

Background

2. A policy paper from the DfE in January 2013 – ‘Further Action on Adoption: Finding More Loving Homes’ - identified the need for the re-organisation of the existing adoption system. The DfE’s ‘Regionalising Adoption’ paper published in June 2015 outlined the government’s expectations for all local authorities to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). In April 2016 the DfE published a new policy document “Adoption: A vision for Change” in which the government committed to deliver radical, whole system redesign by regionalising adoption services by ensuring all local authorities were part of an RAA by 2020. This is currently central government policy rather than a statutory requirement, but the Secretary of State has power to require this by Order (see Legal Implications (below)). The government was clear that Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) needed to form part of each RAA. The government’s aspiration is to improve efficiency and improve the pool of available adopters.

3. There are potential benefits in creating a RAA: it could enable the pooling of information about adopters and children waiting for adoption improve choice, it could speed up matching and placement, RAAs can also benefit from economies of scale, be more flexible and creative and form better partnerships with VAAs.

4. In response Coventry City Council, Solihull Metropolitan Council, Warwickshire County Council and Worcestershire County Council have come together to work towards the creation of a proposed Regional Adoption Agency that has been named Adoption Central England (ACE). The County Council was not directly involved with the initial project development, but has joined in for reasons of geographic and service similarities with Worcestershire. ACE has an established project team that is leading on the design. The work is overseen by a programme board and executive board, which has representatives from all the partner agencies and key stakeholders.

5. Other options with other local authorities were explored. Adoption West, made up from 6 local authorities (Wiltshire, Bath & North East Somerset, North Somerset,

Specialist knowledge, consultation and advice
Matching recommendations
RAA panels
Tracking children alongside the local authorities.

7. The primary functions for ACE however will be to work with the 4 local authorities to progress children's plans for adoption or through other routes to permanence, recruit adopters, and provide support to adopted children and their parents that is timely and meets their individual needs.

8. There is currently policy from Central Government for Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) to play a central role in any new RAA, but the Secretary of State has power to require this by Order. ACE has been developing its approach in

consider haste needs to be balanced with achieving the best outcome (for instance, deciding the detailed delivery arrangements prior to evaluating them). The target date will therefore need establishing as the project progresses, and will of course require Cabine

company model once up and running. The benefit of this is that an incremental development of this sort would help manage some of the risks (e.g. pension liabilities) of setting up a company from the outset.

services. Worcestershire's Adoption Service has an annual budget of £1.42m and 29.7 full-time equivalent staff. This is our total net contribution to the RAA. More work is planned through the project in exploring the financial implications of the shared service option in more detail. The finance work stream will be providing more detail on the costs and the different financial modelling options as the business case develops. This will include detailed work on the hosting arrangement to support each local authority to make an informed recommendation and decision.

27. Implication on support services and costs of a shared service will be explored more fully within the detailed business case, allowing a true picture of actual costs and benefits to each local authority.

28. The shared service option will need to be costed fully, to include the cost of support service and corporate functions, such as ICT, accommodation, HR, legal services, payroll and financial support. There will also be a need to understand the implications for fixed overheads which will remain the liability of the County Council post transfer. These "stranded" costs may be included within contracts for ICT, HR, Finance or accommodation and may not be easily reduced, even when the future delivery of these type of function will transfer to the RAA.

29. Each Local Authority uses different apportionment methodologies, has different terms and conditions and team structures, so more work will be needed to determine a viable service and budget structure.

30. The shared service model provides less risk to the Council and its current employees than the company model. The issue of cost of company set up, pension liabilities and associated tax and insurance liabilities under a company model were also key factors in the shared service being the preferred model to develop further.

31. It is acknowledged that at this stage, there is not sufficient detail available to advise fully on the costs/benefits. This information will become available as part of

