

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) – Part 1**V0.6 October 2014**

Policy title and purpose (brief outline):	Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional Adoption Collaborative
Report prepared by:	Rachel Evans – Lead Head of Service
Status:	The EIA is an evolving document which will be reviewed as the establishment of the Collaborative progresses.
Date:	October 2014

1. Please provide a brief description of the policy/decision

The vision is to create a fully integrated Regional Adoption Collaborative comprised of Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Vale of Glamorgan Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC's adoption service operating within one management structure in accordance with statutory requirements.

Establishing a National Adoption Service is a key component of the Social Services and Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014. The Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional Adoption Collaborative is one of five regional collaboratives which will form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales.

In October and November 2013, a common report was taken to the respective authorities' Cabinets outlining proposals to work in partnership with the four Councils and to agree in principle the Vale of Glamorgan Council as the host authority for the Collaborative. A further report was presented to the four Cabinets in July 2014 and a further more detailed report will be presented in December 2014.

The proposals provide a pathway for creating an effective and responsive National Adoption Service. This will help to more effectively recruit and support adoptive placements and reduce delays for children waiting for placements.

Work has been undertaken to develop the service specification including the areas of service for which the Collaborative will be responsible. It has therefore been identified that the responsibilities of the Regional Collaborative will centre around three main functions:

- All functions associated with the recruitment, training, assessment and support of prospective adopters. This includes inter-country adopters, step-parent & relative adopters.
- The provision of a family finding, linking and matching service for all children requiring adoptive placements.
- The provision of a range of adoption support services for children, birth parents and adoptive families pre and post adoption. This function also includes the provision of counselling for adopted persons seeking access to their birth records and the provision of an intermediary service for persons seeking to trace adopted persons.

Each local authority within the Regional Collaborative will retain responsibility for:

- The assessment, care planning and review of children referred and placed for adoption.
- Maintaining the functions of the Agency Decision Maker in respect of children requiring an 'ought to be placed' decision.
- Assessing the support needs of children requiring adoption.
- The choice of adoptive placement and working with the family finder in matching the child with prospective adopters.

Against this background, a number of models of service delivery were developed and discussed at workshops with managers and staff. The preferred model of delivery supports the restructuring of the Adoption Collaborative into functional teams which has been based upon an analysis of service need within the region.

The analysis has identified a number of areas where improvements in the service provided to children, prospective and approved adopters and birth parents are required. It highlighted the large number of children in the region requiring adoptive placements but also the potential to increase the number of adopters being recruited.

During the engagement process staff have acknowledged the need to improve practice in certain areas and that by restructuring the way adoption services are delivered and pooling resources, opportunities for new ways of working and creative practice in all key areas will be developed. Within the region there are examples of development in collaborative practice already having a positive benefit on the service, including joint training of adopters and sharing adoptive placements. In terms of resources, it is expected that working collaboratively with regional partners the pool of potential in-house adoptive placements will increase and opportunities to use resources more effectively will be provided.

Failing to take a collaborative approach carries considerable risk for the continued individual provision of these statutory services. Welsh Government via powers bestowed in the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014 will be enabled to direct those authorities which do not collaborate.

2. We have a legal duty to engage with people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (please refer to Annex A of the EIA guidance) identified as being relevant to the policy. What steps have you taken to engage with stakeholders, both internally and externally?

Internal:

A written briefing was sent to all staff in the region in October 2013 regarding the Regional Collaborative.

Workshops were held with managers in November 2013 and February 2014, and with staff and managers in December 2013 to design the service model. These ideas and discussions helped influence the structure of the model which has been subsequently agreed by the Steering Group, Directors and Cabinet.

The total number of staff that attended the workshops from each Council is shown below:

Vale of Glamorgan	-10
RCT	- 6
Merthyr Tydfil CBC	- 5
Cardiff	- 9

A further written briefing was sent to all staff in the region by the Steering Group during the week of 24 June 2014 and individual authority meetings were held with staff during that week to discuss the common report being presented to Cabinet.

Each of the authorities has consulted with trade unions on a local basis and a full pre-scrutiny process took place prior to the reports being taken to Cabinet.

Technical groups comprising lead HR, Legal, Finance, and ICT colleagues across all authorities have been established and have a work plan which they are progressing.

Further meaningful consultation has taken place with staff and trade unions as part of the formal consultation process during week commencing 13th October 2014 and a further session is scheduled for the first week of December.

A Steering Group comprised of Heads of Service from the four authorities has been established and meets bi-monthly. Each Head of Service reports upon progress to their respective Directors and a joint meeting was held in May 2014 with all the Directors to agree the service delivery model.

Individual meetings were held with lead Cabinet members and Directors for each of the authorities in June 2014 to discuss plans for the regional service and prior to the report being presented to Cabinet.

A report outlining the proposals was taken to Cabinet in each local authority in October/November 2013 and a further update report in July 2014. A further more detailed report will be presented in December 2014.

External:

As part of the process for establishing the National Adoption Service in accordance with the functional model developed by the ADSS and endorsed by the Deputy Minister for Social Services, a National Task and Finish Group has been established to oversee the implementation of the Service. It comprises senior officers from the lead authorities from each regional collaborative, representatives from Welsh Government, ADSS Cymru, CSSIW, BAAF, and voluntary sector providers.

Regional reports on progress are presented to the Task and Finish Group on a monthly basis.

Four national workshops have been held to consider a range of topics: the role of the medical adviser, voluntary sector, developing legal agreements and adoption support. These have been attended by medical advisers, voluntary sector providers and representatives from all of the regions.

Within the region, a communication strategy for briefing users and stakeholders is being developed.

A meeting is being arranged with Medical Advisers to progress plans for joint regional working.

No engagement has taken place with service users on the basis that there is no discernable difference in how individuals will access or receive the service. The Collaborative will retain its statutory responsibilities for the delivery of adoption services as detailed on page 2.

3. Your decisions must be based on robust evidence. What evidence base have you used? Please list the source of this evidence e.g. National Survey for Wales. Do you consider the evidence to be strong, satisfactory or weak and are there any gaps in evidence?

The evidence base for the Regional Collaborative stems from a number of Government initiatives which have highlighted the merits of authorities collaborating to provide services. In 2011 Welsh Government published 'Sustainable Social Services - A Framework for Action' which highlighted the need to develop a National Adoption Service in Wales as a key policy initiative. This was embodied in the new legislation governing Social Services.

Other important sources of evidence are the National Assembly's Inquiry into Adoption 2012 which highlighted the gaps in adoption provision and practice, the Department of Education's research into marketing of adopters highlighting the need for timeliness of response published in June 2014, and Cardiff University's research into adoption support published in July 2014 which has provided a clear picture of adoption support and the variance of provision.

Additionally, the regional data analysis over the past three years has provided evidence of service gaps and practice which needs to be improved, particularly in terms of converting enquiries from prospective adopters into applicants and the length of time children await placement.

We consider that this is a robust set of evidence which lends support to the argument that current services need to change to be able to deliver more efficient and timely services. The current economic and budgetary position also supports the need to pool resources and work collaboratively.

Welsh Government has produced a set of national performance indicators which measure key activities for the service. Regions are required to report against these indicators on a quarterly basis which will ensure that the evidence base for the service is kept under review and performance is challenged.

It is important to note any opportunities you have identified that could advance or promote equality.

Impact

Please complete the next section to show how this policy / decision / practice could have an impact (positive or negative) on the protected groups under the Equality Act 2010 (refer to the EIA guidance document for more information).

Lack of evidence is not a reason for *not* progressing to carrying out an EIA. Please highlight any gaps in evidence that you have identified and explain how/if you intend to fill these gaps.

4.1 Do you think this policy / decision / practice will have a positive or negative impact on people because of their age?

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on staff based on age. Statistics regarding the age range of existing adoption staff in the four authorities indicate a range between 20-29 and 60+. The majority of staff are aged 30-49.

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on wider stakeholders based on age. It is anticipated delivery of adoption services to adopters and adoptive children will improve. This improvement relates principally to an expectation that the number and range of adoptive placements will increase and children will be matched more quickly.

4.2 Because they are disabled?

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on staff based on disability. Staff have an opportunity to provide details of any disability but are not required to. There is no information to suggest any of the existing adoption staff have a disability. Each case would be looked at individually should it arise.

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on wider stakeholders based on disability. It is anticipated delivery of adoption services to adopters and adoptive children will improve. This improvement relates principally to an expectation that the number and range of adoptive placements will increase and children will be matched more quickly.

4.3 Because of their gender (man or woman)?

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on staff based on gender. Statistics regarding the gender of existing adoption staff in the four authorities indicate the majority of staff are female.

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on wider stakeholders based on gender. It is anticipated delivery of adoption services to adopters and adoptive children will improve. This improvement relates principally to an expectation that the number and range of adoptive placements will increase and children will be matched more quickly.

4.4 Because they are transgender?

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on staff based on transgender.

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on wider stakeholders based on transgender. It is anticipated delivery of adoption services to adopters and adoptive children will improve. This improvement relates principally to an expectation that the number and range of adoptive placements will increase and children will be matched more quickly.

4.5 Because of their marriage or civil partnership?

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on staff based on marriage or civil partnership.

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on staff based on marriage or civil partnership. It is anticipated delivery of adoption services to adopters and adoptive children will improve. This improvement relates principally to an expectation that the number and range of adoptive placements will increase and children will be matched more quickly.

4.6 Because of their pregnancy or maternity?

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on staff based on pregnancy or maternity.

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on wider stakeholders based on pregnancy or maternity. It is anticipated delivery of adoption services to adopters and adoptive children will improve. This improvement relates principally to an expectation that the number and range of adoptive placements will increase and children will be matched more quickly

4.7 Because of their race?

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on staff based on race. Statistics regarding the race of existing adoption staff in the four authorities indicate the majority are White. Some staff chose not to disclose this information.

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on wider stakeholders based on race. It is anticipated delivery of adoption services to adopters and adoptive children will improve. This improvement relates principally to an expectation that the number and range of adoptive placements will increase and children will be matched more quickly.

4.8 Because of their religion and belief or non-belief?

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on staff based on religion and belief or non-belief. The majority of existing adoption staff chose not to disclose this information.

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on wider stakeholders based on religion and belief or non-belief. It is anticipated delivery of adoption services to adopters and adoptive children will improve. This improvement relates principally to an expectation that the number and range of adoptive placements will increase and children will be matched more quickly.

4.9 Because of their sexual orientation?

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on staff based on sexual orientation.

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on staff based on sexual orientation. It is anticipated delivery of adoption services to adopters and adoptive children will improve. This improvement relates principally to an expectation that the number and range of adoptive placements will increase and children will be matched more quickly.

4.10 Do you think that this policy will have a positive or negative impact on people's human rights? Please refer to point 1.4 of the EIA Annex A - Guidance for further information about Human Rights.

We have no evidence to suggest there will be an impact on staff or wider stakeholders based on human rights.

If you have identified any impacts (other than negligible ones), positive or negative, on any group with protected characteristics, please complete Part 2.

Only if there are no or negligible positive or negative impacts should you go straight to part 2 and sign off the EIA.

Equality Impact Assessment – Part 2

1. Building on the evidence you gathered and considered in Part 1, please consider the following:

1.1 How could, or does, the policy help advance / promote equality of opportunity?

For example, positive measures designed to address disadvantage and reach different communities or protected groups?

An improvement in service accessibility for all key stakeholders.

There is considerable evidence regarding the difficulties experienced in finding adoptive families for children who need them and the new service is intended to tackle these obstacles.

1.2 How could / does the policy / decision help to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation?

The service delivery will be maintained at a similar or improved level. Policies of the host employer will be adhered to. A commitment to ensure the recruitment process is fair and clarity of process has been made.

1.3 How could/does the policy impact on advancing / promoting good relations and wider community cohesion?

Collaborative working between the four authorities will enhance the quality of service provision. Persons seeking approval as adoptive parents and individuals requiring access to their birth records and the support of an intermediary service will be afforded a single point of contact. This should provide a more timely, equitable response and remove some of the existing barriers to service. The Regional Collaborative will provide a more timely and equitable response for children requiring adoptive placements by increasing the choice of local placements. Protocols will be developed with local authorities and key stakeholders to ensure positive joint working.

2. Strengthening the policy

2.1 If the policy is likely to have a negative effect ('adverse impact') on any of the protected groups or good relations, what are the reasons for this?

What practical changes/actions could help reduce or remove any negative impacts identified in Part 1?

There are no negative impacts identified.

2.2 If no action is to be taken to remove or mitigate negative / adverse impact, please justify why.

(Please remember that if you have identified unlawful discrimination (immediate or potential) as a result of the policy, the policy must be changed or revised.)

N/A

3. Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing

How will you monitor the impact and effectiveness of the policy?

List details of any follow-up work that will be undertaken in relation to the policy (e.g. consultations, specific monitoring etc.).

This will be built into our implementation plan for the change process and be monitored as part of the governance mechanisms which will include a committee of elected members.

There is a commitment to introduce robust monitoring of service uptake by relevant protected characteristics that are highlighted in the engagement process. For example, focus groups, feedback forms and one-to-one sessions for staff. This information will be available for inclusion in each local authorities' annual equality report.

The results of all impact assessments where the impact is significant will be published on the Welsh Government's website.

4. Declaration

The policy does not have a significant impact upon equality issues

Official completing the EIA

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VVC Regional Adoption Collaborative

Date: October 2014