

## **Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**1 August 2024**

### **Adoption Partnership South East, Regional Adoption Agency, Annual Report 2023/2024**

Report from: Dr Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive

Author: Amy Coombs, Head of Adoption Partnership South East.

#### **Summary**

Adoption Partnership South East is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) providing adoption services for Medway, Kent, and the London Borough Bexley.

The fourth RAA Annual Report attached provides information and an overview of the adoption service activity and practice development for the period April 2023 – March 2024.

#### **1. Recommendations**

- 1.1. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the annual report as set out at Appendix 1, which outlines the activity that has taken place across the Adoption Partnership South East between April 2023 – March 2024

#### **2. Budget and policy framework**

- 2.1. Adoption Partnership South East operates under a pulled budget from Medway, Bexley and Kent.

#### **3. Background**

- 3.1. The Statutory Regulations require that Elected Members be informed of the Adoption Agency's activity on a regular basis. This annual report provides information that will assist Elected Members in respect of their responsibilities as Corporate Parents for Looked After Children.
- 3.2. The report should be read in conjunction with all the appendices, including the Adoption Agency's Statement of Purpose (SOP). The SOP explains our values and principles, the services we provide and the way we provide them.

The information provided meets the requirement of National Minimum Standards for Adoption, and the related regulations (Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Agencies (Misc. Amendments) Regulations 2003).

- 3.3. The agency is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 by:
  - 3.3.1. Ensuring the provision of a high-quality adoption service which guarantees the best possible standards of care, safety and protection for children or young people who are looked after and who need adoptive placements.
  - 3.3.2. Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services.
  - 3.3.3. Working in partnership with adoptive families & multi-disciplinary professionals ensuring the service is based on meeting statutory requirements, good practice, and innovation within the principles of value for money for the agency.
4. Options
  - 4.1. Adoption Partnership South East to continue to provide adoption service for Medway children.
5. Advice and analysis
  - 5.1. The report provides information regarding children's adoption journeys, adopters' journeys and reports the voice of adopted children and adoptive parents.
  - 5.2. The report provides detailed information about how children's needs are at the centre of all the work which takes place within the adoption service.
  - 5.3. The report provides information about adopter recruitment and the number of people enquiring about adopting through APSE.
  - 5.4. The report provides information regarding adoption support services offered to children and families by the RAA.
6. Risk management
  - 6.1. Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community. Using the following table this section should therefore consider any significant risks arising from your report.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
<b>Recruitment of the right adopters for the children of Medway.</b>	The challenge is to recruit adopters who can meet the needs of Medway's children, who may have complex needs.	All three local authorities have access to a wider pool of adopters for their children, resulting in very few children in APSE needing to be placed with adopters approved by other agencies.	BIII
<b>Finance</b>	The principle underpinning the Adoption Partnership has been that there will be no increase in funding for the first 3 years of the Partnership.	Legal agreement in place	CII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

## 7. Climate change implications

- 7.1 Reducing carbon footprint – Staff are supported to work from home and can use different offices across the region to reduce the need to travel.
- 7.2. Current practices are reviewed regularly to ensure we can plan strategically to deliver a quality service and respond to changes as and when they are required.

## 8. Financial implications

- 8.1. A legal Partnership Agreement underpins each Partner's financial contribution to the RAA under a pooled budget arrangement.
- 8.2. The 2023-24 partnership operating budget was £4,270,942, of which Medway's contribution equated to £964,542. At the end of the financial year, the service underspent its budget by £328,271 (Medway's share equalled £65,654) which was rolled forward into the 2024-25 operating budget.

- 8.3. For the 2024-25 financial year, the board is changing the funding methodology for the partnership. Each partner's contribution will now be based on its activity data rather than historic budgets. The partnership is working with an indicative operating budget of £4,294,951 excluding last year's roll forward, of which Medway's contribution is £997,889. The 2024-25 operating budget cannot be finalised until all three partners have agreed their 2024-25 salary increases.
- 8.4. Quarterly RAA Board meetings are held, as outlined in the annual report, where Directors from each local authority partner review budget expenditure and forecasting as well as regular meeting with the finance representatives of each local authority.

## 9. Legal implications

9.1. The work of the RAA is governed by:

- Education and Adoption Act 2016
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Adoption: Statutory Guidance 2013
- Care Planning, placement and Case Review and fostering services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- Care Planning Regulations 2010
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011)
- Local Authority Regulations 2005
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Standards Act 2000

9.2. The formation of a Regional Adoption Agency meets with government requirements.

9.3. The RAA is operated under the terms of a Partnership Agreement, which confirms the legal and governance arrangements; the budget; staffing and funding contributions for the three local authorities.

### Lead officer contact

Amy Coombs, Head of Adoption Partnership South East, amy.coombs@kent.gov.uk,  
03000414443

### Appendices

Appendices 1 Adoption Partnership South East Annual Report 23/24

Background papers

None