



Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

1. Topic of assessment

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| EIA title | Proposal to create a Regional Adoption Agency |
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| EIA author | Suzanne Chambers |
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2. Approval

| | Name | Date approved |
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| Approved by | | |

3. Quality control

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|-----------------------|--|----------------------|--|
| Version number | | EIA completed | |
| Date saved | | EIA published | |

4. EIA team

| Name | Job title | Organisation | Team role |
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5. Explaining the matter being assessed

What policy, function or service is being introduced or reviewed?

The vision for regional adoption agencies was originally set out in 2015 in the DfE publication 'Regionalising Adoption', this has resulted in local authorities being tasked with coming together to create larger agencies covering wider geographical areas by 2020. The rationale for regionalising adoption is to widen matching opportunities for looked after children, improving timeliness and quality of matching. Additional rationale includes promotion of best adoption practice, improved access to adoption support services and achieving economies of scale. 17 such regional adoption agencies (RAAs) covering half of local authorities were in existence by May 2020, and the number is expected to increase significantly over 2019-20 to take in remaining local authorities.

From 2016 Surrey has been in a partnership with East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove City Council with the objective of launching a regional agency to be known as Adoption South East (ASE) in April 2020. Grant funding from the DfE has been supporting our project work since April 2018.

The creation of the RAA will represent a scaling up of adoption activity requiring ASE to recruit and assess approximately 125 adopters a year and place up to 150 children from the 4 local authorities. Adoption support assessments are likely to be needed for over 300 adopted children per year, and the RAA will also support post box or direct contact arrangements for over 2000 children across the region.

The RAA will be hosted by East Sussex County Council, who will appoint a Head of Service and provide corporate services to the RAA. Whilst staff will be managed by the Head of Service, they will however remain employed by their sovereign councils, without recourse to use of TUPE.

The RAA would look to centralise some functions, for example the recruitment line which takes initial enquiries and there would be a single RAA website and a co-ordinated programme of information events and training, but delivered at venues across the RAA. Whilst some adoption roles and activity would be located in East Sussex, this is likely to be limited with the aim being to avoid moving staff from their existing locations, not least given that many functions can be undertaken from local authority based spokes. Whilst a final staff structure has yet to be agreed it is anticipated that there would be roles for all the existing staff who wish to be part of the new RAA.

Under a Partner's agreement each council would delegate responsibility for delivery of the adoption service to the RAA. Budget currently held in the local authority would accordingly be devolved to the RAA.

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| <p>What proposals are you assessing?</p> | <p>Impact of creating a regional adoption agency for service users and staff</p> |
| <p>Who is affected by the proposals outlined above?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looked after children with adoption plans • Children adopted from care, and their adoptive families accessing post adoption support. • Prospective adopters • Children subject of non-agency adoption application • Adults accessing adoption support Relatives of children who have been adopted from care • Staff who will be working for the new RAA • Local authority children’s services |

14 6. Sources of information

Engagement carried out

Service users:

The Services have informed service users about the expected changes through service newsletters, a secure website for adopters (yammer) in Surrey, and through service users groups. In addition, Adoption Champions have been appointed and will undertake further engagement with adoptive families-by survey and face to face meetings with adopter groups during the period July –December 2019

Engagement with relatives of children adopted from care to be supported by specialist birth relative workers attached to the current adoption services.

Staff and local authority children's team's

Communications bulletins have been issued at regular intervals from the RAA Project Board

2 stakeholder engagement events have been held for staff who would be affected and invitations issued to local authority children's services.

An RAA mailbox has been created to enable staff from the 4 local authorities to raise issues and make comments.

Data used

Feedback was obtained from the staff concerning confidence about the emerging plans for the RAA at the staff events.

7. Impact of the new/amended policy, service or function

It is expected that in general terms the RAA would have a positive impact for protected characteristic groups given that a larger service would be able to offer a more comprehensive service offer, including development of specialist resources. Specifically, there would be scope to develop greater expertise within the RAA concerning protected groups with a particular focus on the need to recruit and support families for children from minority ethnic backgrounds and children with complex health needs. It is therefore hoped that outcomes for protected groups would improve as a result of the creation of the RAA, given that the focus will be on timely placement of children and research shows that some of the protected groups currently wait longer to be placed in adoptive families.

Similarly with respect to the duties of the RAA to provide support for adoptive families and others impacted by adoption, a larger agency would enable development of specialist functions and an improved support offer.

Against the positive impact of the RAA sits the challenge of delivering services across a large geographical area and ensuring that services remain readily accessible to all, and in particular protected groups.

7a. Impact of the proposals on residents and service users with protected characteristics

| Protected characteristic | Potential positive impacts | Potential negative impacts | Evidence |
|---|---|----------------------------|---|
| <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 224</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Age</p> | <p>Prospective Adopters: Impact is neutral. All adoption agencies must act in compliance with adoption agency regulations (which require adoption applicants to be at least 21 years of age but do not specify an upper age limit-this represents no change to the current eligibility criteria)</p> <p>Children-N/A</p> <p>Adult Adoptees-neutral</p> <p>Birth relatives-neutral</p> | <p>None</p> | <p>The RAA will need to develop policies to reflect adoption regulations, statutory guidance and National Minimum Standards in this respect.</p> <p>Existing policies across the current services already do this, so this is unlikely to prove problematic.</p> <p>Once developed the policies would be subject to EIA</p> |

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| <p>Disability</p> | <p>For adopters impact is broadly neutral given that it will continue to be possible to access services from local spokes</p> <p>For children with disabilities the chance of being successfully adopted would increase given a larger and more diverse adoption pool</p> | <p>Consolidation of some services to adopters may require that they are offered from fewer locations than at present e.g. adoption panels and training venues</p> | <p>The same comments with regards to policy will apply as for the other protected characteristics</p> <p>It is expected that panels and preparation groups will be offered from 3 rather than 4 sites across the RAA</p> <p>It is a requirement of the DfE that all RAAs have a single pool of adopters from which to match all children referred for family finding, and that there is no use of interagency fees within the RAA-thus opening up access.</p> |

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| | <p>and greater scope to develop expertise in placing children with disabilities.</p> <p>Birth relatives and adult adoptees –neutral (given that they will still access the service via the same LA as now.</p> | | |
| Page 226 | <p>Gender reassignment</p> <p>Adopters: Impact is positive as there is more scope for a larger adoption service to develop knowledge and expertise of the specific needs of this group E.g. by commissioning appropriate training for staff or offering access to a support group.</p> <p>Children: -impact is also likely to be positive for the same reason.</p> <p>Adult adoptees and birth parents-impact will be as above</p> | | <p>The same comments apply to the RAA policies as to the previous protected characteristics.</p> |
| | <p>Pregnancy and maternity</p> <p>Adopters-impact is neutral.</p> <p>Children-N/A</p> <p>Adult adoptees and birth parents-impact is neutral.</p> | | <p>As above</p> |

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| Race | <p>Adopters and children : - impact in terms of eligibility is positive. When seeking matching there will be a positive impact given an expectation of a broader range of children and adopters to be matched across the RAA than at local LA level.</p> <p>Adult adoptees and birth relatives-impact is neutral</p> | | As above |
| Religion and belief | Impact is positive for the same reasons as applied to the above protected characteristic | | As above |
| Sex | Impact is neutral for all | | As above |
| Sexual orientation | Impact is positive given that a larger agency will provide opportunities to develop specific support | | As above |
| Marriage and civil partnerships | Impact is neutral for all groups | | As above |
| Carers (protected by association) | Impact is neutral for all groups | | |

7b. Impact of the proposals on staff with protected characteristics

| Protected characteristic | Potential positive impacts | Potential negative impacts | Evidence |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|---|----------|
| Age | | | |
| Disability | | <p>Staff: There may be an expectation of occasional travel beyond the existing workplace however this already applies given the nature of existing roles. E.g. staff sometimes undertake assessments of applicants living in another local authority</p> <p>Service users: Prospective adopters and adopters may need to access training or panels from different locations than at present</p> | |
| Gender reassignment | | | |
| Pregnancy and maternity | | Staff could be absent due to these during the consultation/selection process | |

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| Race | | | |
| Religion and belief | | | |
| Sex | | | |
| Sexual orientation | | | |
| Marriage and civil partnerships | | | |
| Carers (protected by association) | | Change of location for services may impact as with disability | |

8. Amendments to the proposals

| Change | Reason for change |
|--------|-------------------|
| None | |
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9. Action plan

| Potential impact (positive or negative) | Action needed to maximise positive impact or mitigate negative impact | By when | Owner |
|--|--|---------------|------------------------------|
| Staff concerns to date have focussed on location of work base | This will continue to be considered within the final service structure design | December 2019 | Strategic Partnership board. |
| Change of location for adoption panels and adopter training-impact for staff and service users with disabilities | Any location considered will be accessible by public transport. However, against this adopters will be able to choose from a wider range of locations and dates in order to access these services, and would be offered opportunity to access training via other methods e.g. e-learning or to access panels via video link. For staff with disabilities negative impact would be reduced by agile working, and other reasonable adjustments. | December 2019 | Strategic Partnership Board |
| Staff absent due to pregnancy or ill health | The line manager would ensure that all staff bulletins and consultation are sent directly to the staff member and that they are kept up to date about the progress of the RAA plans and have opportunity to participate in consultation | Ongoing | Project Board members |

10. Potential negative impacts that cannot be mitigated

| Potential negative impact | Protected characteristic(s) that could be affected |
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11. Summary of key impacts and actions

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| <p>Information and engagement underpinning equalities analysis</p> | <p>There have been regular staff bulletins and an RAA mailbox has been created, as well as 2 large scale events which has provided opportunity for discussion. This has enabled concerns to be raised but to date these have been generalised rather than specific to any protected characteristics.</p> <p>Communications with stakeholders similarly has not raised specific concerns to date in relation to protected characteristics.</p> |
| <p>Key impacts (positive and/or negative) on people with protected characteristics</p> | <p>The impact is mainly positive as a larger agency operating on a regional scale provides opportunity to develop specialist knowledge provision, and increases the number of locations and dates from which service users might choose to access services.</p> |
| <p>Changes you have made to the proposal as a result of the EIA</p> | <p>None to date</p> |
| <p>Key mitigating actions planned to address any outstanding negative impacts</p> | <p>Existing National Minimum Standards for Adoption and Adoption Agencies Regulations will continue to apply to the RAA, and offer protections to service users who wish to adopt.</p> <p>The RAA’s performance with respect to the above and it’s success in placing children with protected characteristics for adoption, will continue to be subject to national KPIs set by the Department for Education through the ‘Adoption Scorecard’ and monitored locally by the RAA Strategic Partnership Board on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Ease of access to all locations for people with protected characteristics will be considered as part of the service design process.</p> <p>Engagement will continue with staff and service users pending ‘go live’ to identify any as yet unidentified impacts and will inform service planning.</p> |
| <p>Potential negative impacts that cannot be mitigated</p> | <p>None</p> |

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