

# Impact Assessment



Assessment of: Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency – Kernow and Adopt South West Unite

Service: Children's Services

Director of Children's Services: Julian Wooster

Version / date of sign off by Head of Service: V1

Assessment carried out by (job title): Head of Adopt South West

## 1. Description of project

Cornwall's Adoption services wish to join Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency as a full member. Regional adoption agencies were a response to the Education and Adoption Act 2016 which required authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to join together to form Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA). However, at that time Cornwall Council did not become members. Devon County Council took the lead and is the host council to Adopt South West. The regional grouping at this time for Adopt South West also includes Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay Councils.

## 2. Reason for change/review

Cornwall's Adoption services have been rated as an outstanding adoption agency for many years by Ofsted but recognise that within the fast-changing pace of social work and current adoption climate, joining and pooling resources, knowledge and expertise with four other Local Authorities, (Devon, Plymouth, Somerset and Torbay) would be beneficial for children whose permanence plan is one of adoption. Practice would also be standardised across five Local Authorities, which will provide consistency to the adopter experience.

## 3. Summary of aims/objectives, limitations and options going forwards

The clear benefit identified is to achieve the integration of Cornwall's Adoption services with Adopt South West, a Regional Adoption Agency that will deliver one best practice model to the South West peninsula. It will provide a larger pool of prospective adopters, swift matches for children who have a plan of adoption, better value for money in sharing costs between five Local Authorities and a service which delivers consistently good and innovative adoption practice that ensures improved life changes for children.

## 4. People affected, diversity profile and analysis of needs

### **Social/equality impacts:**

The Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency will continue to deliver improved outcomes for children and families:

- 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
- Offers sufficient, high quality adoption support services

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.

### **Environmental impacts:**

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 now operate out of offices across the five Local Authorities, rather than four. The workforce will continue to work with technology that minimises the need to travel where possible.

### **Economic impacts:**

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. It may also reduce the inter-agency costs by increasing the single pool of adopters approved by Adopt South West.

### **Other impacts (partner agencies, services, DCC policies, possible 'unintended consequences'):**

The introduction of the Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency involved Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council, Somerset County Council, and at that time Voluntary Adoption agencies and other adoption service providers across the area. Cornwall's Adoption services will integrate into the practice already being undertaken by Adopt South West, continuing to develop shared practice and learning from each other, with themed participation groups across the region with Adopters and Parents.

The system is continually reviewed to ensure children can be placed with families more effectively and with minimal disruption. Support to adopters and their families will be improved as no matter where they live within the Adopt South West area local support will be available. Cornwall will join Adopt South West's "joint adoption panels" to bring more consistency to the preparation required of staff and Adopters for decisions and to align the terms such as payment for those acting on adoption panels across the area. 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.

### **How will impacts and actions be monitored?**

Adopt South West already have a mechanism to collect the required information to regularly report on performance, which Cornwall will become part of, allowing data to be collated from all five Local Authorities. This will support the existing national statutory reporting required from all Adoption Services in England. Ofsted currently inspects Adoption Services through the lens of an ILACS inspection of the child's Local Authority.

## **5. Stakeholders, their interest and potential impacts**

### **People affected:**

- Birth families of a child/children who have been adopted
- Children with an adoption placement order in Devon, Somerset, Torbay, Plymouth and Cornwall and those people wishing to adopt a child from the area
- 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
- Staff in Local Authority children's teams and Adoption Services in the five Local Authorities, Adoption Panel Chairs and Members

## Diversity profile and needs assessment of affected people:

- Adopters are considered regardless of age, gender, disabilities, race, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion/belief.
- Children considered for adoption are aged up to maximum age of 18 when the adoption order is made

## Other stakeholders:

- Families of those people who have adopted a child/children
- Providers of support to adopters and Birth families
- Partner agencies e.g. Health, CAMH's, Education

## 6. Research and information used

Adopt South West is following the single Local Authority Hosting model for a Regional Adoption Agency. 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 specifically based on the expertise and experience of all the Local Authority partners and was informed by the key involvement of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies practising at that time, Families for Children and Barnardo's.

The best practice available from across the area was adopted, and adapted through further innovations, to deliver a consistently high-quality adoption service. Cornwall will join in developing services further by adding their knowledge and expertise. There are already in place shared learning forums for all Regional Adoption Agency development teams to share and learn from one another.

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 employed is the Children and Family Act 2014, which sets out regulations around Fostering for Adoption and the principle that every child should be considered for fostering for adoption if Adoption is a permanence option. The Act reinforces wider reforms to ensure that all children and young people can succeed, no matter what their background. It is central to the Regional Adoption Agency practice.

The family finder's role within Adopt South West is key in working in partnership with the five Local Authorities Child Care Social work staff for identification of children at the earliest point possible, and to provide guidance to the Local Authority around the potential of Foster for Adoption placements. All practice reviews are guided by the Adoption Minimum Standards and the Adoption Regulations 2005 ensuring the Adopt South West as a Regional Adoption Agency will continue to meet statutory guidelines.

### **Social Impacts:**

The Regional Adoption Agency operates within clear standards laid down in law regarding [Adoption Children Act 1989](#), which 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 into force. Among other things, these regulations set out arrangements for Local Authorities considering ceasing to look after a child.

Other Acts that regulate how Adopt South West operates are:

- [Children \(Leaving Care\) 2000](#), which sets out duties local authorities have to support young people leaving care from 16 to 21 years of age
- [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
- [Children and Adoption Act 2006](#) gives courts more flexible powers to facilitate child contact and enforce contact orders when separated parents are in dispute
- [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
- [Children and Families Act 2014](#) encourages 'fostering for adoption', which allows approved adopters to foster children while they wait for court approval to adopt and introduces a 26-week time limit for the courts to decide whether a child should be taken into care. In some cases, this

limit may be extended by eight weeks. It also introduces 'staying put' arrangements that 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

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## 7. Equality analysis

Adopt South West 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
- 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
- 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. 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

To adopt a stepchild an Adopter must tell their 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 adults for at least 6 months.

If an adult disagrees with an adoption agency's decision, they can either:

- challenge their decision by writing to the agency decision maker
- apply to the Independent Review Mechanism, which will look into the case

Staffing - Cornwall Council Adoption Service employee's will be TUPE transfer to Devon County Council. Although the majority of the workforce is largely mobile, all require an office base. Cornwall Council offices will be open to all employees of Adopt South West.

### **Age:**

Adopt South West will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption. An Adopter may be able to adopt a child if they are aged 21 or over (there's no upper age limit).

Having children of their own (of any age) will not exclude a person from adopting, whether those children are living at the family home or have left home. Consideration will, however, be given to the age gap between a person's own children and the age of the child(ren) the person wishes to adopt, and the position of each child within the family in accordance with the child(ren)s' needs.

Staffing - there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy.

### **Disability (incl. sensory, mobility, mental health, learning disability, ill health) and carers of disabled people:**

Adopt South West operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption. 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.

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 care may be able to provide this support.

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.

The Medical Adviser will assess the information provided through a medical on a disabled applicant and an assessing social worker will also explore any potential impact this may have on parenting and how these would be managed.



Similarly, if a person has had treatment for a serious illness, Adopt South West will seek full information from the person's GP and will want to establish the impact of the illness and future prognosis. A Medical Adviser may want to contact a hospital consultant for further details before being able to make a recommendation. If there is a significant risk that a person may not be able to care for a child throughout their dependent years, the Medical Adviser will seek further information and advise the Adopt South West accordingly.

As well as existing health conditions, Adopt South West 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 a person has unresolved problems with such issues in their past, the agency may consider that you have shown strength and motivation to deal with problems which would enhance your application.

Staffing - there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy.

**Culture and ethnicity: nationality/national origin, skin colour, religion and belief:**

Adopt South West operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption. A prospective adopter can be matched with a child with whom they do not share the same ethnicity, provided they 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.

**Sex, gender and gender identity (including men, women, non-binary and transgender people), and pregnancy and maternity (including women's right to breastfeed):**

Adopt South West will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 gave unmarried couples, including same sex couples, the right to adopt, and this became law in December 2005.

A same sex couple doesn't need to be in a Civil Partnership or married to adopt but does need to show they are living together in an enduring relationship.

Single adopters are also welcome whatever their sexual orientation. 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.

Staffing - there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy.

**Marital status:**

Adopt South West will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption. An adopter may be able to adopt whether they are:

- single
- married
- in a civil partnership
- an unmarried couple (same sex and opposite sex)
- the partner of the child's parent

Staffing- there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy.

**Other socio-economic factors such as families, carers, single people/couples, low income, vulnerability, education, reading/writing skills, 'digital exclusion' and rural isolation:**

Adopt South West will operate within clear standards laid down in law regarding Adoption. An adopter may be able to adopt whether you are a homeowner or living in rented accommodation.

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 also 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.

Adoption Agencies need to be sure that any pets that are owned 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.

Staffing- there will be no change to existing HR workforce policy.

## 8. Human rights considerations

None

## 9. Environmental impacts

Reduce waste, and send less waste to landfill: n/a

Conserve and enhance biodiversity: n/a

Safeguard the distinctive characteristics, features and special qualities of Devon's landscape: n/a

Conserve and enhance the quality and character of our built environment and public spaces: n/a

Conserve and enhance Devon's cultural and historic heritage: n/a

Minimise greenhouse gas emissions: n/a

Minimise pollution (including air, land, water, light and noise): n/a

Contribute to reducing water consumption: n/a

Ensure resilience to the future effects of climate change (warmer, wetter winters; drier, hotter summers; more intense storms; and rising sea level): n/a

## 10. Economic impacts

**Impact on knowledge and skills:** Although bringing together five Local Authority Services to operate as a DCC hosted single Service the location of demand and distribution of staff will still be across the existing local authority boundaries. It is therefore unlikely there will be either a positive or negative impact on knowledge and skills within Devon.

**Impact on employment levels:** Although bringing together five Local Authority Services to operate as a DCC hosted single Service the location of demand and distribution of staff will still be across the existing local authority boundaries. It is therefore unlikely there will be either a positive or negative impact on employment levels within Devon.

**Impact on local business:** Although bringing together five Local Authority Services to operate as a DCC hosted single Service the location of demand and distribution of staff will still be across the existing local authority boundaries. It is therefore unlikely there will be either a positive or negative impact on local business within Devon.

### 'Social Value' of planned commissioned/procured services:

How will the economic, social and environmental well-being of the relevant area be improved through what is being proposed? And how, in conducting the process of procurement, might that improvement be secured?

Presently each Local Authority has contracts for services with the Adoption support services provider market but not necessarily for the same services. These contracts will be aligned so that all five Local Authorities procure the same services, this sees an opportunity for existing providers to review the scope and scale of their service offer and may see these businesses grow. There may also be new businesses created through interest in the opportunities these contracts afford.