

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

3 June 2020

Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel

Purpose

1. To update Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) on the establishment of the Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel (Adoption West JSP).
2. To ask OSMC to endorse the terms of reference and membership of the Adoption West JSP, including the appointment of an additional Wiltshire Councillor while it holds the position of Panel chairman.
3. NB. This report is brought to OSMC as the only Overview and Scrutiny (OS) committee operating under the temporary arrangements in place during COVID-19. Once the normal OS structure resumes, reports from the Adoption West JSP will be presented to Children's Select Committee.

Background

4. The background to the establishment of Adoption West as a company limited by guarantee and registered with Ofsted as a Voluntary Adoption Agency is included in the draft Terms of Reference (see Appendix 1 – paragraphs 2 to 8).
5. In December 2019, Adoption West approached its six member authorities to ask them to consider approaches to its scrutiny. A meeting was arranged with the relevant OS chairmen (i.e. Those who would have led scrutiny of the authorities' own adoption arrangements) of each of the participating local authorities. Adoption West also approached the Scrutiny team at Wiltshire Council and asked them to detail and cost the support that would be required for the scrutiny activity.
6. It should be noted that the Adoption West JSP does not fall under the banner of 'Overview and Scrutiny' as defined by the Local Government Act 2000, in that it will not be a body jointly and formally constituted by the six participating councils. Although it will not have the power to call in a decision or summon officers to attend, the Panel will still provide a scrutiny function led predominantly by democratically elected non-executive councillors.
7. At its first meeting on 20 May 2020, the Adoption West JSP considered Adoption West's background, aim and purpose, current governance, and how its scrutiny

would be undertaken, including the Scrutiny Panel's terms of reference, membership, chairmanship and support costs.

Main considerations

Terms of reference

8. The terms of reference are included as Appendix 1 to this report. A few key points have been highlighted below.
9. As part of the division of scrutiny roles between Adoption West and the local authorities, each local authority has retained case management responsibility for the child until the making of the Adoption Order. The local authorities remain responsible for all statutory functions, including but not limited to: Statutory visits, management and supervision of contact between child and family members, supervision, administration and finance of foster placements and communication with foster carers (including Fostering for Adoption placements).
10. These responsibilities will be monitored by each local authority through its chosen scrutiny mechanism, although the Adoption West JSP will make every effort to notify a local authority if it identifies issues that are within the local authority's responsibility.
11. Taking into account the geographical distances between members of the Adoption West JSP, it is intended that meetings of the Panel be accessible both in person and remotely (online / telephone), although there will be one meeting a year to be attended in person by all members.
12. It is proposed that the financing of the administrative support required for the Panel (which will be delivered by Wiltshire Council's Scrutiny team) is divided among the member authorities in the same proportion as their respective contribution to Adoption West.

Membership

13. The current membership of the Panel is as follows:

Bath and North East Somerset Council	Cllr Vic Pritchard, chair of Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel
Bristol City Council	Cllr Claire Hiscott, chair of People Scrutiny Commission
Gloucestershire County Council	Cllr Dr Andrew Miller, chair of Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee
North Somerset Council	Cllr Wendy Griggs, chair of Children and Young People's Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel

South Gloucestershire Council	Cllr Sarah Pomfret, chair of Health Scrutiny
Wiltshire Council	Cllr Jon Hubbard, chair of the Children’s Select Committee

14. It is hoped that, in time, membership of the Adoption West JSP will include up to 6 stakeholders within the “adoption triangle”, such as (but not limited to) adoptive parent, adopted young person, adopted adults, birth family member, etc.
15. Cllr Jon Hubbard was elected Chairman of the Adoption West JSP by its members on 20 May 2020 until May 2021. After May 2021 the chairman will be elected for a 2-year period to provide consistency and align with local election patterns as best as possible.
16. Because Wiltshire Council currently holds the position of Panel chairman, it is now invited to appoint a further non-executive member under the Panel’s terms of reference. This is to enable the chairman of the panel to act in the interest of the whole Region (i.e. the six Local Authorities within Adoption West) and focus on the role of chairman, with the second non-executive councillor from the chair’s authority representing that area and undertaking associated reporting duties.
17. It is proposed that the appointment to the Adoption West JSP of the additional Wiltshire Councillor follows the usual pattern of appointment to task group:
 - request for expressions of interest from all non-executive councillors;
 - shortlisting and appointment by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children’s Select Committee (“parent” committee for the Adoption West JSP).

Proposal

18. To endorse the Terms of Reference for the Adoption West JSP.
19. To endorse the membership of the Adoption West JSP for Wiltshire Council, including the appointment of an additional Wiltshire Councillor.

Cllr Jon Hubbard, Chairman of Adoption West – Joint Scrutiny Panel / Chairman of Children’s Select Committee

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – draft Terms of Reference