

Committee:	Dated:
Community and Children's Services Committee	12 April 2019
Subject: Regional Adoption Agency	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Chris Pelham, Assistant Director People	

Summary

Members of the Community and Children's Services Committee were informed in June 2018 of the plans for the City of London to become a member of a new Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). This is as part of a 'hub and spoke' model with Coram Capital Adoption, Harrow, Redbridge and other local authority areas that had expressed an interest in joining the new arrangements. This model was built on the already established relationship the City of London had with Coram Capital Adoption, the group that has delivered our adoption services for four years.

Members approved the plan to develop these new arrangements. This report is to update Members on these arrangements and confirm that the new RAA, 'Ambitious for Adoption', will be 'going live' from 29 April, 2019.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the report for information.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London (CoL) has very few children needing to be placed for adoption. At the time of this report, there have not been any adoption orders made since 2012.
2. Given the local demographic context and the specialist skills and knowledge required to deliver a local authority-based adoption service, in 2015 the CoL commissioned Coram Capital Adoption to deliver its adoption functions. This included recruiting and assessing potential adopters, and ensuring that the service infrastructure for adoption is in keeping with regulatory requirements. This service management model drew the CoL into a 'regional' framework with other local authorities, Harrow and Redbridge, which were already part of the Coram Capital Adoption arrangements.

3. At the same time in 2015, the Government set out a requirement to improve adoption practices across the country by establishing new RAAs, which had to be in place by 2020.
4. As a result of this requirement, the CoL, along with all other London local authorities, was part of a regional discussion to plan the development of a London-wide RAA. At the same time, the CoL was part of the project proposal to develop a separate RAA built on the foundations already established with Coram Capital Adoption, Harrow and Redbridge. This project took the title of 'Ambitious for Adoption'.
5. In April 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) approved the Ambitious for Adoption project proposal for a new RAA to be developed. This would involve Harrow as lead local authority, Coram Capital Adoption as a strategic partner, and CoL, Redbridge, Slough Children's Services Trust and Bromley as participating local authorities. As a result, the CoL withdrew from the London-wide RAA discussion in order to continue to be part of the new RAA Ambitious for Adoption proposal.
6. During this development phase, the CoL has continued to commission Coram Capital Adoption to deliver its adoption services, under current contractual arrangements.

Current Position

7. The original plan to have the RAA go live in November 2018 was put back to April 2019 to accommodate the commissioning of Coram Capital Adoption as the Voluntary Adoption Agency provider. This would also address growing interest from other areas to join the new RAA.
8. Ambitious for Adoption has continued to develop its governance, structural and financial arrangements with the intentions of becoming an RAA by April 2019. The DfE has monitored this work, and set out an expectation that all areas have to be part of an RAA by April 2020.
9. The plan is for Ambitious for Adoption to go live from 29 April 2019. This will see Harrow as the lead local authority, CoL and Redbridge coming together with Coram Capital Adoption to form the new RAA. Other local authority areas, including Bromley, Slough Children's Services Trust, Waltham Forest and Hillingdon, will join at later dates.
10. A Strategic Governance Board, represented at Director level and chaired by the Harrow Director Children's Services, has overseen the development of the RAA.
11. The RAA will focus on excellent practice and improved outcomes for children by applying established best practice as core – this includes systematic early permanence planning and placement, preventive as well as therapeutic

adoption support utilising evidenced programmes – approaches recognised as ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted.

12. The hub will manage the service from a central London location, led by a dedicated RAA Managing Director/Head of Service responsible for:

- Sufficiency planning
- Quality assurance
- Inspection readiness and reporting
- Panel administration
- Contract supervision for fulfilment of sub-contracted/commissioned services (including peer support, inter-country adoption and birth family support)
- Operational compliance and resilience including General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Financial administration
- Employment and human resources management
- Information systems and data governance.

13. The hub will deliver the following core services:

- Recruitment and assessment of adopters
- Dual approval of concurrent planning/fostering for adoption carers and contact delivery
- Matching process and recommendation (to the local authority for final decision)
- Delivery of pan-RAA therapeutic parenting groups and specialist therapeutic support and assessment for the Adoption Support Fund
- Sub-contracting/commissioning for specialist areas/suppliers, expected to include inter-country adoption, young people’s groups, adopter peer support services and birth parent counselling.

14. The RAA has attracted considerable interest from other local authority areas. Since June 2018, Bromley and Slough have continued to be part of the Ambitious for Adoption planning arrangements. They anticipate formally joining post-April 2019. Waltham Forest and Hillingdon have also subsequently joined the RAA during this development phase, and they will also formally join at a later date post-April 2019.

15. This demonstrates the viability and benefit of local authorities working together across the geography of London and west of London area, utilising a shared centrally located hub that reflects the transport network for maximum accessibility by adopters and young people, and maximises the recruitment and engagement of staff.

Implications

16. Strategic: The new RAA aligns with our ambitions for our children and families, as set out in the Children and Young People's Plan and the Corporate Plan. It is also compliant with the Government aim for regionalising adoption by 2020.

17. Financial: There has been a small annual uplift to accommodate the increase in adoption planning activity that has taken place in the City. This has been contained within the local risk budget.

18. Legal: An exemption/waiver to put in place a new contract (from 1 June to 31 March 2019) was approved in order to cover CoL during the procurement of the new RAA contract.

19. Contract period: The new RAA will operate with a five-year initial contract, with the option to extend for a further five years in periods of: two years; two years; and one year.

20. Human resources: Given the unique structure and make-up of the CoL Children's Social Care Service, there is no expectation that the new RAA arrangements will have staffing implications for the CoL.

Conclusion

21. This report updates Members on the development of the Ambitious for Adoption RAA, confirming that the new arrangements will be in place from 29 April 2019.

Appendices

- None

Chris Pelham

Assistant Director, People

T: 020 7332 1636

E: chris.pelham@cityoflondon.gov.uk