



Impact Assessment

Assessment of:	Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency
Service:	Children's Services

Director of Children's Services	Julian Wooster
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Section 1 - Background

Description:	Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency is a development of adoption agencies in response to the Education and Adoption Act 2016 which advised authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to join together to form Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA). Devon County Council, as part of the Adopt South West partnership, is one of 19 groupings of local authorities and voluntary sector adoption agencies working on the regionalisation agenda nationally. The regional grouping also includes Plymouth, Torbay and Somerset.
Reason for change/review and options appraisal:	In June 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) published ' Regionalising Adoption ' and asked all adoption agencies in England to consider how to work much more closely together on a regional basis. This was enacted as the Education and Adoption Act 2016 . The Act gives the Secretary of State a new power to direct one or more named local authorities to make arrangements for any or all of their adoption functions to be carried out on their behalf by one of the local authorities named, or by another agency.

The Government's view is that structural change will improve the process for children and adopters leading to

- improved numbers of children being adopted
- an improved experience for adopters and improved timeliness overall
- to deliver consistently good and innovative adoption practice that ensures improved life chances for children.

The Department for Education describes 4 models for delivery of a Regional Adoption Agency.

1. A Local Authority single host, on behalf of a number of Local Authorities; e.g. Aspire, a Dorset hosted service for three Local Authorities.
2. Joint Venture between Local Authorities; a new public sector owned Local Authority Trading Company. e.g. Achieving for Children, Kingston and Richmond's Children's Services
3. A new Voluntary Adoption Agency; possibly a Joint Venture with flexibility for public & third sector ownership e.g. Entrust Schools Service in Staffordshire.
4. Existing Voluntary Adoption Agency; where Local Authorities commission an existing Voluntary Adoption Agency to deliver the Regional Adoption Agency e.g. Coram.

Nationally, all agencies used a scoring system as a tool to aid discussions, the purpose of which was to examine the desirability, feasibility and viability of each option. Following consideration of each possible model by the Local Authorities Directors/ Heads of Service and Executives from Families for Children and Barnardo's the preferred option was identified as a 'Single Local Authority Hosting the Regional Adoption Agency on behalf of a number of Local Authorities'.

The clear benefit identified is to achieve the integration of the four Local Authority adoption services into one best practice model, whilst maintaining the current partnership with Voluntary agencies which had been established in the delivery of the previous Adopt South West partnership.

Further to this, it was proposed that Devon host the Regional Adoption Agency. It was recognised that Devon County Council -

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operates the highest graded Local Authority adoption service (Good); • Has successfully innovated in a number of areas (e.g. fostering for adoption, young people's engagement); • Has the capacity to deliver given the size of the agency and the Local Authority; • Has the experience of developing other services that Devon hosts for the region; • Is centrally placed geographically.
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Section 2 - Key impacts and recommendations

Social/equality impacts:	<p>The Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency will deliver improved outcomes for children and families -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a system where children are matched with the most suitable adopter as quickly as possible. • Improve the scale of Adopter recruitment to provide a broader pool of adopters, well prepared and well matched to the needs of children waiting and; • Offers sufficient, high quality adoption support services <p>This will be achieved by employing best practice, improving processes and practice quality and by encouraging innovation. Better shared resources across the region will also improve cost effectiveness with the potential to invest further in service developments.</p>
Environmental impacts:	<p>There are no negative environmental impacts envisaged, staff will continue to travel to meet with children and potential adopters in the course of their work, they will operate out of offices across the 4 Local Authorities as they do now. The workforce will continue to work with technology that minimises the need to travel where possible.</p>
Economic impacts:	<p>Better shared resources across the region will improve cost effectiveness with the potential to invest further in development of services. There is a wish to increase the volume and type of services available to better support families post adoption, these may be secured from the market and this would see a need for growth and development of new capabilities by the service providers and may offer opportunities for jobs in the area.</p>

<p>Other impacts (partner agencies, services, DCC policies, possible 'unintended consequences'):</p>	<p>The introduction of the Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency involves Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council, Somerset County Council and Voluntary Adoption agencies and other adoption service providers across the area.</p> <p>There will be changes to improve and standardised practice across the region with themed participation groups across the region with Adopters, Special Guardians and Parents to improve practice of the Regional Adoption Agency.</p> <p>The system will be reviewed to ensure children can be placed with families more effectively and with minimal disruption. Support to adopters and Special Guardians and their families will be improved, for example there will also be changes to the paperwork required for court decisions, to help people applying to one, or at times more, courts for decisions, as currently the paperwork has to be changed to meet each Local Authority and Court's requirements. This will also make it easier for the staff supporting the adopters.</p> <p>There will be "joint adoption panels" across the area to bring more consistency to the preparation required of staff and Adopters for decisions and align the terms such as payment for those acting on adoption panels across the area.</p> <p>There will be no Adopt South West specific impact on existing Devon County Council Policies, this does not preclude changes that may be required to meet National Policy relating to Regional Adoption Agencies.</p>
<p>How will impacts and actions be monitored?</p>	<p>A set of objectives has been agreed and the mechanism to collect the required information to regularly report on performance will be put in place. These will support the existing national statutory reporting required from all Adoption Services in England.</p> <p>Ofsted currently inspects Adoption Services and a new framework is being developed for inspection of Regional Adoption Agencies.</p>

Section 3 - Profile and views of stakeholders and people directly affected

<p>People affected:</p>	<p>Children with an adoption placement order in Devon, Somerset, Torbay and Plymouth and those people wishing to adopt a child from the area.</p> <p>Local Authority Members and Chief Officers responsible for Children's Services and accountable to the Ofsted inspection regime and national achievement required by the Department for Education.</p> <p>Staff in Adoption Services in the 4 Local Authorities, Adoption Panel Chairs and Members.</p>
<p>Diversity profile and needs assessment of affected people:</p>	<p>Adopters are considered regardless of age, gender, disabilities, race, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion/belief</p> <p>Children considered for adoption are aged up to maximum age of 18 when the adoption order is made.</p>
<p>Other stakeholders:</p>	<p>Families of those people who have adopted a child/ children; birth families of a child/children who have been adopted.</p> <p>Providers of support to adopters and birth families.</p> <p>Partner agencies e.g. Health, Education</p>
<p>Consultation process:</p>	<p>There were dedicated adopter engagement sessions early in the journey and the adopters' first priority is to ensure adequate support is available throughout the whole adoption process and beyond. They also prioritise improving support on offer and awareness of adoption in schools and CAMHS services and would like to be recognised as experts on the needs of their children. Adopters also mentioned getting rid of the postcode lottery across the region because of funding variations, and ensuring the RAA adds value, rather than an additional layer of bureaucracy.</p> <p>Similarly, staff have and continue to be engaged with many events held. They have welcomed the opportunity to be involved in the plans for the development of an RAA. Staff from the Local Authorities and the two Voluntary Adoption Agencies are working together to design the service improvements and for example this</p>

	<p>has seen the approval for Joint Panels to be introduced during October 2017 ahead of the formal launch of the Regional Adoption Agency.</p> <p>The staff priorities are to have respect for the adopter at forefront of the redesign of process and consideration of new/ different support services. The key benefit is the ease of looking for best match for children and adopters across the region together and keeping more solutions local. Early permanence and joint working with child care social workers across the region will bring improved outcomes for the child and families and they are keen to work on breaking down any barriers to this whilst designing the Regional Adoption Agency way of working and protocols.</p> <p>The Adoption Panel chairs hope that the shift to a Regional Adoption Agency will lead to better outcomes for children and higher quality services, they welcome the opportunity to work together and focus on what works well.</p> <p>We have engaged with adopters and panel members in engagement workshops, to help shape joint panels and contributed to further ideas on improving the services of the Regional Adoption Agency.</p> <p>Local Authority Members have also been engaged across the authorities</p>
<p>Research and information used:</p>	<p>Adopt South West is following the single Local Authority Hosting model for a Regional Adoption Agency.</p> <p>The required Inter Authority Agreement is informed by legal, financial, practice and commissioning representatives from each Local Authority. The Regional Adoption Agency Service has been specified based on the expertise and experience of all the Local Authority partners and informed by the key involvement the Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Families for Children and Barnardo's. The best practice available from across the area is to be adopted, and adapted through further innovations, to deliver a consistent high-quality adoption support service.</p> <p>As a national programme, there has been support provided by the Department for Education and their nominated advisors, Deloitte. There are shared learning forums in place for all 19 Regional Adoption Agency development teams to share and learn from one another.</p> <p>Each Local Authority responds to the Children and Social Work act and this is carried through into the ethos, practice and approach to improvement in development of the Regional Adoption Agency. A further reference</p>

	<p>employed is the Children and Family Bill 2013 – this sets out regulations around Fostering for Adoption and the principle of every child should be considered for fostering for adoption if Adoption is a permanence option is central to the Regional Adoption Agency practice. The family finders role is key in working in partnership with the Local Authority Child Care Social work staff for identification of these children at the earliest point possible and to provide guidance to the Local Authority around the potential of Foster for Adoption placements.</p> <p>All practice reviews are guided by the adoption minimum standards and the adoption regulations 2005 ensuring the Regional Adoption Agency will continue to meet statutory guidelines.</p>
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Background Analysis

This section describes how relevant questions and issues have been explored

Section 4 - Social Impacts

Characteristics	<p>In what way are you eliminating or reducing the potential for direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or disadvantage? Are there any reasonable and proportionate, unavoidable negative consequences?</p> <p>In what way are you advancing equality (meeting needs, encouraging participation, making adjustments for disabled people, ‘closing gaps’).</p> <p>In what way are you fostering good relations between groups (tackling prejudice and promoting understanding), if relevant?</p>
<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption</p> <p>Children Act 1989 Sets out many of the duties, powers and responsibilities local authorities hold in respect of their looked after children and care leavers. In 2015 new regulations relating to the Children Act came in to force. Among other things, these regulations set out arrangements for local authorities considering ceasing to look after a child. View the Children Act 1989</p>	

Children (Leaving Care) 2000

Sets out duties local authorities have to support young people leaving care from 16 to 21 years of age.

[View the Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#)

Adoption and Children Act 2002

Updated the legal framework for domestic and inter-country adoption, and places a duty on local authorities to maintain an adoption service and provide adoption support services.

[View the Adoption and Children Act 2002](#)

Children and Adoption Act 2006

Gives courts more flexible powers to facilitate child contact and enforce contact orders when separated parents are in dispute.

[View the Children and Adoption Act 2006](#)

Children and Young Persons Act 2008

Legislates for the recommendations in the Department for Education and Skill's 2007 Care Matters white paper to provide high quality care and services for children in care.

[View the Children and Young Persons Act 2008](#)

[Download the Care Matters white paper \(PDF\)](#)

Children and Families Act 2014

Encourages 'fostering for adoption' which allows approved adopters to foster children while they wait for court approval to adopt. Introduces a 26-week time limit for the courts to decide whether or not a child should be taken into care. In some cases, this limit may be extended by eight weeks. Introduces 'staying put' arrangements which allow children in care to stay with their foster families until the age of 21 years. This is provided that both the young person and the foster family are happy to do so.

[View the Children and Families Act 2014](#)

All residents (include generic equality provisions):

The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption

An Adopter does not have to be a British citizen to adopt a child, but:

- An Adopter must have a fixed and permanent home in the UK, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man
- An Adopter must have lived in the UK for at least 1 year before you begin the application process

	<p>An Adopter will not be allowed to adopt if you, or an adult member of your family, have a criminal caution or conviction for offences against children or certain sexual offences against adults but, with the exception of these specified offences, a criminal record will not necessarily rule you out.</p> <p>Smoking will not necessarily rule you out from adopting. Consideration will be given to this and to all health- and lifestyle-related issues, and the agency will want to know of any specific health risks to you or to the children who may be placed in your care.</p> <p>There is no single national policy on smoking, but all agencies will apply some restrictions. According to national medical advice children under five and those with particular medical conditions should not be placed in smoking households. You will usually need to be smoke-free for at least six months before adoption from these groups can be considered.</p> <p>To adopt a step child an Adopter must tell your local council at least 3 months before applying to a court for an adoption order. Also, the child must also have lived with both of you for at least 6 months.</p> <p>If you disagree with an adoption agency's decision, you can either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • challenge their decision by writing to them • apply to the Independent Review Mechanism, which will look into your case <p>Staffing of the RAA will be achieved through TUPE transfer of Somerset County, Plymouth City & Torbay Councils staff to Devon County Council which along with existing DCC staff will complete the workforce. Although the majority of the workforce is largely mobile all require an office base, there will be staff that may be required to use different offices as their work base, this will be determined through the TUPE consultation process and this impact will be managed through existing HR policies in each Local Authority.</p>
Age:	<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption.</p> <p>An adopter may be able to adopt a child if you're aged 21 or over (there's no upper age limit)</p> <p>An adopter's own family- having children of your own (of any age) will certainly not exclude you from adopting, whether they are living at home with you or have grown up. Consideration will, however, be given to the age gap between your own children and the age of the child(ren) you wish to adopt and the position of each child within the family in accordance with the child(ren)s' needs.</p>

	<p>Staffing- there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy</p>
<p>Disability (incl. sensory, mobility, mental health, learning disability, ill health) and carers of disabled people:</p>	<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption</p> <p>Being disabled should not automatically exclude anyone from becoming an adopter and it is widely recognised that disabled people can often provide a very loving home for a child.</p> <p>Disability is only one of the many issues that will be considered by an adoption agency so adopters should not rule themselves out before they have had a conversation with their agency of choice. Even if an adopter believes that they might need some additional assistance to adopt a young person, social services may be able to provide this support.</p> <p>It is recognised that the life experiences of disabled people can give them a unique insight into the lives of children in care, who often have a sense of themselves as ‘different’ or who may also have a disability. Living alongside disability in the context of positive relationships can teach children the importance of inclusivity and how to value difference.</p> <p>The Medical Adviser will assess the information provided through a medical on a disabled applicant and an assessing social worker will also explore with you any potential impact this may have on parenting and how these would be managed. Similarly, if you have had treatment for a serious illness, the agency will seek full information from your GP and will want to establish the impact of the illness and future prognosis and their Medical Adviser may want to contact your hospital consultant for further details before being able to make a recommendation. If there is a significant risk that you may not be able to care for a child throughout their dependent years, the Medical Adviser will seek further information and advise the Adoption Agency accordingly.</p> <p>As well as existing health conditions, an agency will want to discuss lifestyle issues such as weight, smoking and alcohol consumption. These issues are not barriers to adoption but they could present health risks in the future. If you have resolved any problems with such issues in the past, the agency may consider that you have shown strength and motivation to deal with problems which would enhance your application.</p> <p>Staffing- there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy</p>
<p>Culture and ethnicity: nationality/national origin,</p>	<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption.</p>

<p>skin colour, religion and belief:</p>	<p>You can be matched with a child with whom you do not share the same ethnicity, provided you can meet the most important of the child's identified needs. All families should be able to get support to help their adopted child to understand and appreciate the important cultural, religious or linguistic values of their birth community.</p> <p>Staffing- there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy</p>
<p>Sex, gender and gender identity (including men, women, non-binary and transgender people), and pregnancy and maternity (including women's right to breastfeed).</p>	<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption.</p> <p>The Adoption and Children Act 2002 gave unmarried couples, including same sex couples, the right to adopt, and this became law in December 2005. If you are a same sex couple you don't need to be in a Civil Partnership or married to adopt, you will need to show that you are living together in an enduring relationship.</p> <p>Single adopters are also welcome whatever their sexual orientation.</p> <p>An adopter should not experience discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. All agencies are committed to equal treatment of all potential adopters and in fact may positively welcome applications from LGBT adopters.</p> <p>Staffing- there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy</p>
<p>Sexual orientation and marriage/civil partnership:</p>	<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption.</p> <p>An adopter may be able to adopt if</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • single • married • in a civil partnership • an unmarried couple (same sex and opposite sex) • the partner of the child's parent <p>Staffing- there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy</p>
<p>Other socio-economic factors such as families, carers, single</p>	<p>The Regional Adoption Agency will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption.</p> <p>An adopter may be able to adopt whether you are a homeowner or living in rented accommodation.</p>

<p>people/couples, low income, vulnerability, education, reading/writing skills, 'digital exclusion' and rural isolation.</p>	<p>An adopter's financial circumstances and employment status will always be considered as part of an adoption assessment, but low income, being unemployed or employed do not automatically rule them out. An adopter can be an adoptive parent while on benefits. The agency will want to discuss how the responsibility of caring for a child would be managed. Some agencies want a child to have their own bedroom but this is not a requirement and in some circumstances sharing can be considered. The adopter's local authority may provide support, especially for adopters of sibling groups or of children with a disability or special need of some kind. An adopter would also be encouraged to look into what benefits they may be entitled to. A number of other allowances are available for children with disabilities.</p> <p>Adoption Agencies need to be sure that any pets that you own do not pose a threat to children's health or safety. Also, some children may suffer from allergies which would prevent placement with some pets. A report from a vet may be requested.</p> <p>Staffing- there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy.</p>
<p>Human rights considerations:</p>	<p>None</p>

Signed off by:	Julian Wooster
Date	March 2018
Compliance sign off Date	9 March 2018
To be reviewed by: (officer name)	Julian Wooster
Review date:	March 2019