

<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet Pre Agenda	<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	Thursday 21 September 2017
<b>Subject:</b>	Update on Regionalisation of Adoption - Adoption in Merseyside		
<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Social Care and Health	<b>Wards Affected:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Cabinet Member - Children, Schools and Safeguarding		
<b>Is this a Key Decision:</b>	Yes	<b>Included in Forward Plan:</b>	Yes /
<b>Exempt / Confidential Report:</b>	No		

### Summary:

The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with further information regarding the level of service provision within Sefton, following approval by Cabinet on 25<sup>th</sup> May 17 for the proposed model for the Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), known as AIM (Adoption in Merseyside).

### Recommendation(s):

(1) A Final report regarding the proposed establishment of the Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption in Merseyside is provided to Cabinet on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017.

### Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

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: (including any Risk Implications)

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.

Negotiations are continuing to finalise the costing model for the new RAA and Finance officers are involved in supplying the data required towards Sefton's contribution to the new service. The Council's contribution will be within the existing budget resource levels for adoption. There are no direct risks to the Council as a result of this, however should the new RAA be successful it may lead to expansion of the service, and further requirement for additional contributions from each District Council. The new RAA however may also bring some positive economies of scale to bear helping to bring costs down for adoption and helping place children more permanently across the region.

A draft risk share agreement is currently being considered and this will be finalised in due course. This will set out responsibilities of each party and assess how all risks in relation to the agency will be managed.. All financial monitoring and reporting for the RAA will be performed by Liverpool Council and will be taken through a Governance board on a regular basis. Many of these details are yet to be finalised and agreed collectively, however they should be in place by November. Finance will continue to work with Officers from the Districts to ensure a smooth transition and minimisation of risks.

## **(B) Capital Costs**

N/A

### **Implications of the Proposals:**

<b>Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):</b>
<b>Legal Implications:</b>
<b>Equality Implications:</b>  The equality Implications have been identified and mitigated.

### **Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:**

Protect the most vulnerable: Ensuring that we are able to provide high quality service to children who have a plan of adoption.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: Supporting Sefton residents who wish to become adopters

Commission, broker and provide core services: This is a core service and the proposal should strengthen current arrangements.
Place – leadership and influencer: N/A
Drivers of change and reform: This is an opportunity to collaborate, share best practice and improve service delivery.
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 Head of Corporate Resources (FD 4840/17.) and Head of Regulation and Compliance (LD 4124/17) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

#### **(B) External Consultations Implementation Date for the Decision**

Following the expiry of the “call-in” period for the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting

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#### **Appendices:**

There are no appendices to this report

#### **Background Papers:**

There are no background papers available for inspection.

Cabinet Report and Decision of 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017

## **1. Introduction/Background**

1.1 In June 2015 the Department for Education (DfE) published a White Paper that proposed local authorities should create Regional Agencies by 2020 (Regionalising Adoption- June2015). 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. A report was provided to Cabinet on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017 setting out the proposals for the Regional Adoption Agency, its Aims and Objectives and proposed model and a final report will be provided for Cabinet on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 17.

On 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017 Cabinet agreed three recommendations Subject to the Director of Social Care and Health submitting a further report to the Cabinet clarifying the level of service provision within the Sefton, :

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.

## **2. The Level of Service Provision in Sefton**

2.1 There will continue to be a significant presence of adoption social workers within Sefton. It will remain essential that adoption social workers work closely with the child's social worker to ensure the best possible match for children. All Social workers within the Regional Adoption Agency will be supported with agile working with the provision of tablet computers and mobile phones.

The adoption assessment process for potential adopters is predominantly undertaken in adopters homes and this will continue.

Commissioning of services to support adoption will be undertaken centrally but delivered locally, this includes adoption support services.

Marketing information will reflect the fact that the RAA is delivering the service on behalf of the four Local Authorities.

The role of the Agency Decision Maker in decisions regarding approval of adopters, Children who should be placed for adoption and matching decisions will remain with Sefton, (This role is currently undertaken by Vicky Buchanan, Head of Children's Social Care).

The RAA will coordinate regular correspondence with Adopters through Newsletters and information on its own website and will facilitate the creation of support groups in each of the Local Authority areas.

Collaborative working is not new in terms of how we deliver adoption services. Sefton and Wirral have been working collaboratively over a number of years, sharing adopter preparation groups with Sefton adopters travelling to Wirral events and vice versa. This gives adopters more choice and timely access to groups.

The development of the RAA has the potential to build on these strengths, offering potential adopters more choice and increased access to preparation groups, information sessions etc. It should also improve the timeliness of decision making, for example Adoption Panels will be held weekly, (currently monthly in Sefton), this should improve the experience of both children and adopters.

### **3. Governance arrangements**

More detail on the governance arrangements will be available in the November report to cabinet as they are in the process of being finalised. However Sefton will continue to have significant input into the ongoing development of the RAA to ensure that it continues to meet Local Need. The Head of Children's Social Care is on the Strategic Board where decisions and recommendations are made. The Service Manager for Corporate Parenting is on the Operational Board and will influence operational delivery with a strong commitment to Sefton Residents.