

13 January 2017

## **Regional adoption agencies**

### **Purpose**

For information.

### **Summary**

This paper provides a brief overview of recent work to establish regional adoption agencies across England, as background for a presentation by Mark Owers, Independent Professional Adviser to the Adoption Leadership Board. Mark will present emerging findings from work with the five demonstration projects over the past 12 months, before opening up for discussion with Members.

### **Recommendations**

The Children and Young People Board is asked to;

1. Note the current activity taking place to regionalise the adoption system
2. Feedback on emerging issues or areas of concern to inform the LGA's work on the Adoption Leadership Board.

### **Action**

Officers to take action as directed by members.

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## **Regional adoption agencies**

### **Background**

1. Adoption has become an increasingly high profile issue in recent years, with a number of initiatives underway aimed at improving the adoption system and making it easier to find permanent, loving homes for children who need them without unnecessary delay.
2. This work is driven by the government-led Adoption Leadership Board (ALB), which brings together central government, local authorities (including the LGA, represented by Cllr Chris Coleman) and voluntary adoption agencies in an attempt to drive improvements across the system.
3. Andrew Christie CBE became chair of the ALB in April 2016, replacing Sir Martin Narey, and has set three clear priorities for the coming year:
  - 3.1. Addressing the decline in numbers of children entering the adoption system
  - 3.2. The effective development and implementation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs)
  - 3.3. Defining the future of Adoption Support, particularly in a regionalised system.
4. The LGA has been supportive of this work, with local government central to recent improvements in areas such as timeliness, post-adoption support and the number of children waiting to be placed. While we have consistently cautioned that the strong focus on adoption must not come at the expense of other care options for young people, such as long-term fostering or special guardianship, we have been encouraged by the recent launch of a national fostering stocktake and moves to extend support for adopted children to those cared for under a Special Guardianship Order.
5. Last year, the government stated its intention for all local authorities to become part of a regional adoption agency (in practice, these are often sub-regional arrangements) by 2020, with reserve powers available to enforce compliance through the Education and Adoption Act 2016.
6. Nineteen RAAs are currently underway, involving 132 local authorities (see appendix A for details). Five of these arrangements have been categorised as Demonstration Projects, providing an opportunity for closer analysis of the opportunities and challenges presented by this programme. These projects are Adopt Central England (ACE); Aspire (Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole); Coram East; Greater Manchester; and Yorkshire & Humber.
7. Mark Owers, Independent Professional Adviser to the ALB, has been working closely with the Demonstration Projects, other RAA projects and national adoption stakeholders,

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and will present the emerging findings from the past 12 months before opening up for discussion with Members. The role of elected members in regional adoption agencies has been a particular focus at recent ALB meetings, and the LGA has consistently warned that some regional arrangements appear to have been pursued and agreed without sufficient engagement with elected members.

8. We would therefore welcome a broader discussion with CYP Board members on their view of regionalisation, the extent to which elected members have been involved in these developments locally, and any emerging issues to feedback to the ALB.

#### **Recommendation**

9. Members are asked to note the current activity taking place to regionalise the adoption system, and feedback on emerging issues or areas of concern to inform the LGA's work on the Adoption Leadership Board.

#### **Financial implications**

10. There are no specific additional financial implications for the LGA arising from this report.

#### **Implications for Wales**

11. As the Adoption Leadership Board covers England only, the above paper contains no implications for Wales.