This report proposes a model for the Merseyside RAA and sets out the benefits this will bring to children, adopters and to the local authorities involved.