

BRIEFING FOR AMBITIOUS SCRUTINY

Regionalising Adoption - changes resulting from the Adoption Bill - August 2015



Background

The Education and Adoption Bill, if passed, will give 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 proposed functions are: the recruitment, assessment and approval of prospective adopters; decisions about which prospective adopters a child should be matched with; and the provision of adoption support services.

In June 2015 the Department of Education released a paper called [Regionalising Adoption](#) and asked for expressions of interest from adoption agencies in moving to regional adoption agencies.

Local authorities are being invited to bid for a grant from £4.5million of funding.

The aim is to reduce the number of adoption agencies from the current national total of 180, and move to a regional model which the D for E suggests will lead to economies of scale, savings, access to a larger pool of adopters willing to take “hard to place” children, and opportunities to share good practice, supervision etc. The D for E is not being prescriptive about what they mean by a regional adoption agency, however they are interested in models placing 200 children a year. The paper states it is not efficient to recruit only 10 to 20 adopters a year as some agencies do.

The Regionalising Adoption paper also notes that seeking to just first place an agencies own children with their own adopters is seen as unacceptable because of the potential delay for the child. So the government announced in the July 2015 budget that £30million will be made available so that the £27,000 fee for out of area adoptions will be directly funded by central government. The intention is to avoid the perverse incentive to look locally first to avoid this fee.

Currently nationally in England there are a number of adoption partnerships but very few merged services. Adopt Berkshire is one (4 Councils). The Triboroughs is another. The D for E paper states that VAAs have a clear role and gives the example of Coram and Cambridgeshire having formed a new VAA together. Functions are delegated from the authority to the Coram.

Plymouth, Adopt South West and the South West region

In 2014/5 Plymouth achieved 40 children placed for adoption and recruited and approved 30 adopters (28 couples and 2 single people.)

So far in first three quarters of 2015/6 290 children have been adopted in the South West. If current trends continue around 400 adoptions will be achieved in the South West.

Adopt South West, which includes Plymouth, launched in April 2015 as a co-operative regional partnership which is not a legal entity or agency.

ASW co-operates on recruitment and has one front door - a call centre number and a website for adopters <http://www.adoptsouthwest.org.uk/> The Adopt South West joint marketing strategy includes a joint [TV campaign](#) that has already started this year (in April) and will be aired again in Adoption Week and January 2016.

Adopt South West is a partnership of Devon County Council, Torbay Council, Plymouth City Council, Families For Children (a VAA) and Barnardos SW (a VAA) adoption agencies. Adopt South West currently has 49 children and 98 adopters waiting (July 2015 figures).

Elsewhere in the South West we understand that the following local authority adoption services - S Glouc, Glouc, Bristol, N Somerset, BANES, Swindon and Wiltshire - are merging to become Adopt West.

We also understand that a regional grouping that may become Adopt Wessex is in the process of forming (FFC, Poole Borough, Bournemouth Borough and Dorset County Council adoption agencies.) Somerset County Council may join this partnership.

Cornwall is also currently discussing with Adopt South West partners whether to join Adopt South West. If they did as far as we know all local authorities would be part of one of the three regional South West partnerships that are forming: Adopt South West, Adopt Wessex and Adopt West.

Next steps – if adoption agencies are interested in making an expression of interest to the D for E the application needs to be submitted by September 7th. Support suggested includes project coach and financial support in 2015/6 (e.g. to backfill roles). Applicants can also make suggestions about the support needed. Coaching support will be available from Oct 2015 to end March 2016 from an independent agency commissioned by the Department for Education, with a view to developing an action for April 1st 2016 onwards.

Action taken to date by Plymouth City Council

Adopt South West has agreed to jointly develop an expression of interest together and this is in process. The application will request change management and other support to assist in the development of a joint options appraisal.

Adopt South West members have also formally written to Cornwall to invite Cornwall to join Adopt South West. Cornwall are currently considering whether to join and a variation to the Adopt South West joint funding agreement has been drafted ready.

Adopt South West has informally taken advice from the D for E about the likely success of an application for less than 100 adoptions a year, (given current local trends), in lower population fringe areas of the UK such as the Peninsula. The D for E has indicated that an Adopt South West Expression of Interest would be welcomed.