

Meeting of:	<b>Cabinet</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Monday, 12 April 2021</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Healthy Living and Social Care
Report Title:	Adopting Together Service
Purpose of Report:	As lead authority for the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC), to request authority to renew the Adopting Together Service Level Agreement to enable contractual provisions to be agreed to facilitate placements via the Adopting Together Service on behalf of partner authorities.
Report Owner:	Cabinet Member – Social Care and Health.
Responsible Officer:	Director of Social Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Heads of Service from partner authorities have been consulted and agree with the proposal.
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet
<p><b>Executive Summary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• In 2019, it was agreed that there was a need to formalise the contractual arrangements between the placing authorities and Adopting Together by way of a service level agreement. VVC, under the terms of the Agreement underpinning the Collaborative, were not permitted to enter such arrangements with Adopting Together on behalf of the partner authorities without the necessary authority being in place.</li> <li>• On 17th June 2019, Cabinet agreed to VVC entering into such an agreement on behalf of its partner authorities. This agreement now needs to be renewed to enable the service delivery to continue.</li> </ul>	

## **Recommendations**

- 1.** That Cabinet agree to renew, for a period of five years from the expiry of the previous Service Level Agreement, for the Vale of Glamorgan Council, as host authority for the Collaborative, to enter into contractual arrangements with St David's Adoption Agency and Barnardos Cymru for the provision of placements for hard to place children.
- 2.** That delegated authority be granted to the Head of Children and Young People Services and Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal and Democratic Services to agree terms and enter into forms of contract with the said bodies under the Adopting Together Service.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 1.** To enable continuity of service provision over a sustained period of time. There is an ongoing need to continue the current contractual arrangements to provide clarity of expectations, roles, responsibilities of partner agencies and the provider of the service.
- 2.** To enable contractual arrangements to be agreed and executed to ensure an ongoing commitment to the service.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1** Adopting Together was established under the aegis of the National Adoption Service (NAS) in Wales. It is a collaborative working arrangement between St. David's Adoption Agency, Barnardos Cymru and Adoption UK to provide adoptive placements and support to adoptive families.
- 1.2** St David's and Barnardos Cymru are the only two voluntary adoption agencies operating in Wales who assess adopters to provide placements for children referred by local authorities.
- 1.3** The Adopting Together Service is an extension of the usual service provided by these agencies in that it targets recruitment for specific children and provides support to those children for a period of three years following placement for adoption.
- 1.4** Adopting Together focuses on the recruitment of adopters for children with additional needs who have been waiting for adoptive placements the longest.
- 1.5** The partner agencies which form part of Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC), i.e. the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council and Cardiff Council, support the service.
- 1.6** Since the inception of Adopting Together, over 30 children from the region have been referred and eight children have been placed. A further match has been agreed. These placements have been successful.
- 1.7** 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, Barnardos Cymru and Adoption UK which form the National Adoption Service (NAS) in Wales.

- 1.8 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.
- 1.9 VVC is one of the largest regions in Wales with the highest number of children requiring placements. In the year 2019-20, VVC matched 98 children with adoptive parents and 79 of those had waited longer than six months. A significant number of these children had additional support needs which is a major factor in contributing to the delay in securing permanent placements.
- 1.10 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 support and follow up led by a Clinical Psychologist.
- 1.11 VVC Management Board which includes the Heads of Service from the four partner agencies has endorsed the scheme and the placements which have been made have been successful to date.

## **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 ongoing 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 the scheme by the number of children referred and placements already made.
- 2.4 There is a need to continue the contractual arrangements previously agreed to provide clarity of expectations on behalf of the partners and providers and long-term security for the agencies.
- 2.5 An ability for the host authority to agree the service level agreement would secure the service and provision of placements for our hardest to place children.

## **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 service.
- 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 to avoid any potential breakdown later.
- 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 Highly 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 as a direct result of this report.

### **Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 4.3 The Adopting Together Service is unique to Wales. Adoption services in Wales are 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 two 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**

[https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/\\_Committee%20Reports/Cabinet/2019/19-06-17/Adopting-Together-Service.pdf](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/_Committee%20Reports/Cabinet/2019/19-06-17/Adopting-Together-Service.pdf)