

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

7 January 2020

Subject: Wiltshire Council Adoption Service: 2019/20 Q1-2, 6 Month Report

Cabinet member: Cllr Pauline Church Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Skills

Key Decision: Non Key

Executive Summary

It is a statutory requirement that the Families and Children's Service provides regular assurance reports to the Council regarding its responsibility for the adoption of children. The main mechanism is the provision of the annual year-end report which is supported by a six-month update relating to Quarters 1 and 2 of the financial year.

For this reporting period, two main areas receive particular focus regarding the Service and outcomes for Wiltshire's children:

- The need for timeliness of the assessment of adopters and their match with a child to be adopted, and
- The need for timeliness of the adoption of children with complex needs.

As previously reported, for the year 2018/19, 33 adoption orders were granted, and 27 families were approved as suitable to adopt. In Quarters 1-2 of 2019/20, 14 adoption orders were granted, 11 children were placed for adoption and 14 families were approved as suitable to adopt. A further 4 children have been matched at matching panel in October and November.

Building upon Government priorities for adoption and recognising Wiltshire Council's commitment to improving adoption outcomes in terms of numbers of children being adopted and the timeliness of matches for children requiring adoptive placements, the development of the Service, within the broader context of the development and implementation of Adoption West, has continued. Annual comparative performance is measured using the Adoption Scorecard which, for Wiltshire Council, shows overall continued improvement and is included within this report for information.

The 2018-19 Annual Report described good progress in developing the collaborative arrangements to improve adoption performance. The regional response to this is Adoption West, comprising of six local authorities and a small number of locally operating Voluntary Adoption Agencies working

together to form a new adoption agency. Wiltshire Council is a member of the Adoption West partnership.

The Ofsted inspection of Wiltshire Council Families and Children's Services carried out in June 2019, graded as Good in all domains, said:

"The arrangements for finding children adoptive parents are a strength. The new relationship with Adoption West...is working well and has been seamless for both children and carers. Children in Wiltshire are waiting less time than ever to move in with their adoptive family. The scrutiny of the performance of the RAA [Regional Adoption Agency] is thorough and challenging."

Cabinet has previously received detailed information regarding Adoption West and the role, responsibility and accountability arrangements that are in place.

Proposal(s)

It is recommended that the contents of this report are noted and accepted.

Reason for Proposal

Wiltshire Council is an Adoption Agency registered with Ofsted. The 2014 Adoption Minimum Standards (25.6) and 2013 Statutory Guidance (3.93 and 5.39) describe the information that is required to be regularly reported to the executive side of the local authority to provide assurance that the adoption agency is complying with the conditions of registration whilst being effective and achieving good outcomes for children and service users.

Terence Herbert, Executive Director, Children and Education

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

7 January 2020

Subject: Wiltshire Council Adoption Service: 2019/20 Q1-2 6 Month Report

Cabinet member: Cllr Pauline Church Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Skills

Key Decision: Non Key

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides an interim six-month report to Cabinet regarding adoption performance within the Families and Children's Service of Wiltshire Council. It is a requirement of the condition of registration as described in 2014 Adoption Minimum Standards and 2013 Statutory Guidance that Cabinet is satisfied that the Service complies with the conditions of registration, is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children.
2. Cabinet received the Annual Report for 2018-19 in July 2019, covering the period from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.
3. There are two main areas of focus for the Service and the impact upon Wiltshire's children requiring adoptive families:
 - The timeliness of the assessment of adopters and their match with a child to be adopted, and
 - The timeliness of the adoption of children with complex needs.
4. This report includes brief information regarding the management of the Service, children who require adoptive placements and those who are placed, the recruitment and approval of adopters, the disruption of placements, children where the plan for adoption changes and the work of the Adoption Panel. There is information about the effectiveness of Adoption West.
5. It is recommended that the contents of this report are noted and accepted.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

6. The adoption work of Wiltshire Council Families and Children's Service supports a central priority of the Wiltshire Council Business Plan, to protect those who are most vulnerable. Two specific actions are:
 - To develop an outstanding Adoption Service for all children for whom adoption is in their best interest, and
 - To work with voluntary sector partners to ensure that we offer and deliver a comprehensive array of adoption support services.

7. As indicated in the Annual Report, Adoption West became an Ofsted registered Adoption Agency in October 2018 and become fully operational in March 2019.
8. The responsibility for care planning and casework for the child remains with the local authority. All activity relating to the recruitment, assessment and approval of adoptive parents is with Adoption West. The matching of children with adopters happens at Adoption West Adoption panels with reporting and attendance required of Wiltshire Council children's social workers. The Wiltshire Agency Decision maker has the final say for children's matches.

Main Considerations for the Council

9. The main consideration for the Council is to be assured about statutory compliance and the effectiveness of the Service. In 2018/19 33 children were adopted (an increase from 22 the previous year). Of these, 30 (91%) were placed within 12 months of the decision that adoption was in their best interest being made. In 2018/19 27 families were approved as suitable to adopt (an increase from 19 the previous year). A focus is maintained on ensuring a sufficiency of adopters to meet the needs of children in Wiltshire and the wider Adoption West area.
10. In Quarters 1-2, 14 children were adopted, all of whom (100%) were placed within 12 months of the decision being made that adoption was in their best interest. In this time, 14 families were approved as suitable to adopt
11. Wiltshire's current Adoption Scorecard is included, below, for information. A full commentary was included in the annual report for 2018-19. The most recently published performance to March 2018 shows overall continued improvement. There are three key measures that are included:

A1: the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted:

- The local authority three-year average (2015-18) is **397** days. This is significantly shorter than the three-year average of 469 days in 2014-17 and shorter than the England three-year average for 2015-18 of 486 days. The Scorecard shows steady improvement over time.
- Excluding two legacy cases, adopted in 2016, the three-year average figure becomes **337** days for 2015-18
- The local authority figure for 2018-19 is 342 days, up slightly from 326 in the previous year.
- Including Early Permanence placements and legacy cases, locally reported data estimates the figure for 2016-19 as **377** days, a continued improvement on 397 days and a marked improvement on 486 days, remaining significantly less than the England average.

A2: the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family:

- The local authority three-year average (2015-18) is **173** days. This is a small decrease on the three-year average of 186 days in 2014-17. Excluding two legacy cases this figure becomes 139 days for 2015-18.
- It remains shorter than the England three-year average of 201 days. Overall the Scorecard shows steady improvement over time.
- The local authority one-year figure for 2018-19 is **100** days. In 2017-18 the figure was 132 days.
- The three-year figure still includes 2 children adopted in May 2016 following protracted court proceedings, who were originally placed for adoption in 2014 with the placement orders being granted in 2011. One child has significant additional needs and the second experienced placement disruption prior to being matched with adoptive parents. In addition, 2 children were adopted by their foster carers whose adoption assessments needed to be completed once placement orders were granted. Three adoptive placements were found for a family of 7 children, meaning significant sibling contact was required.
- Including legacy cases where they remain in the three-year period, locally reported data estimates the figure for 2016-19 as **152** days. 2016-19 will be the final three-year average where these legacy cases will have an impact.

A3: the number of children who waited less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family:

- In the three-year period 2015-18, there were **76%** (95) of children who waited less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. This is an increase from 69% (85) in the previous cycle. The England three-year average (2015-18) is 56%. Locally reported data estimates the figure for 2016-19 as 76% (99) of children. This shows maintenance of high levels of performance over time.

12. As indicated in the previous annual report, the most recent Scorecard three-year averages relate to 2015-18, therefore there has been a further year of work taking place in Wiltshire which has produced the unverified averages described above. This data indicates that the three key measures have continued to improve, with the overall pace and trajectory of improvement being positive. There is significant improvement for indicator **A1** (meaning that more children are being placed in their adoptive placements in a shorter time after being received into care) and **A3** remains high in the context of a tougher definition (a reduction of two months each reporting year). This is good progress. After a year where improvement of **A2** reduced (whilst still including two children who have been hard to place and who are now in adoptive placements), the figure is now reducing once again, demonstrating commitment to seek secure, permanent arrangements for all children where adoption is in their best interest.
13. There is robust tracking of children who require decisions that they Should be Placed for Adoption, through to home finding, matching and the application for Adoption Order.
14. The increased number of adoptive families being found for children across the Adoption West area is encouraging. It remains challenging within Adoption West (and the wider region) to maintain the pool of families who want to adopt children,

particularly siblings, and so it is an Adoption West priority to formulate and implement an effective recruitment strategy. This reflects the national trend. Adoption West is working nationally with the RAA Leaders' Group to develop a national campaign to recruit more adopters over the next six months.

15. Despite this concern, there has not been a sustained impact on timeliness to date, indicated in the Scorecard, below. Q2 data does show a slight slowing of the time it takes for a child to be adopted. It is likely that this slowing is because of the complexity and specific circumstances of individual children moving through the process along with an increase in the average time it takes to complete care proceedings, currently 28 weeks. (this is due to increased use of expert reports and the time to obtain these and judicial availability). However, the numbers are small and the period in question is relatively short and so even a small delay for a given child can affect the timeliness. The impact will be far less when viewed within the scope of a three-year scorecard.
16. Processes are strongly embedded to ensure that family finding starts at the earliest opportunity and that all activities are monitored and completed in a timely fashion. (Previous practice had family finding beginning later in the child's journey with the resultant impact on timeliness.) Adoption West will ensure that best family finding practice is recognised and delivered within Wiltshire and across the Adoption West area.
17. The full Scorecard is as follows overleaf:

Children				Average time indicators																																				
	A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (days)	A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)	A3: Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (number and %)	<p>A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family A1 threshold —</p> <p>A2: Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family A2 threshold —</p> <p>Average number of days</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>A1</th> <th>A2</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>2008-11</td><td>803</td><td>107</td></tr> <tr><td>2009-12</td><td>750</td><td>157</td></tr> <tr><td>2010-13</td><td>673</td><td>169</td></tr> <tr><td>2011-14</td><td>637</td><td>165</td></tr> <tr><td>2012-15</td><td>610</td><td>161</td></tr> <tr><td>2013-16</td><td>545</td><td>158</td></tr> <tr><td>2014-17</td><td>469</td><td>186</td></tr> <tr><td>2015-18</td><td>397</td><td>173</td></tr> </tbody> </table>						Year	A1	A2	2008-11	803	107	2009-12	750	157	2010-13	673	169	2011-14	637	165	2012-15	610	161	2013-16	545	158	2014-17	469	186	2015-18	397	173	<p>A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, 2015-18 England average - 486 days</p>			
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Distance from 2015-18 performance threshold (426 and 121 days)	Threshold met	52 days	n/a	<p>Thresholds</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>2008-11</th> <th>2009-12</th> <th>2010-13</th> <th>2011-14</th> <th>2012-15</th> <th>2013-16</th> <th>2014-17</th> <th>2015-18</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A1</td> <td>639</td> <td>639</td> <td>608</td> <td>547</td> <td>487</td> <td>426</td> <td>426</td> <td>426</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A2</td> <td>213</td> <td>213</td> <td>182</td> <td>152</td> <td>121</td> <td>121</td> <td>121</td> <td>121</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>							2008-11	2009-12	2010-13	2011-14	2012-15	2013-16	2014-17	2015-18	A1	639	639	608	547	487	426	426	426	A2	213	213	182	152	121	121	121	121				
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Adopters				Related Information																																				
	Number of approved adoptive families waiting to be matched as at 31 March 2018	Number of applications to become an adoptive family still being assessed (not yet approved or rejected) as at 31 March 2018	Proportion of adoptive families who were matched to a child during 2017-18 who waited more than 3 months from approval to being matched to a child	New ADM decisions	New placement orders granted	Adoptions from care during 2015-18 (with % leaving care who are adopted)	Children for whom the permanence decision has changed away from adoption during 2015-18	Number of children waiting to be placed for adoption (as at 31 March 2018)	Number of children waiting to be placed for adoption with a placement order (as at 31 March 2018)	A10: A1 timeliness where times for children who are adopted by their foster family are stopped at the date the child moved in with the foster family (days)	Number of children in a fostering for Adoption / Concurrent Planning foster placement for	Adoptions of children from ethnic minority backgrounds during 2015-18 (number adopted and % of BME children leaving)	Adoptions of children aged five or over during 2015-18 (number adopted and % of children aged 5 or over leaving care who are adopted)	Average length of care proceedings locally during 2015-18 (weeks)																										
LA	10	25	82%	35	30	25	30	20	10	343	x	5 (10%)	15 (5%)	29																										
England	1,600	1,760	69%	LA -17% National -9%	LA 16% National -15%	12900 (14%)	2450 (11%)	4,500	2,760	412	410	1930 (7%)	2910 (5%)	30																										

18. Management arrangements and staffing within Adoption West and the Local Authority have remained broadly as described in the Annual Report and are compliant with regulation in terms of qualification and experience. A Service Director is leading Adoption West. The appointee was the Wiltshire Adoption Team Manager and a successor Team Manager was appointed. In turn, that person is to act up as Adoption West Service Manager once temporary cover is in place. Whilst this affects the Trowbridge hub of Adoption West, it means that senior managers in that organisation know and understand the context of adoption in this local authority. Adoption West has a Panel Advisor linked to the Trowbridge hub.

19. The core task of the Service is to provide secure and stable adoptive placements for children who require legal permanence and are no longer able to remain living safely with their parents or other family members. Services are delivered by two teams within Adoption West, operating from the Trowbridge hub in relation to Wiltshire Council's children:

- The Adoption Recruitment and Assessment Team
- The Adoption Support Team

20. In addition, Adoption West is responsible for providing an intermediary service for adopted adults and birth relatives wishing to trace family members, for those wishing to trace adopted children, support for non-agency adoptions (typically step-parents wishing to adopt), and those wishing to adopt children from overseas. This will include people who live in Wiltshire.

21. Adoption West has its own governance arrangement. There is a Board of Directors in place, supported by a Service Manager Group. The agency has its own development plan.

22. The priorities of the 2019-2020 Adoption West Development Plan include:

- Developing a recruitment strategy focussing on adopters for siblings alongside a support offer i.e. Specialist training, mentoring programme
- Rolling out Child Permanence Report training to local authority child care teams
- Developing an action plan to progress dual approval and increase Early Permanence placements
- Implementing best practice based on current research regarding Moving Children to Adoption (the transition planning)
- Engagement with Adoption UK/AW Adopter Advisory Board
- Developing an early help adoption support intervention provision for families, to prevent crisis management and potential disruption.

23. As required to be provided to Cabinet, brief performance information and commentary relating to Quarters 1-2 in 2017 is as follows:

Profile of children waiting for an adoptive placement (at end of period)

Legal status	2017/18	2018/19	Q 1-2 2019
Section 20	0	0	4
Interim Care Order	17	10	4
Care Order	0	1	4
Placement Order	3	9	11
Total	20	20	23

Ethnic Origin	2017/18	2018/19	Q 1-2 2019
White British	19	19	21
Mixed/Other	0	0	1
White Irish	0	0	0
Other Ethnic Group	1	1	1
Total	20	20	23

Age	2017/18	2018/19	Q 1-2 2019
0-11 months	9	4	3
12-23 months	2	2	3
2-4 years	5	5	7
5-10 years	4	9	10
11 and over	0	0	0
Total	20	20	23

24. To be noted is that several children remained at home with birth family whilst subject to care proceedings with a care plan for adoption. This meant that other permanence options (such as Special Guardianship Orders) will be considered by the court for these children.

Wiltshire Children adopted

Age	2017/18	2018/19	Q 1-2 2019
0-11 months	5	4	1
12-23 months	8	15	8
2-4 years	5	9	5
5-10 years	4	5	0
11 and over	0	0	0
Total	22	33	14

Rescissions of Placement Orders and Disruptions

25. In 2018-19, 5 rescissions were made where the plan for the child moved away from adoption, leading to the rescission of Adoption and Placement Orders. Wiltshire Council applies rigorous scrutiny to care planning and it is inevitable that there will be developments in a case or a child's situation that means that adoption is no longer in that child's best interest; for example, a family member or parent can resume the care of a child where it had not previously been envisaged, a court may not grant a Placement Order but make a Special

Guardianship Order instead or a plan will move to long term fostering, particularly for older children. In Q1-2, 3 rescissions were made and there are a further 5 children who are currently in this rescission process. This is broadly in line with previous years, reflecting a continuing ambition for Wiltshire's children, and more detail will be included in the annual report.

26. During 2017-18, there were no adoption placement disruptions notified to the Council before an Adoption Order was made. In Q1-2, there have been no disruptions.

27. The following table provides adopter information before the implementation of Adoption West.

Prospective adopters

	2017/18	2018/19
Enquiries to be an adopter	66	67
Applications to be an adopter	30	35
Number of newly approved adopters	18	27
Application to approval:		
0-3 months	0	3
4-6 months	3	19
7-12 months	13	4
Over 12 months	1	1
Number approved adopters unmatched	12	23
Number approved adopters matched	18	12

28. In the period Q1-2 of Adoption West panel activity:

	Bristol Hub	Gloucester Hub	Trowbridge Hub	AW Total
Enquiries to adopt	49	91	43	183
Attendance at Information sessions	23	34	42	99
Applications to be an adopter (ROI)	16	21	21	58
Started stage 1	19	21	17	57
Started stage 2	21	10	10	41
Number of newly approved adopters	13	15	14	42
Number approved adopters not linked or matched at end of period	9	5	5	19
Number approved adopters matched/Linked	16	12	25	53

29. Not all the adopters indicated above, included in the Trowbridge Hub figures, live within Wiltshire, but all those approved by Adoption West would be potentially available for Wiltshire children. The 19 adopters, unmatched in Q1-2 and "waiting", remain potentially available for Wiltshire children.

30. There were 10 Wiltshire children with Placement Orders waiting for placements at the end of Q2. Of these, a sibling group of two plus two under one year olds will be matched at Panel in November. Another child has a potential link with an adopter.

Financial summary of the agency

31. The table below indicates the current budget for the financial year 2018/19:

Adoption Team	2019/20 Budget (£)	Actuals to 30 th Sept 2019 (P6)	2019/20 Forecast (£)	2019/20 Forecast variance (£)
Contract Value with Adoption West	745,450	297,250	634,823	(110,627)
Adoption Support	184,150	238,778	489,472	305,322
Adoption Allowances	324,390	166,359	320,558	(3,832)
Residence Orders	87,520	37,297	79,063	(8,457)
Special Guardianship Allowances	1,733,700	878,119	1,789,988	56,288
Adoption income (from interagency placements)	0	(136,667)	(187,000)	(187,000)
Total	3,075,310	1,481,136	3,126,904	51,694

32. The net overspend in the table above largely relates to an overspend on inter authority fees paid and adoption support packages, some of which can be intensive, reflecting the needs of more complex children. All such plans require agreement from a senior manager before implementation and are subject to regular review to ensure that they remain required and appropriate.

33. With effect from 1st April 2019, there has been a contract for services with Adoption West which is managed by the appropriate Head of Service and scrutinised internally and through the work of the Board of Governors. It provides value to the Council by ensuring that adoptive families are found for Wiltshire Council's children, utilising the increased options for family finding presented by Adoption West.

34. The local authority has retained budget and responsibility for adoption support, adoption allowances, the inter authority budgets and Special Guardianship budgets.

35. There are families who are financially supported to care for Wiltshire children:

	At 31 March 2018 Children/Carers	At 31 March 2019 Children/Carers	Q 1-2 2019
RO/CAO Allowance	11/10	10/9	10/9
Adoption Allowance	32/26	34/27	31/25
Other (SGO)	195/150	213/164	232/179
Total	238/186	257/200	273/213

Adoption Panel

	2017/18 (Wiltshire Council and Adoption West (AW))	2018/19	Q 1-2 2019
No. Panels held	19 (inc AW)	18	8
Adoptive families considered	24* (including 4 assessed by other AW local authorities)	26	16
Matches considered	36 (28 Wiltshire children and 8 from other AW local authorities)	32 (24 Wiltshire children and 8 from other AW local authorities)	10 Wiltshire children (+7 from other AW local authorities)
Relinquished Children	1 (Wiltshire child)	0	0
Reviews of Adopters notified	0	0	0

* Two suitability assessments were considered by panel on 27.3.18 and their ADM decision was made in April. Therefore, they do not appear in the 2017-18 count.

36. Adoption Panels are fully within the remit of Adoption West. During Quarters 1-2, the Adoption Panel complied with Regulation: appraisals for members have been held and Adoption West Training days are implemented. The interim arrangement for Panel matching and suitability recommendations being considered by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is robust within Wiltshire Council. The responsibility for suitability decisions will move to Adoption West when further management capacity is secured in that organisation (anticipated early 2020). This arrangement is not causing delay for Wiltshire's children.

Next Steps and Recommendations

37. Performance has remained strong following the implementation of Adoption West in March 2019. To continue the positive outcomes for Wiltshire children who require adoptive families, actions were indicated within the Annual Report and these continue to be relevant:

- By using a range of management and performance information, closely track the effectiveness of adoption practice in terms of children requiring adoptive families to be confident that the implementation of Adoption West does not adversely affect outcome for Wiltshire's children
- Through the Board of Directors, maintain a high level of scrutiny of Adoption West; considering the needs of Wiltshire's children through ensuring good matching and support of adopters
- Support Adoption West through the involvement of an officer within the Senior Management Team of the Families and Children's Service as the lead on adoption and to be the primary connection to Adoption West. This includes managing liaison meetings with ADMs and the Adoption West Advisor.

- Through specific discussion and regular liaison meetings, continue to work with the local judiciary to further improve the way that the courts deal with care cases in a timely manner, recognising the potential delays for children where additional family members (sometimes multiple) may be considered as carers late in proceedings or where additional assessments are indicated
- Ensure that Early Permanence placements for children are identified via Adoption West
- Working closely with Adoption West, ensure proactive family finding practice (anonymised profiles, information days and events, Link Maker, child appreciation events) to ensure the effectiveness of the process to bring about timely identification of potential adoptive matches for children who require adoption
- Hold Adoption West to account to ensure a sufficiency of adopters who can meet the diverse needs of the population of children requiring adoption in Wiltshire. A suitably diverse pool of approved adopters allows matching to begin early in the process, often before a Placement Order is made.
- In cases where it is recognised that the agency may struggle to match children with in-house prospective adopters, request Court consent to feature the children's profiles beyond Wiltshire's boundaries and, through Adoption West, be pro-active in referring children to regional and national family finding services once a Placement Order has been granted (sooner with the consent of the court)
- Continue to ensure that formal Disruption Meetings take place where adoption placements breakdown before Adoption Orders are made to consider key learning to inform whole service improvement.

Background

38. The Wiltshire Council Families and Children's Service provides permanency for children who are no longer able to live safely with their parents or other family members. This is achieved through several ways, one being the provision of quality adoptive placements for children who live in Wiltshire and where a decision has been made that adoption is in their best interest. These adoptive families are assessed and approved by Adoption West.
39. The fundamental requirement of the Service is that children are placed with families who have been assessed as being suitable to adopt. A recommendation of suitability is made by the Adoption West Panel and this is ratified as a decision by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). Through this process, there is rigorous assurance that approved adopters can provide safe, secure and enduring family placements for this vulnerable group of children. This allows them to grow, develop and thrive in a nurturing, supportive and loving family environment, removed from the stigma of being Looked After by the local authority.
40. To do this, there must be an appropriate range of enduring adoption placements to meet the assessed needs of children who need permanent adoptive families. These families must promote stability, safety and positive outcomes for children by working in partnership with all agencies as required.

41. The legislative basis of this work is the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the accompanying 2005 Regulations. From March 2019, Adoption West began to fully operate as the Regional Adoption Agency; Wiltshire retains the functions of an Adoption Agency that relate directly to children's planning.
42. The local authority, through reporting to Cabinet, must be assured of regulatory compliance and effectiveness through performance monitoring, challenge and improvement planning.
43. The Families and Children's Service, working in partnership with Adoption West, continues to provide adopters for infants and younger children. Through a programme of recruitment, Adoption West maintains the pool of adopters, including for those who can provide permanence for children who may be considered "harder to place". This group includes older children, sibling groups and children with disabilities. Adoption West is part of the South West Adoption Consortium (SWAC) which works regionally to identify matches for children across the area. Adoption West subscribes to Link Maker, a national online adopter-lead resource to help adopters be linked with children.
44. Adoption West is a Regional Adoption Agency involving six local authorities and a small number of locally operating Voluntary Adoption Agencies. This provides a single Adoption Agency for the region in line with government requirement. Adoption West will have significant impact on outcomes for Wiltshire's children as it will deliver a more effective regional response to adoption and the needs of children.

Safeguarding Implications

45. The adoption of children is carried out within the Families and Children's Service, in conjunction with Adoption West. The work of the Service is delivered in accordance with Wiltshire Children's Services Policy and Procedures, overseen by the Wiltshire Safeguarding Vulnerable People Panel. The local authority has clear and effective safeguarding procedures in place for children and vulnerable adults.
46. This report is for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Public Health Implications

47. Not applicable - for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Corporate Procurement Implications

48. Not applicable - for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal (detailing conclusions identified from Equality Analysis, sections 4 and 5)

49. Not applicable - for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

50. Not applicable - for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Risk Assessment

51. Risks that may arise if the performance and management of the Families and Children's Service (and Adoption West) regarding the adoption of children is not effective and it does not achieve good outcomes for children:

- Safeguarding risk to looked after children if they are placed with adopters who have not been fully assessed, prepared and supported. Safeguarding is considered a high-level risk within the corporate risk register.
- That the governance and scrutiny arrangements of Adoption West are not robust, impacting upon outcomes for Wiltshire's children.
- An inadequate supply of adopters to meet the needs of Wiltshire children requiring permanence through adoption.
- Reputational risk for the Council if the Agency (and Adoption West) is not effective and does not achieve good outcomes for children who require adoption.
- Reputational risk if statutory timescales are not meet regarding adoption.
- Reputational risk if the Service is rated as Inadequate through inspection.
- Financial risk if placements are made, are unstable and subsequently breakdown leading to children returning to local authority care.

52. Effective delivery of the Service in relation to adoption and the effectiveness of Adoption West, the improvement plan, reporting and challenge will mitigate these risks.

Financial Implications

53. The budget and forecast expenditure are included above, the service is forecasting an overspend which is 8% of the net budget. This pressure relates to packages of adoption support (there are complex children being adopted and when adoptive parents return to seek support from the local authority after Adoption Orders have been granted, sometimes after a number of years, there are increasingly complex packages of support required to support the, now older, children in question). together with inter agency fees, both being higher than budgeted.

54. The cost of supporting an adopted child is less than the average cost of looking after a child in the care system and is often time limited as opposed to costs of care which extend to 18 years old and beyond. Cabinet has previously information relating to the financial implications of Adoption West and the contribution that the Council makes to the organisation. This interim report relates to the work of the families and Children's Service in relation to adoption and *not* Adoption West.

Legal Implications

55. It is a requirement of registration as an Adoption Agency that the Executive side of the Council receive regular written reports regarding the effectiveness,

compliance and management of the Agency. It has been agreed that this will be in the form of an annual report and interim report and so it ensures that legal requirements are met. There are no additional legal implications arising.

Options Considered

56. Not applicable - for note by Wiltshire Council Cabinet.

Conclusion

57. Recent years have seen considerable change within the world of adoption and a focus on improving adoption performance. This has led to the need to review and develop services, amend policy and practice and so increase the effectiveness of the Wiltshire Adoption Service. The implementation of Adoption West has built upon, and taken forward, this improvement, as evidenced in the Scorecard information. At the heart of this is the belief that, for some children, adoption is the best route to legal permanence, security and the opportunity to achieve their potential. Wiltshire Council is committed to improving service delivery and, therefore, outcomes for children. Adoption West brings further significant change and improvement. The Council is an Adoption West partner, working collaboratively and regionally to ensure a whole service approach to prevent delay in securing appropriate adoptive placements for children in a timely and safe way.

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Background Papers

None

Appendices

None