

# Cabinet

10 September 2020

## Establishment of a Framework Agreement for Children's Therapeutic Services and Interventions

### Recommendations

- 1) Cabinet approves proceeding with an appropriate procurement process for the provision of a Children's Therapeutic Interventions Framework on behalf of Adoption Central England.
- 2) Cabinet approves and authorises the Strategic Director for People to enter into all relevant contracts for the provision of Children's Therapeutic Interventions Framework on terms and conditions acceptable to the Strategic Director for Resources.

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The regionalisation of the adoption services and the creation of Adoption Central England (ACE) was not only concerned with ensuring a wider pool of prospective adopters for those children who need a permanent family and improving the timeliness of adoption for children, it also sought to improve post adoption support services to adoptive families.
- 1.2 Many children who are adopted will experience early life trauma and ongoing trauma as a result of this. This is like the experiences of children and young people who remain looked after. This was recognised by the Government that set up the Adoption Support Fund in 2015. For adoptive families requiring therapeutic services for themselves and their adopted children, an assessment of need is completed through ACE who will then process appropriate applications through the Adoption Support Fund. Some therapeutic interventions can be delivered through ACE, however the majority are commissioned and delivered by external providers. To date ACE has put in place commissioning arrangements with approximately 100 providers ranging from individuals to larger private organisations. The proposal to establish a Framework Agreement, led by Warwickshire County Council as the host agency, will strengthen commissioning and quality assurance arrangements ensuring the best possible outcomes for children and families.
- 1.3 ACE secured £1.3 million funding for therapeutic interventions in 2018-2019 and 561 adoptive families received services as a result. In 2019-2020 the claims against the Adoption Support Fund amounted to just over one million pounds and 607 adoptive families received therapeutic interventions consequently.

- 1.4 The fund is also available to households where the formerly looked after child is now subject to a special guardianship order. Their experiences and needs are very similar to those children who are adopted however nationally this group of carers are recognised as being *'older, poorer, less healthy and less well educated than adopters, they often have life changing decisions thrust on them with little preparation, assessments are often rushed, driven by the court 26-week deadline'*. Further, the impact of early trauma (on children) is not felt in a predictable or linear way but can emerge at any time across the life span especially at key transition points such as moving to secondary school or during adolescence. (Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board).
- 1.5 Applications to the Adoption Support Fund on behalf of special guardianship households have been significantly less and it is proposed that the Framework Agreement for Therapeutic services is applicable to this group of children/carers also. There will also be occasions where local authorities might wish to access services through the Framework Agreement for other children who have been assessed as in need.
- 1.6 Historically services were obtained through a Coventry City Council led JETS framework which ended in August 2018. Currently ACE, in theory can access providers through a dynamic purchasing process managed by Worcestershire County Council. However, this arrangement is not meeting the needs or demand of the adoptive families across the region and following discussions with procurement officers in the ACE local authorities, it is considered appropriate for Warwickshire County Council to set up a framework agreement for providers.
- 1.7 Due to the potential demand and value of the commissioned services, Cabinet approval is sought in order to progress this work.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Children who are placed for adoption, and those placed usually with relatives under a special guardianship order arrangement, have invariably been the subject of safeguarding and legal proceedings as a result of abuse.
- 2.2 The Adoption Support Fund has been available since May 2015. The Department of Education (DfE) commissioned an 'Evaluation of the Adoption Support Fund (August 2017)'. This included
- an online survey to adopters across the UK
  - a longitudinal postal survey of adoptive parents accessing the fund
  - a sample of local authority case studies, and
  - longitudinal in-depth interviews with adoptive families tracing their journeys and experiences.
- 2.3 The evaluation found that:
- children using the Fund showed substantially higher levels of emotional, behavioural and development needs than both children in

the general population and compared to looked after children, and showed a very high level of predicted psychiatric disorders

- family functioning and parent-child relationships within the families using the Fund were found to be very challenging, and
- the mental health and wellbeing of adoptive parents accessing the Fund was substantially poorer than the wider adult population.

2.4 The same evaluation also found that *'the market for independent post adoption support services expanded in response to the increased funding available ... though was not yet sufficiently developed to meet the rapid and substantial increase in demand. Key challenges to growth of local markets to meet the demands are lack of trained therapists ... the necessary supervision required to practice effectively... quality concerns about the market that is exacerbated by the stretched capacity of the independent providers struggling to meet the sudden demand'*.

2.5 Adoptive parents did report high levels of satisfaction with various aspects of support offered, however a concern was the timeliness of the service and how quickly they receive support.

2.6 ACE was set up on 1 February 2018 and in two and half years over 1,200 applications have been made to the Adoption Support Fund with a value exceeding £2.3 million. The primary interventions required and received have been:

- Complex multi-disciplinary assessments
- Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), and
- Play therapy.

2.7 The maximum fund allowed for each child per year, subject to assessment, is £2,500 for a complex assessment and £5,000 for therapeutic intervention. Within this financial envelope the travelling costs of the therapists are met along with their clinical supervision.

2.8 ACE is working closely with a range of providers who can meet the growing need; however, this is not sufficient and not all providers are registered on the Worcestershire (Dynamic Purchasing System) DPS and many are independent practitioners where ACE undertakes preliminary checks and assurances. To access the Worcestershire DPS all providers must be asked to take part in a further competition which is awarded solely on price – the lowest priced bid will be successful. This does not allow for parental choice of the therapist or the type of therapy offered.

2.9 The Evaluation also found *'regardless of the size of the adoption support team, the case studies indicate that upskilling of social workers in therapeutic knowledge is improving the efficiency and quality assessment, liaison with clinicians and appropriate commissioning of external providers to be good practice'*.

2.10 ACE is investing in its own service and is progressing certification as a DDP centre. Other therapies and interventions offered are therapeutic parenting,

Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) training and a parent-child attachment programme. ACE social workers can access DDP informed and NVR clinical supervision. However, the demand for adoption support is exceptionally high and some adoptive placements are deemed to be very vulnerable requiring greater and easier access to a range of more locally based providers.

- 2.11 The establishment of a Warwickshire led framework agreement would meet this need and extend the range of available support services to special guardianship families.
- 2.12 Warwickshire County Council hosts the regional adoption agency and as the lead agency will be responsible for entering into the Framework Agreement and any applicable call-off contracts on behalf of ACE. The ACE Executive Board members were notified of the proposal on 15 June 2020 and have given it their support. Further they have agreed the appointment of a contracts officer to support Framework, whose role would be to address any provider issues or concerns.
- 2.13 Any liabilities arising from the Framework Agreement would be jointly owned and shared by the five constituent local authorities in accordance with the agreed proportions as outlined in the ACE Partnership and Hosting Agreement. Also, the costs arising from the procurement exercise will be met from the ACE budget.

### **3. Advantages of the Therapeutic Interventions Framework Agreement for Children**

- 3.1 The following advantages have been identified:
- Unlike the DPF, factors other than cost can be taken into consideration in determining the preferred provider such as adopter choice, geographical location of the provider, suitability of the therapy and availability to deliver an intervention in a timely way.
  - The framework agreement would allow adoptive families to access details of providers so that they can express choice in selecting the provider they would look to work with.
  - The administration of the process is more straightforward and selective as we will be able to make a direct award to a suitable provider.
  - Warwickshire is central in the ACE region and is more likely to attract new providers from a wider geographical area. It will also build on existing established relationships with current providers so that services can be developed that complement each other to meet unmet need.
  - Commissioning practices will be strengthened, and quality assurance of awarded contracts will be strengthened.
  - Other children and families known to the local authorities will be able to access the services, such as children subject to special guardianship orders and other children in the community who are assessed as vulnerable and in receipt of early help services.

- 3.2 The future of the Adoption Support Fund appears secure at the present time with flexibilities being introduced during the Covid-19 period to extend the range of support services to adopters and special guardians. The fund is administered centrally at the present time and there is a possibility that this might change in the future with funding being allocated and aligned to the regional adoption agencies.
- 3.3 The ACE Executive Board, at its meeting on 6 February 2020, agreed the appointment of a contracts officer, funded through the ACE shared budget, who will oversee the administration of placements ensuring compliance with procurement and contract management requirements. They will be the main point of contact with the providers ensuring effective working relationships and quality assurance.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this proposal as the Framework Agreement does not place upon ACE or the local authorities including Warwickshire any guarantee to spend to any providers on the Framework. Any liabilities regarding finance relating to ACE are shared across all local authorities within as previously agreed within the ACE Hosting & Partnership Agreement and when there is a call off from the framework will that cost be met from the Adoption Support Fund.
- 4.2 The advantage of the Framework Agreement is that it should hopefully attract therapeutic providers from across the region, making them more accessible to families. This could have the effect of reducing the amount of adoption support fund monies spent on travel, potentially increasing the amount funding that can then be used for direct therapeutic interventions.

#### **5. Environmental Implications**

- 5.1 There are no adverse environmental implications. Having a wider range of therapeutic providers across the region should reduce travel for both the providers and families, which would be positive for environment.

#### **6. Timescales and implementation plan**

Complete Service Specification	June 2020
Other local authorities approve service specification	July 2020
Warwickshire Corporate Board	15 July 2020
Cabinet decision	10 September 2020
Tender preparation commences	23 October 2020
Advertising	3 November 2020
Response period, evaluations and selection	18 December 2020
Approval period	13 January 2021

Award	1 March 2021
Framework Commences	1 March 2021

## 7. Summary

- 7.1 Both the national research and evidence shows that adoptive children and their parents need and value therapeutic interventions that both support the child's development and ensures the stability of adoptive placements. This can equally apply to children subject to special guardianship orders and other vulnerable children in the community.
- 7.2 The current arrangements for accessing therapeutic interventions could be improved and be more inclusive of adoptive parents. Also, the current providers are biased toward the south of the ACE region.
- 7.3 It is therefore recommended that Warwickshire County Council leads in the establishment of a framework agreement for therapeutic interventions for children. This approach has the support of commissioners within the other local authority areas covered by ACE. The action will also place ACE in a good position should the administration and arrangements for the use of the Adoption Support Fund, in future be delegated to the regional adoption agencies.

## 8. Background papers

There are no background papers.

Report Author	Brenda Vincent Lead Manager - ACE	<a href="mailto:brendavincent@aceadoption.com">brendavincent@aceadoption.com</a>
Assistant Director	John Coleman	<a href="mailto:johncoleman@warwickshire.gov.uk">johncoleman@warwickshire.gov.uk</a>
Strategic Director	Nigel Minns	<a href="mailto:nigelminns@warwickshire.gov.uk">nigelminns@warwickshire.gov.uk</a>
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Jeff Morgan	<a href="mailto:jeffmorgan@warwickshire.gov.uk">jeffmorgan@warwickshire.gov.uk</a>

This report was circulated to the following members:

Local Members: None

Other Members: Councillors Yousef Dahmash, Pam Williams, Dominic Skinner, Corrine Davies and Jonathon Chilvers