

18 December 2014		ITEM: 9
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Adoption Report Outlining Process and Performance		
Report of: Roland Minto – Service Manager, Placements and Support		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Accountable Head of Service Roland Minto – Service Manager, Placements and Support		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director Peoples Services		
This report is public		
Purpose of Report: to update members of the Committee of progress with discussions in identifying future partnership working arrangements for Thurrock's Adoption Service		

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 That members of the Committee note the discussions that have taken place to date in identifying potential new partnership arrangements, and support officers in their further pursuit of options to ensure sound and cost effective outcomes for children.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

2.1 At the September meeting of the Committee it was highlighted that Thurrock Adoption Service faced a new challenge following the unexpected withdrawal in April of Havering Council from our existing Consortium arrangements, leaving only Thurrock and Southend as Local Authorities, together with Barnados Adoption Service as an affiliated member.

2.2 It was recognised that whilst we would wish to maintain a good ongoing working relationship with Southend, the two authorities would both need to explore alternative arrangements in order to deliver an effective service. It was also noted that the previous Team Manager had recently left the authority, and that this also gave an opportunity to reflect on the most effective organisational structure going forward.

2.3 Members therefore requested that an update on Thurrock's position should be brought to the December Committee: hence this report.

3. PROGRESS OF DISCUSSIONS:

- 3.1 The changes which took place created a window of opportunity to consider a variety of options, which include internal restructuring, joining another existing Consortium, developing shared service arrangements with another authority, or entering into more formal partnership with one of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies (whose role in adoption work the current government are seeking to expand).
- 3.2 Initial enquiries were made to the South East Region Consortium, which includes six quite different authorities in the area immediately south of the River Thames. Because of Thurrock's location adjacent to the Dartford Crossing this Consortium was identified as possibly more geographically convenient than for example the Eastern Region, which extends to Norfolk. However we were informed that the South Eastern Consortium were not looking for any new members at this time. We will therefore need to continue to explore whether other exiting Consortia might be more receptive.
- 3.3 However, as detailed previously, some dialogue had already taken place with a nationally recognised organisation, about exploring a significantly different model, and this is continuing. Development along these lines might have some significant implications for staff and whilst the ultimate objective must be the best possible service for children, the deliberations will need to be undertaken cautiously to ensure that the positive benefits clearly outweigh any consequential impact. Members of the Committee will continue to be kept informed.
- 3.4 In light of the above no decision about any future restructuring of the service internally has been made. The Team Manager post is being successfully covered by an interim Agency Manager, and the team continues to deliver the service.

4. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 4.1 Any significant changes to the service structure will be referred to the appropriate bodies, Overview and Scrutiny, Trade Unions, etc, in the event that a decision is made to pursue a radically amended service delivery model.

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 5.1 The content of this report is compatible with Health and Well Being Strategy Priority 12: *Provide outstanding services for children in care and leaving care*

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

In light of the Council's challenging financial future the authority will need to be satisfied that any future partnership arrangements achieve satisfactory outcomes in as cost effective manner as possible.

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
Finance Officer

6.2 Legal

Thurrock Council has obligations to deliver satisfactory and legally sound outcomes for children requiring adoptive placements, and any new arrangements would need to guarantee these.

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Solicitor

6.3 Diversity and Equality

If any new arrangements opened up the prospect of more Thurrock children being placed satisfactorily for Adoption that would be a positive move, but it will be essential that any new partners share Thurrock's commitments to promoting diversity and equality.

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price,**
Community Development Officer

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

Members may wish to refer to previous report to the Committee of September 2014.

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