

WEST MERCIA ADOPTION PROJECT

OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE

Document Purpose	
To provide an initial outline of the project sufficient to identify why it is being proposed and what it seeks to achieve.	
Document Details	
Version	0.3
Version Date	19.8.13

1. PROJECT DEFINITION

1.1 Project Aim

The overall aim of the project is to develop a single West Mercia Adoption Service which delivers a more efficient and effective service to a wider range of children.

1.2 Project Description

The project will develop a single West Mercia Adoption Service across Worcestershire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Herefordshire which delivers a more efficient and effective service to a wider range of children, with particular emphasis on improving the timeliness of placing children and young people for adoption.

The new service will at least maintain the quality of current provision, improve outcomes, deliver savings based on lower service costs arising from a more efficient staffing structure and economies of scale arising from aggregated workloads. It is anticipated that cashable savings up to 20% in 2014/15 for each authority will be made through the project.

Project Scope

- Explore the opportunity to establish a shared adoption service covering West Mercia.
- To look at how we might best organise recruitment and training of adopters which would be compliant with government targets over the next three or four years.
- To look at the organisation of panels in West Mercia and determine the appropriate number of these.
- To review existing post adoption support arrangements and how these might best be organised to meet future need including the level of financial support provided.
- To review existing post adoption counselling arrangements for birth family members and how these might be developed to meet future need.
- Consider under these arrangements how particular groups are targeted and adoptive homes located e.g. older children, children with disabilities, sibling groups, BME groups.
- Explore arrangements for overseas adoption and how these might be delivered more effectively.
- To assess the feasibility of different models of working, including joint working with a voluntary adoption agency/not for profit groups or a mutual and how this might be achieved.
- To look at the relationship with the West Midlands Adoption Consortium in order to ensure that any development is complementary.

- To think about relationships between the adoption team and field work teams and the way in which children and young people needing permanent alternative homes are identified and tracked.
- To assess the impact of change on our relationships with local courts and how this would be managed.
- To consider how this body will relate to regional and national bodies.
- To look at the governance arrangements of such an organisation and how this might be managed.
- To determine options as to who might run such an organisation.
- To consider arrangements for prospective adopters wishing to consider the Fostering to Adopt scheme.
- To consider arrangements for foster carers wishing to adopt children already placed with them.

1.3 Project Background

Under new powers provided to the Government under the Children and Families Bill 2013, local authorities that are not performing appropriately will have their role as adoption agencies withdrawn. In addition, there is a longer term proposal in the Government's 'Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay' which proposes as a default position that the recruitment and training of adopters will be transferred to voluntary organisations.

The four local authorities in the West Mercia region - Herefordshire Council, Worcestershire County Council, Telford & Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council - recognise that working collaboratively provides a genuine opportunity to respond to the national agenda and, following the success of a similar approach to establish a West Mercia Youth offending Service, are exploring the possibility of joining forces to provide a single adoption service.

By delivering a single service whilst maintaining functions at a regional and local level, partners envisage achieving economies of scale and delivering a faster and more cost efficient process of providing alternative permanent homes for children across the West Mercia region.

1.4 Project Objectives

The key objectives of the project are:

- To retain local accountability and service delivery based on local need.
- To maintain or improve outcomes for children, young people and adopters, building on the strengths of existing services.
- To improve efficiency through:
 - Streamlining management costs by creating a single service.
 - Streamlining service delivery via processes and pathways.
 - Ensuring better value from commissioning non-core functions.
- To identify the most appropriate delivery arrangements for the single service.
- To support the establishment of the single service by September 2014.

1.5 Project Outcomes

The key outcomes for the project are:

- Retained local accountability and services based on local need.

- A reduction in the length of time taken in the 'end-to-end' adoption process, ie, from initial inquiry to a child being placed.
- A reduction in the overall cost of adoption for the four authorities across a number of different budgets.
- Children waiting for adoption will be matched more quickly and placed with adoptive families sooner, particularly 'hard to place' children.
- Children's social workers will have increased choice of potential adopters to enable the successful matching of children.
- The four authorities will be assisted to meet new Government requirements on timescales.
- Swifter and more effective assessment, training, approval and support for adopters.

1.6 Innovation

Many local authorities have embarked on or are looking at joint ventures, such as WWiSH (Wigan, Warrington and St Helen's joint adoption service), Adoption in the Black Country (joint venture between Wolverhampton, Dudley, Walsall and Sandwell) and indeed Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin's existing joint adoption service. This project's intention is to learn from and build on such models and combine adoption services over the West Mercia footprint, which covers a much larger geographical area and demographic sector. We are not aware of any other authority/group of authorities looking at adoption service delivery on this scale.

2. CURRENT SERVICE PROVISION

Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin councils have had a joint adoption service since 1998. This service came out of LGR with Telford separating from Shropshire, but keeping some joint services. The joint service has 31 posts and a combined adoption budget of £835k (Shropshire £488k / Telford £347k). The majority of functions are delivered in-house with the exception of marketing for the recruitment of prospective adopters, birth parent support and counselling, and access to records from other LAs for adopted adults, which are commissioned.

Worcestershire's adoption service has 24 posts and a £1m budget. All its functions are delivered in-house with the exception of adopter support groups which are commissioned.

Herefordshire's adoption service is the smallest with 14 posts and a budget of £331k. All of its functions are delivered in-house.

3. OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE

3.1 Options

The following delivery options for the new service are being considered:

Option 1

Do nothing and stay 'as is', with each service maintaining its existing service set up, using 3rd parties independently procured.

Option 2

Deliver some key functions together and maintain delivery of other functions within individual authorities.

- Partnership arrangement involving a number of SLAs for certain tasks/duties.
- Sharing of some costs and collaboration on 'placement 'selling' and 'purchasing'.
- Joint activity days.
- Share training opportunities.
- Occasional use of voluntary sector as and when required.
- Co-located teams.

Option 3

Deliver a core adoption service across West Mercia, with commissioned non-core services based on local needs.

- West Mercia 'union' of LAs.
- Pooling some budgets to deliver efficiencies.
- Host authority arrangement.
- One management structure but reporting from/to the 4 LAs.
- Joint activity days.
- One training procedure but shared.

Option 4

Deliver a single adoption service, incorporating all core and non-core services, delivered by a lead West Mercia authority.

- Combined governance arrangements – single entity, fully integrated service (social enterprise?)
- Voluntary organisation fully integrated into arrangement – for hard to place children/birth ties/BRC work.
- One 'brand' and one set of common procedures.
- One marketing partner providing front door services.
- One IT system.
- Joint activity days.
- One route (funnel) from marketing partner into the agency then two or four consistent allocation streams.
- Core staff groups supported by a pool of bank staff to assist at times of high demand.
- Flexible and mobile adoption panels.
- Central training team.

Option 5

Contract out all core and non-core services (on a not for profit basis), eg, by going into partnership with a voluntary organisation or establishing a staff mutual.

Options Appraisal

There are five main options, with benefits from Option 1 being negligible and benefits from Option 2 being minimal. It is possible that a model mixing elements of Options 3, 4 and 5 may be feasible based on a cost/benefit analysis. None of the options preclude going into partnership with a voluntary organisation.

To achieve the desired project outcomes it is recommended that by working together the four West Mercia authorities will be able to carry out a more in-depth appraisal of Options 3-

5 in the first instance to the benefit of all authorities and which maintain local accountability and service delivery based on local need.

In doing so, the areas that would need to be considered and explored further include our legal obligations and boundaries (if we go into partnership with a voluntary organisation what functions can be legally discharged), the governance and audit framework around adoption and human resource implications (TUPE arrangements, etc).

3.2 Project Costs

The bulk of the work in designing the overall structure, including developing the management and staffing structure, determining the core and non-core offer of the new service, pathways to/from the service, the transfer of staff and any redundancies, etc, is likely to fall to existing staff across the four authorities. During this period costs will, therefore, include the backfill of posts to do this work and project management.

Each authority has an Adoption Reform Grant which can specifically be used for adoption transformation, therefore, each authority has contributed £12,500 of this grant into a pooled budget to support the project.

3.3 Return on Investment

Cashable Savings

The overall aim of the project is to maintain and improve the quality of current provision and improve outcomes whilst making financial efficiencies. The new service will deliver savings based on lower service costs arising from a more efficient staffing structure and economies of scale arising from aggregated workloads. This is expected to be up to 20% in 2014/15 for each authority.

Non Cashable Benefits

The primary focus of this project is to deliver an improved adoption service to a wider range of children. Reducing the length of time taken in the “end to end” process of the adoption journey, ie, from initial inquiry to a child being placed for adoption, will minimise the impact of delays for both the children and adopters. Whilst operational efficiencies will be achieved through the pooling of resources, the organisational changes expect to improve on the quality of the current provision across the region.

3.4 Risks

The key high level risks associated with this project are:

- Conflict between the project's vision/objectives and the strategic direction of each individual adoption service or authority.
- Change in leadership in any of the authorities could lead to buy-in to the project being lost.
- Lack of stakeholder support.
- Lack of resources to deliver the project effectively and within timescale.
- Ability to resolve complex issues such as IT within timescale.
- Loss of key quality staff through the change process.
- Under the Children and Families Bill, the Secretary of State will have the power to direct Local Authorities to arrange for the recruitment, assessment and approval of prospective adopters to be carried out by one or more other adoption agencies.

- Target savings may not be achievable across the board.

3.5 Stakeholders

The main stakeholders associated with this project are:

- Children and young people in the LAC system at all stages of the adoption process.
- Adopters at all stages of the assessment/approval process.
- Approved adopters waiting for placements.
- Adopters with placements pre adoption order.
- Adoptive families in receipt of adoption support services.
- Birth families.
- Adopted adults.
- Adoption Service staff in each authority.
- Children's Social Workers and Fostering Social Workers in each authority.
- Adoption Panel chairs and members in each authority.
- Elected Members with responsibility for children and families in each authority.
- Providers.
- West Mercia Adoption Project Working Group.
- West Mercia Adoption Project Steering Group.
- West Mercia Adoption Project Board.

4. HIGH LEVEL PROJECT PLAN

4.1 Timescales

Key Milestone	Date
Produce Outline Business Case	September 2013
Produce Detailed Business Case	December 2013
Produce Detailed Implementation Plan for approval	February 2014
Implementation	April - August 2014
New Service Operational	September 2014

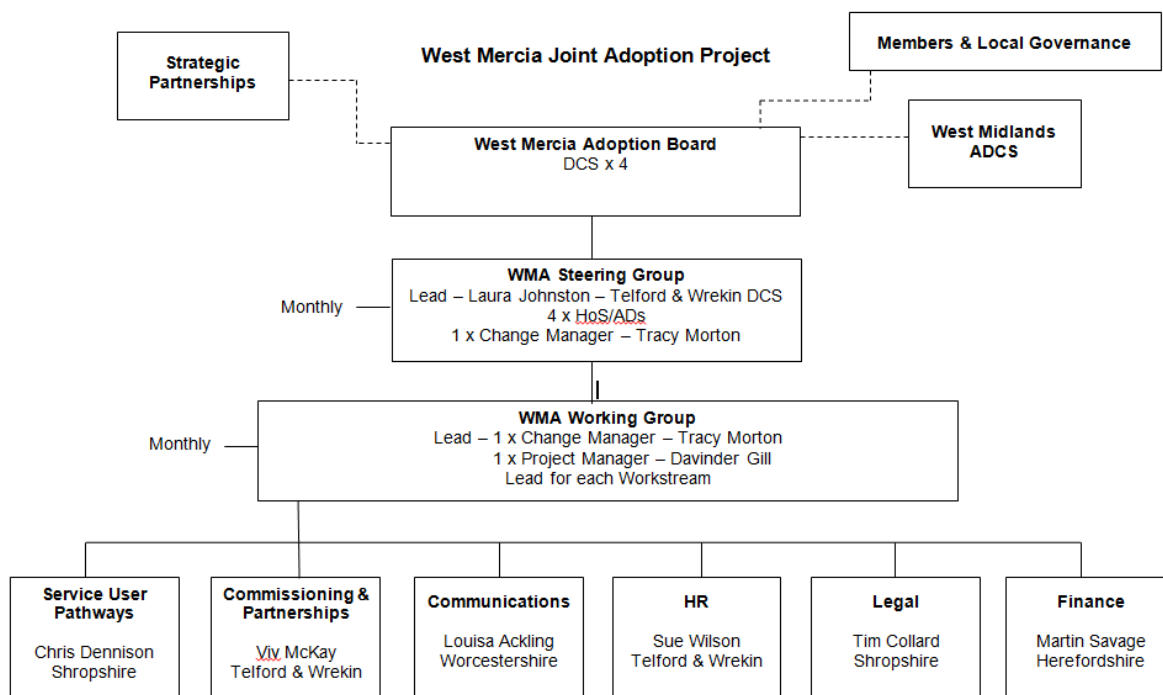
4.2 People Resources

Refer to paragraph 3.2 and 4.3.

4.3 Project Structure and Governance

A West Mercia Adoption Board, Steering Group, Working Group and Project Teams have been established to deliver the project, as illustrated in the structure chart below. A Project Lead and Project Manager have also been assigned to the project.

The Board, Steering Group and Working Group each meet monthly and have met regularly since May 2013.



5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT SCREENING

	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Neutral Impact	Comments
Age	X			The project aims to improve outcomes for children aged 0-18 and adopters over the age of 21.
Disability	X			The project aims to improve outcomes for children/young people and adopters regardless of disability.
Gender	X			The project aims to improve outcomes for children/young people and adopters regardless of gender.
Race	X			The project aims to improve outcomes for children/young people and adopters regardless of race.
Religion/Belief	X			The project aims to improve outcomes for children/young people and adopters regardless of religion/belief.
Sexual Orientation	X			The project aims to improve outcomes for young people and adopters regardless of their sexual orientation.
Gender Reassignment	X			The project aims to improve outcomes for adopters regardless of gender reassignment.
Pregnancy and maternity	X			The project aims to improve outcomes for birth parents.

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0.1	14.8.13	-
0.2	15.8.13	Comments by WM Adoption Steering Group 14.8.13
0.3	19.8.13	Final comments by WM Adoption Steering Group

Approvals		
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WM Adoption Steering Group	19.8.13	0.3