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| Meeting of: | Cabinet |
| Date of Meeting: | Monday, 17 June 2019 |
| Relevant Scrutiny Committee: | Healthy Living and Social Care |
| Report Title: | Adopting Together Service |
| Purpose of Report: | As lead authority for Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) to enter into contractual arrangements for the provision of placements via the Adopting Together Scheme on behalf of partner authorities. |
| Report Owner: | Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health |
| Responsible Officer: | Director of Social Services |
| Elected Member and Officer Consultation: | Heads of Services from partner authorities have been consulted and agree with the proposal |
| Policy Framework: | This report is for Executive decision by Cabinet |
| <p>Executive Summary:</p> <p>Adopting Together has been established under the aegis of the National Adoption Service (NAS) in Wales. It is a collaborative working arrangement between St. David's Adoption Agency, Barnardo's Cymru and Adoption UK to provide adoptive placements and support to adoptive families.</p> <p>St. David's and Barnardo's Cymru are the only two voluntary adoption agencies operating in Wales who assess adopters to provide placements for children referred by local authorities.</p> <p>Adopting Together is a new initiative and an extension of their usual service in that it targets recruitment for specific children and provides therapeutic support to those children and families for a year following placement for adoption. Additional support is also provided to the adopters via a buddying scheme.</p> <p>Adopting Together focuses on the recruitment of adopters for children with additional needs who have been waiting for adoptive placements for over six months.</p> <p>The partner agencies which form part of Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) i.e. Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council support the project and have identified a number of children who meet the criteria for the project.</p> | |

To date, ten referrals of children have been made to the project from the region and six children have been placed on a spot purchase basis. These placements have been successful.

Securing adoptive placements for children requiring adoption is a function delegated to the Collaborative by its partner agencies although case responsibility for the child remains with the placing authority.

Going forward there is a need to formalise the contractual arrangements between the placing authorities and the constituent partners of Adopting Together (St. David's Adoption Agency, Barnardo's Cymru and Adoption UK) by way of a formal agreement. VVC is, under the terms of the Collaborative Agreement underpinning VVC, not able to enter into contractual arrangements with Adopting Together as it is not a legal entity and so authority is required to enable this Authority as host Authority to enter into the contractual arrangements.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet agree to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, as host authority for the Collaborative, entering into contractual arrangements with St. David's Adoption Agency and Barnardo's Cymru for the provision of placements for hard to place children.
2. To delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal and Democratic Services to agree terms and enter into forms of contract with the said bodies under the Adoption Together Service.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. Adopting Together enhances the range of placement options for children who have waited the longest for adoptive homes and provides additional support for those children and their new families.
2. There is a need to formalise the current arrangements by entering into contractual arrangements which clarify expectations, roles, and responsibilities of partner agencies and the provider of the service.
3. The partner authorities who comprise the Regional Collaborative have delegated the authority to secure placements for children requiring adoptive homes to the Regional Collaborative and seeking to formalise contractual arrangements with Adopting Together.
4. VVC's Collaborative Agreement does not currently enable the host Authority to undertake this role and so Cabinet authority is required to enable such contractual arrangements to be put in place.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) is one of five regional Collaboratives alongside the three voluntary adoption agencies, namely St. David's Adoption Agency, Barnardo's Cymru and Adoption UK which form the National Adoption Service (NAS) in Wales.
- 1.2 The performance of adoption services in Wales is closely monitored by NAS via a range of performance measures which are collated quarterly and reported to NAS. One of the key indicators is the length of time children wait for placements particularly those who have been waiting over six months to be placed.
- 1.3 VVC is one of the largest regions in Wales with the highest number of children requiring placements. In the year 2017-18, VVC matched 89 children with adoptive parents and 68 of those had waited longer than six months. A significant number of these children had additional support needs which are a major factor in contributing to the delay in securing permanent placements.
- 1.4 Adopting Together has been developed out of an emerging national need to secure adoptive placements for those hardest to place. The Service offers specific training, assessment and support to adopters, an intensive transition

process for children once a suitable match has been identified and post placement therapeutic support and follow up by a Clinical Psychologist.

- 1.5 The VVC Management Board which is comprised of Heads of Service from the four partner agencies has endorsed the Service and partners have already utilised the service on a spot purchase basis. The placements which have been made to date have been successful.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 The development of Adopting Together has arisen out of a national need to secure adoptive placements for those children with additional needs who wait the longest and to ensure that those children are provided with an individualised package of support.
- 2.2 The need to secure placements in a timely way is an identified need within VVC and Adopting Together provides an additional mechanism to support those children who are most in need.
- 2.3 The partner authorities within the Collaborative have endorsed and supported Adopting Together by the number of placements already made on a spot purchase basis.
- 2.4 There is a need however to formalise these arrangements by entering into a contractual arrangement which provides clarity of expectations on behalf of the partners and providers and long term security for the agencies.
- 2.5 The current Collaborative Agreement underpinning the operation of VVC does not currently enable the host Authority to enter into such contractual arrangements on behalf of the partner agencies despite the fact that securing adoptive placements is a delegated function of the Collaborative.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1 The principles and working arrangements of Adopting Together promotes partnership working, innovative practice and collaboration between the local authority and voluntary sector.
- 3.2 The need to secure permanent adoptive placements for those children who require them is a statutory function and long term requirement of the Collaborative and its partner authorities.
- 3.3 Adopting Together offers an opportunity to provide security for children in a spirit of partnership between purchasers, providers and adoptive parents. The ongoing support provided is designed to prevent difficulties and by early intervention, designed to avoid any potential breakdown in the placement.
- 3.4 Adopting Together has developed a partnership agreement with Cardiff University who have been commissioned to evaluate the progress of the scheme and to conduct some follow up research as to its effectiveness with adoptive families and partner agencies.

- 3.5** Adopting Together has achieved some national recognition for innovation in collaborative working. It won the Institute for Collaborative Working Innovation Award and was High Commended in the category of Social and Community Benefit at the 2018 Go Wales Awards.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** The funding of the placements under Adopting Together are agreed and met by the individual placing authority. The fees comprise the nationally agreed inter agency fee plus an additional fee to provide the therapeutic support.

Employment

- 4.2** There are no employment consequences.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** The Adopting Together agreement is unique to Wales. Adoption services in Wales are now provided under the provisions of Part 9 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 which also legislated for the setting up of the Adoption Collaboratives, including the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative. The National Adoption Service was set up to implement the Act to increase the pool of adopters and to ensure good quality support services, and pursuant to this role have arranged for the three providers to provide the highly specialised support services referred to in this report. It will be necessary to enter into contracts with the providers for the provision of these specialist services.

5. Background Papers

Cabinet Meeting - 1st April 2019 - Deed of Variation Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Collaborative Agreement - Minute No. C639