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| Local Members Interest |
| N/A |

Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee - Thursday 07 November 2019

Regional Permanency Arrangement Development (Phase One)

Recommendations

I recommend that the Select Committee:

- a. Acknowledges the statutory requirement to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by the 1st April 2020.
- b. Scrutinises the progress, to date, in respect of the formation of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) between Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.
- c. Scrutinises the ambition of Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council to go beyond adoption and develop a regional model of wider permanence.

Report of Cllr Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Summary

What is the Select Committee being asked to do and why?

1. This report seeks to provide a transparent account to Members of the work undertaken to date in respect of the statutory requirement to be part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), as set out in the Education and Adoption Act 2016.
2. The Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee is asked to read the information detailed in the report which seeks to set out the case for creating an innovative, dynamic and forward-thinking Regional Permanency Arrangement (in addition to a Regional Adoption Agency) across Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.
3. Members are asked to scrutinise the progress, to date, in respect of the formation of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) and the ambition of Staffordshire County Council to go beyond adoption and develop a regional model of wider permanence which includes Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO).
4. Comments of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee, and Cabinet will be reported to the Regional Programme & Management Board. These comments will inform the future planning, management and delivery of the Regional Permanency Transformation Programme.

Executive Summary

5. The Permanency Partnership between the four Local Authorities fulfils the statutory requirements of the Education and Adoption Act 2016 and delivers the vision set out by Government in “Regionalising Adoption” (DfE 2015).
6. The four Local Authorities established the North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership, a formal partnership arrangement, in April 2017.
7. The Partnership aims to improve outcomes for children who enter care and require permanent care away from their families of origin. This includes children who are adopted from care, children living with special guardians and kinship carers, and those who require long-term foster care.
8. It is recognised that failure to secure permanent care for these children results in a wide range of detrimental impacts and can significantly affect their outcomes throughout childhood and into adulthood.
9. Our Partnership is the only regional arrangement to have secured Department for Education (DfE) transformation grant funding to develop services for this broad ‘permanence’ agenda (other Regions have only received funding to develop Regional Adoption Agencies).

Regional Permanency Model:

10. The Partnership will create a joint service delivery model focused on finding local, caring, stable and loving homes where Looked After Children achieve permanence.
11. Through a phased Transformation Programme (2019 and 2024), we will align Partner Local Authority functions and practice relating to achieving permanence for children through Adoption, Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardianship.
12. The Arrangement will operate through a hub and spoke model enabling Local Authorities to benefit from the regional delivery of some core services, whilst maintaining their own individual independence.
13. Staff will continue to be employed and based within their current Local Authority at this time. We will explore opportunities for secondments to fulfil specific regional roles and functions within the Partnership.
14. The Central Regional Permanency Hub will co-ordinate and deliver core functions across the partnership’s footprint. These include:
 - a. Strategic marketing and recruitment including adopter recruitment for the whole region,
 - b. Adopter preparation training
 - c. Adoption Panel administration
 - d. Specialist Family Finding for ‘harder to place’ children

- e. Specialist placement support and therapeutic interventions
 - f. Post-adoption support enquiries
15. Locality Permanency Hubs will operate within individual Local Authorities and will form part of the wider Children & Families System. Consistent regional practice will be coordinated via the Central Hub under the Partnership's governance arrangements. Locality Hubs will deliver functions including:
- a. Assessment of Prospective Adopters
 - b. Adoption and Permanence Support for local children and families
 - c. Services to adopted adults
16. The Regional Commissioning & Development Hub will deliver a range of functions relating to commissioning, development, change, and transformation; whilst coordinating the infrastructure of individual Local Authority functions to contribute to the delivery of a joint service delivery model.

Governance

17. The Service Management Board will be accountable for the Regional Arrangement. It will be chaired by a Director of Children's Services (on behalf of the four respective Local Authorities) and include relevant Assistant Directors/Strategic Leads.
18. The Board members will be accountable to Elected Members and Senior Leaders of their respective organisations.
19. The Regional Head of Operations will be responsible for the Regional Permanency Arrangement. The post holder will have line (matrix) management responsibility for staff within the arrangement and responsibility for day to day operations.

Financial Implications

20. The Four Local Authorities agree that the Partnership cannot lead to increased financial costs or pressures and that no Authority will be disadvantaged financially as a result of the arrangement.
21. It is recommended (subject to Cabinet consideration) that the Regional Financial Formula for 2020/21 and 2021/22 is set on the basis that each Partner contributes 100% of "in scope" budgets (Adoption), as disaggregated from the 2019/20 budget.

Progress to Date & Next Steps:

22. Regional governance systems are underpinned by clear strategic plans in place to manage future demand, develop quality services which achieve excellence, deliver value for money and achieve appropriate efficiencies and cost savings.

23. A network of Regional Business Workstreams are focusing on aligning service infrastructure for Adoption; including governance, legal infrastructure, finance, resources, workforce, I.C.T, digitalisation, information governance and strategic commissioning.
24. A network of Regional Practice Workstreams focusing on aligning and improving Adoption practice. This includes adopter recruitment, adopter assessment, achieving early permanence, the child's permanency journey, permanency support, adopter training and development and family finding.
25. The Partnership have tested new ways of working and has secured new funding and partnerships; most recently securing a DfE Grant to implement the Mockingbird Practice Model for fostering.
26. The programme will continue in the design phase of the new operating model which prepares the detail for phase one to go live in April 2020.
27. The Partnership will continue to engage all stakeholders
28. We will return to the Cabinets of Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council in respect of a Regional Permanency Arrangement in December 2019.

Full Detailed Report

Background:

29. In June 2015, the Coalition Government prioritised the achievement of permanence through Adoption. "Regionalising Adoption", published by the Department of Education (DfE), set out the Government's direction for the formation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) by 2020. The DfE's expectation was that larger delivery models would be able to pool resources and share best practice to better target the recruitment of prospective adopters and speed up the matching and placement of children for adoption.
30. Responding to the requirement to form a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) which was established by the Education and Adoption Act 2016, Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council joined together in April 2017 to facilitate a collaborative working arrangement, through the establishment of the North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership.
31. The four Local Authorities shared a vision to create an arrangement which went beyond Adoption and included Fostering, Special Guardianship and Connected Persons. The Partnership has a shared mission to lead the local, regional and national agenda in respect of achieving permanence for all Looked After Children who require it.
32. Since 2017, Corporate Parenting Panels have been updated regularly and have monitored the formation, activity and progress of the North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership.

Context:

33. Most children will have their need for stability and nurturing met by their birth parent(s) and will not require support from, or come to the attention of, Local Authority Children's Services. A small number of children will come into the care of the Local Authority and will require long term provision away from their birth parent(s).
34. Where children require long term care, Local Authority Children's Services will prioritise the achievement of permanency. Permanence, in the context of Children's Social Care, is defined as a framework of emotional (attachment), physical (stability) and legal permanence (in respect of who discharges parental responsibility).
35. Failing to achieve permanency for Looked After Children can lead to a detrimental impact on their short, medium and long-term outcomes, including a direct impact on their sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. This can often result in placement breakdowns and disruptions leading to children requiring

specialist, intensive and costly placements/services, causing direct financial pressure on Local Authorities.

36. The Partnership recognises that only a small number of children enter the Adoption System and a much larger group require long-term permanence through mainstream fostering, Connected Person's Fostering and Special Guardianship.
37. In responding to the requirement to establish a Regional Adoption Agency, the Partnership is seeking to facilitate an innovative, dynamic and forward-thinking collaboration which focuses on all permanence options, through the establishment of the North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership.
38. This innovative approach aims to create a sustainable system which operates on a regional footprint, maximising resources, capacity and flexibility, and leading to improvements in service delivery, effective practice and long-term outcomes for children, whilst maintaining the independence of each individual Local Authority.
39. Whilst the DfE has provided transformation grants to support the formation of a number of Regional Adoption Agencies across the country, we are the only region to have received support to pursue the broader vision of incorporating a wider group of children who require permanent care into our regional arrangements.

Regional Permanency Arrangement:

40. The Partnership is working towards a regional arrangement, which operates, across Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council with the creation of a joint service delivery model. The arrangement will focus on finding local, caring, stable and loving homes where Looked After Children achieve permanence.
41. Through a phased Regional Permanency Transformation Programme, we will align permanency functions relating to Adoption, Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardians between 2019 and 2024. This will ensure that governance arrangements, delivery structures, systems, processes and practice enable the workforce from the four Local Authorities to work together, ensuring all children entering care will receive a consistently high level of organisational commitment, leading to better outcomes for children.
42. The Regional Permanency Arrangement will operate through a hub and spoke model which enables Local Authorities to benefit from a network of regional delivery whilst maintaining their own individual independence. This will ensure the Partnership reflects the local landscape, adapted as necessary to the needs of individual Local Authorities, whilst demonstrating clear links to the local Children & Families System.
43. The proposed model demonstrates learning from delivery adopted by Integrated Children & Families Services across England in relation to the principles of multiagency teams, integrated working and governance. Such ways of working have been successfully embedded within Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs

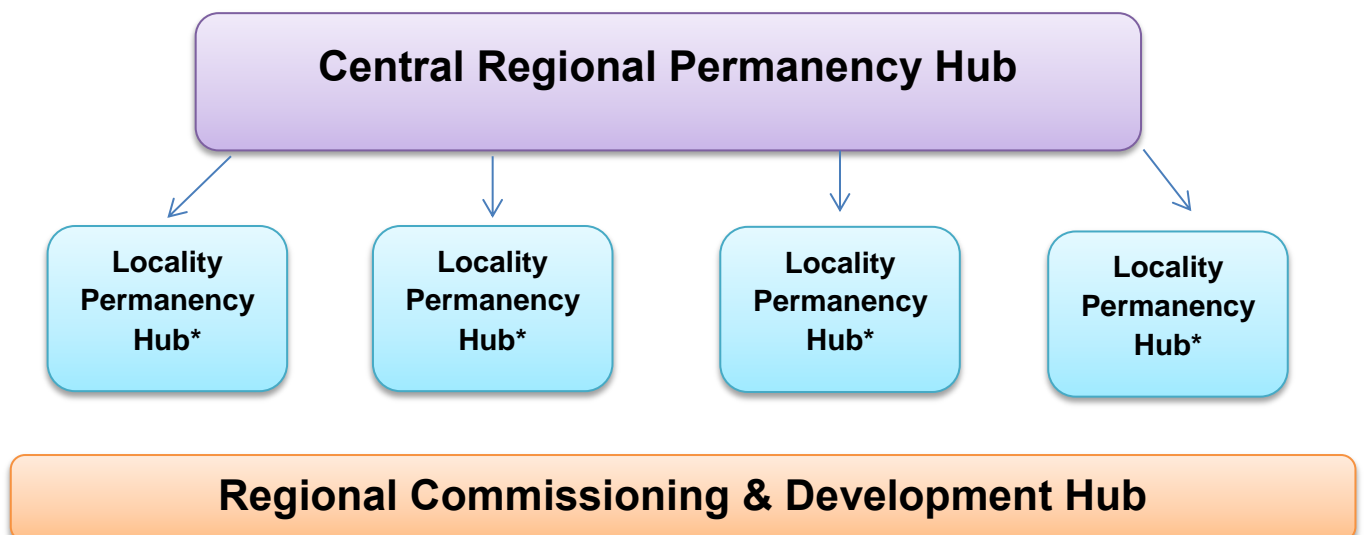
(MASH), Multi Agency Early Help Partnerships, West Mercia YOS, Stoke-on-Trent YOS and the Staffordshire YOS.

44. Staff will continue to be employed and based within each Local Authority and will not be transferred to another alternative delivery vehicle at this time. We will however, where appropriate, continue to seek to explore opportunities for secondments where it is in the best interests of the Partnership.
45. The Partnership recognises the differences in practice within each Local Authority but continues to be assured of the commitment of each Partner to drive forward improvements through the Regional Permanency Arrangement.
46. Statutory responsibilities relating to Looked After Children will continue to sit with Local Authorities (i.e. Corporate Parenting, Agency Decision Maker and Care Planning, Placement and Case Review).

Regional Delivery Model:

47. The Partnership will adopt the following principles in developing a Regional Permanency Arrangement:
 - a. The services relating to Adoption, Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardianship will be delivered through a multi-agency Regional Permanency Arrangement.
 - b. Looked After Children will, wherever possible and appropriate, remain in the local area to which they were born.
 - c. The workforce will not be transferred to an alternative Local Authority or delivery vehicle.
 - d. The development of a regional permanency model cannot increase the financial pressures on individual Local Authorities.
 - e. The Partnership reflects the local landscape, adapted as necessary to the needs of individual Local Authorities, whilst demonstrating clear links to the local Children & Families System.

48. The proposed regional delivery model is as follows:

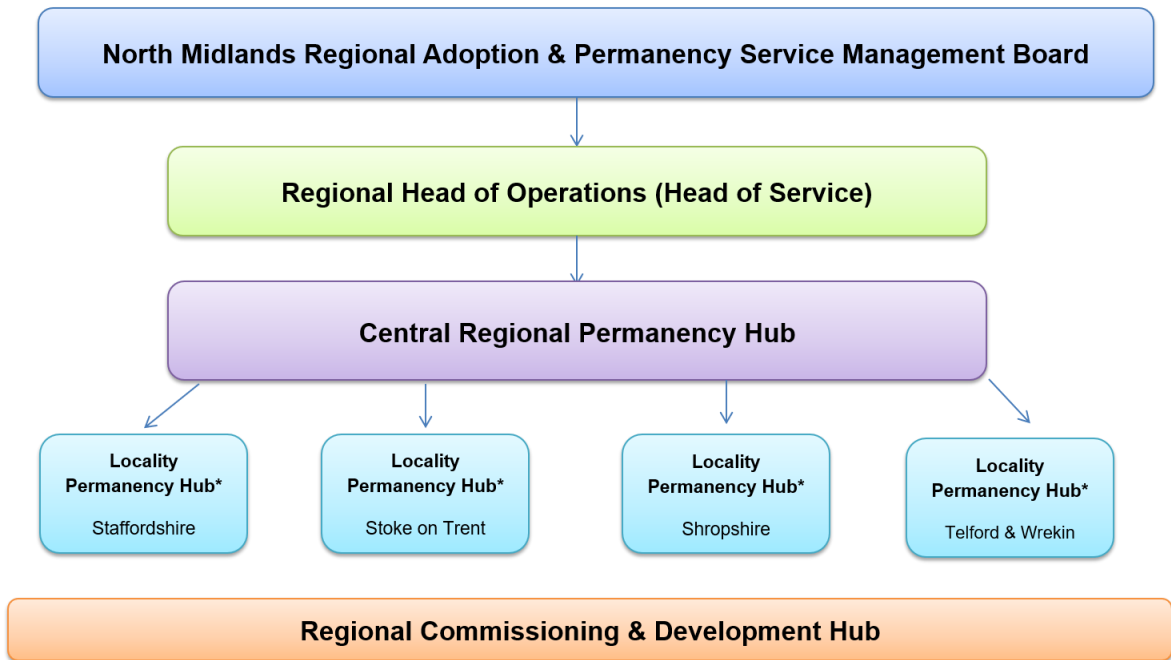


49. The Central Regional Permanency Hub will co-ordinate functions from across the partnership to ensure that we are able to operate on a regional footprint, maximising resources, capacity and flexibility, leading to improvements in effective practice and long-term outcomes for children. The Central Regional Permanency Hub will include functions which will benefit from operating on a regional footprint. Functions include the development of marketing and recruitment strategies, specialist training, learning and development programmes and specialist placement support services for Looked After Children, Adopters, Foster Carers, Special Guardians and Connected Persons. In phase one the functions will be Adopter Recruitment, Adopter Training, Post Adoption Support Front Door and Panel administration. The Central Regional Permanency Hub will be delivered through the four Local Authorities and our voluntary sector partners.
50. Locality Permanency Hubs will bring together permanency functions within each Local Authority. The Locality Permanency Hubs will operate within individual Local Authorities and will form part of the wider Children & Families System. Consistent practice across Locality Permanency Hubs will be coordinated and directed by a Central Permanency Hub and Regional Commissioning & Development Hub under the leadership of the Regional Head of Operations and Regional Senior Leadership Team (SLT).
51. The Regional Commissioning & Development Hub will be accountable to the Regional Head of Operations for the leadership, management and coordination of specialist functions which enable the development and delivery of a Regional Permanency Arrangement which operates on a regional footprint, maximising resources, capacity and flexibility, leading to improvements in effective practice and long-term outcomes for children. The Regional Commissioning & Development Hub will have unique functions in relation to commissioning, development, change, and transformation whilst coordinating the infrastructure of individual Local Authority functions to contribute to the delivery of a joint service delivery model.
52. In forming our partnership, we have facilitated informal conversations with the voluntary sector across our region to develop a deeper understanding of how we can most effectively engage voluntary sector partners in the development of our partnership. We recognise that the voluntary sector would like to be a fundamental part of developing our delivery model at the earliest opportunity and we are therefore proposing to invite the voluntary sector across our region to form an "Alliance". It is the intention of our partnership to invite the alliance to be a strategic partner with our partnership and to work in coproduction with our partnership to develop our delivery model. This "Alliance" will become an essential part of our delivery model and will be developed in co-production with voluntary sector.
53. The Partnership has secured a significant joint arrangement with Adoption UK, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, to provide additional Permanency Support activity.

This is focused on peer support and developing the Adopter community. This is closely aligned to the “People Helping People” agenda in Staffordshire.

Governance:

54. The governance systems will be aligned and developed to ensure robust arrangements where Senior Leaders have a strategic focus on achieving permanence for children entering care who require long-term/permanent care away from their birth parents. Our regional governance systems will be underpinned by clear strategic plans in place to manage future demand, develop quality services which achieve excellence, deliver value for money and achieve appropriate efficiencies and cost savings. Our regional governance systems will develop a clear approach to using evidence and analysis to understand demand, regional sufficiency planning and inform future planning and commissioning of services, relating to permanency

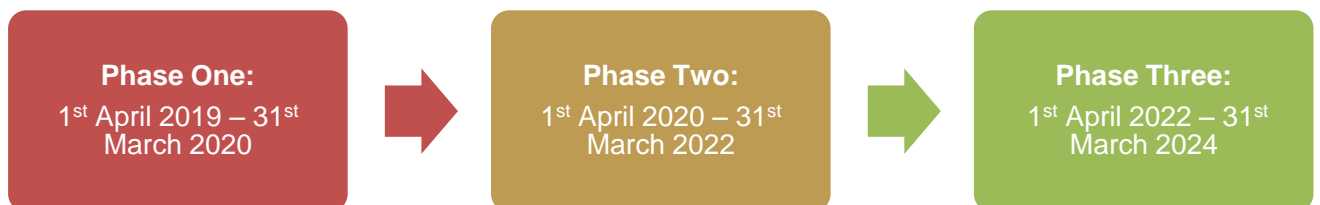


55. The Board will be accountable for the Regional Permanency Arrangement and will provide strategic leadership to achieve the long-term vision and objectives of the arrangement. The Board will be chaired by a Director of Children’s Services (on behalf of the four respective Local Authorities) and will include Assistant Directors/Strategic Leads responsible for permanency and representatives of Local Authority Commissioners (where appropriate). Because Staffordshire County Council will be the legal entity and accountable body for the Regional Permanency Arrangement, the Board will not be chaired by a Staffordshire representative. The Board will have specific delegated authority for the Regional Permanency Arrangement, acting as a single line of accountability and on behalf of the four respective Local Authorities.

56. The Board members will be accountable to Elected Members and Senior Leaders of their respective organisations. When decisions are required outside of the delegated functions these members will ensure that any appropriate mechanisms are used. If there is a time when decisions cannot be made this will be escalated by the Chair of the Board to the collective group of Directors of Children’s Services and Chief Executive Officers, of each Local Authority, for agreement and decision.
57. The Regional Head of Operations will be responsible for the Regional Permanency Arrangement. Whilst employed by Staffordshire County Council will report directly to the Management Board. The post holder will have line management responsibility for staff within the arrangement, through matrix management, and will have operational responsibility for the Regional Permanency Arrangement on a day to day basis. The Regional Head of Operations will have a single line of an accountability to the Management Board and will have a range of functions.
58. The Regional Head of Operations will represent the region at the West Midlands Regional Adoption & Special Guardianship Leadership Board. The Regional Head of Operations will seek to engage the Regional Permanency Arrangement in broader opportunities for transformation and development across the West Midlands and England.
59. It is proposed to bring together Service Leads responsible for Adoption, Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardianship from each participating Local Authority to form a Regional Senior Leadership Team. Responsible (through matrix management) to the Regional Head of Operations (who is accountable to the Regional Management Board), members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will provide strategic and operational management across the North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership. Service Leads will continue to be employed by their individual Local Authority and will continue to have a line of accountability within this management structure.

Functions:

60. Functions will be transferred into the Regional Permanency Arrangement at different stages in the Regional Permanency Transformation, as outlined in the following diagram:



61. In Phase One, Adoption functions will be prioritised in order to develop a live Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by the 1st April 2020 (to comply with the Education and Adoption Act 2016). Adoption functions include those that relate to Adopter Recruitment, Adopter Assessment, Adoption Matching and Post Adoption Support. Priority functions within Fostering, Connected Persons and Special

Guardianship will also be included in Phase One to allow adequate time to deliver the ambitions of the Partnership by the 1st April 2024.

62. Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardianship will be prioritised in the second phase of the Regional Permanency Transformation. This activity will follow a similar approach to phase one which will be focused on active exploration.
63. In Phase Three, the Partnership will focus on the final functions of Fostering, Connected Persons and Special Guardianship. Work to integrate the functions of Phase Three into the Regional Permanency Arrangement is likely to begin in phase one and phase two but due to the complexity will not go live until phase three. Functions in this phase include Assessment & Eligibility of Fostering Allowances and Other Payments, in respect of SGO/Connected Persons and Assessment & Eligibility of Financial Allowances in respect of SGO/Connected Persons.

Financial Implications:

64. In proposing the development of a Regional Permanency Arrangement, the four Local Authorities are clear that it provides an opportunity to achieve a range of financial benefits in the medium term, as outlined in the Outline Business Case (OBC).
65. The four Local Authorities are clear that any future partnership arrangement cannot lead to increased financial costs or pressures because of the development of this Partnership. The four Local Authorities are also clear that no Local Authorities will be disadvantaged financially because of the development of this arrangement.
66. It is recommended (subject to Cabinet consideration) that the Regional Financial Formula for 2020/21 and 2021/22 is set on the basis that each Partner contributes 100% of “in scope” budgets (Adoption), as disaggregated from the 2019/20 budget.
67. It is also recommended (subject to Cabinet consideration) that there will be no further recourse to any Local Authority in the Partnership, in respect of services in scope of the Phase One Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). Partner Local Authorities will remain responsible for any additional cost pressures (through, for example, significant increases in predicted demand for services).
68. The Department of Education, stakeholders and other Local Authorities have identified regional finance and funding formulas as one of the most significant challenges facing RAA’s across the country. Many regional financial formulas have led to an increase in the financial contributions of Local Authorities to Adoption Services. Within the design of the proposed financial model for our Partnership, we have identified the best practice from RAAs that have gone live. The available evidence supports this as the best approach in terms of mitigating the potential for increased cost pressures.

69. The proposed approach will ensure financial certainty for the RAA in the short term, whilst ensuring that Local Authorities are insulated from potential financial risk as a result of the new arrangement. Adopting this proposed arrangement will allow the Partnership and the four Local Authorities to take informed financial decisions in the medium and long term, ensuring the Regional Permanency Arrangement will achieve financial sustainability to meet the changing needs of Looked After Children and the challenges facing the four Local Authorities.
70. The proposed model allows the Partnership to be able to adjust the Regional Financial Formula to take account of further functions coming into scope, as previously set out in the Outline Business Case (OBC) in respect of Adoption Allowances, Fostering, Connected Carers and Special Guardianship.

Progress to Date:

71. Governance systems are aligned and developed to ensure robust arrangements where Senior Leaders have a strategic focus on achieving permanence for children entering care who require long term/permanent care away from their birth parents.
72. Our regional governance systems are underpinned by clear strategic plans in place to manage future demand, develop quality services which achieve excellence, deliver value for money and achieve appropriate efficiencies and cost savings. Our regional governance systems are developing a clear approach to using evidence and analysis to understand demand, regional sufficiency planning and inform future planning and commissioning of services, relating to permanency.
73. The Regional Permanency Arrangement, through dialogue, is making progress towards achieving financial sustainability to meet the changing needs of Looked After Children and the challenges facing the four Local Authorities.
74. Information governance is integrated in all aspects of the Regional Permanency Arrangement and up to date and comprehensive intelligence and performance data is used regularly with partners to plan and assess impacts of the Partnerships decisions.
75. The Partnership have developed a network of Regional Business Workstreams which are focusing on aligning our service infrastructure for Adoption. This includes activity relating to governance, legal infrastructure, finance, resources, workforce, I.C.T, digitalisation, information governance and strategic commissioning.
76. The Partnership have also developed a network of Regional Practice Workstreams which are focusing on aligning our Adoption practice. This includes activity relating to adopter recruitment, adopter assessment, achieving early permanence, the child's permanency journey, permanency support, adoption decision making, adopter training and development and family finding. This includes the alignment of all policies, procedures and guidance relating to Adoption.

77. The Partnership have tested new ways of working, including the development of an Early Permanency Project, a Post Adoption Support Project and most recently the Partnership have received a DfE Grant to test new ways of working for Fostering through the Mockingbird Practice Model.

78. The Partnership is on track to deliver a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) by the 1st April 2020.

Next Steps:

79. The programme will continue in the design phase of the new operating model which prepares the detail for phase one to go live in April 2020.

80. The Partnership will continue to engage stakeholders, including the workforce, Looked After Children, Adopters, Foster Carers, Special Guardians, Designated Family Judges, Family Justice Boards and CAFCASS, partners, residents and other stakeholders to co-produce the development of this operating model which focuses on permanence.

81. Lead Cabinet Members for Children & Young People, along with Directors of Children's Services (DCS), will continue to join quarterly strategic partnership meetings to continue to provide political, member led leadership to the development of our Partnership and the Regional Permanency Arrangement.

82. The Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee and the Corporate Parenting Panel will continue to be asked to scrutinise the design and implementation of the Regional Permanency Arrangement.

83. We will return to the Cabinets of Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council in respect of a Regional Permanency Arrangement in December 2019. The Partnership will return to the Corporate Parenting Panel at the same time for additional scrutiny by Members.

Link to Strategic Plan

84. The Regional Permanency Transformation Programme is a key outcome in the SCC Strategic Plan. The Regional Permanency Transformation Programme is directly linked to the priorities of Children & Families and Health, Care and Wellness. The Programme also contributes to the priority outcomes of *"Be healthier and more independent"* and *"feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their community"*.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

85. Since 2017, the Corporate Parenting Panel have continued to closely monitor the formation and activities of the North Midlands Regional Adoption & Permanency Partnership.

86. We will return to the Cabinets of Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council in respect of a Regional

Permanency Arrangement in December 2019. The Partnership will return to the Corporate Parenting Panel at the same time for additional scrutiny by Members.

87. The Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee to provide further scrutiny in 2020.

Community Impact

88. The Partnership is continuing to undertake a detailed Community Impact Assessment (CIA) in relation to all aspects of the Regional Permanency Transformation Programme. A detailed Community Impact Assessment (CIA) will be made available prior to the "Go Live" of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) in April 2020. This will be available for the scrutiny of the Committee in 2020.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

[Appendix 1: Regional Outline Business Case \(OBC\)](#)

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