

**Manchester Health and Wellbeing Board  
Report for Information**

**Report to:** Health and Wellbeing Board – 30 August 2017  
**Subject:** The Establishment of a Regional Adoption Agency  
**Report of:** Strategic Director of Children’s Services

---

**Summary**

This report informs the Health and Wellbeing Board about the establishment of a new Regional Adoption Agency. The new agency, named Adoption Counts, has been formed by Manchester City Council Adoption Service with four neighbouring local authority adoption services and two local voluntary adoption agencies. A regional service will widen the pool of adopters for Manchester’s looked after children who need adoption and enhance our ability to secure adoptive families for children in a timelier manner than as a single agency. It is anticipated that creating a regional service will reduce competition and create efficiencies through the pooling of resources.

Regionalising the service is consistent with the Government agenda promoting regional adoption agencies and with the Greater Manchester agenda for joined up services across the region. After significant development work Adoption Counts commenced operations on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017.

**Recommendations**

The Board is asked to note the contents of the report and note that Manchester City Council as from July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017 delivers adoption services as part of the new regional agency, Adoption Counts.

---

**Board Priority(s) Addressed:**

<b>Health and Wellbeing Strategy priority</b>	<b>Summary of contribution to the strategy</b>
Getting the youngest people in our communities off to the best start	For looked after children who cannot safely return to their birth parents or extended family, the local authority has a responsibility to provide them with stability and permanence throughout their childhood and into adulthood. For younger children in particular, the most suitable and successful way to do this is through securing an adoptive family for them. The creation of a regional adoption agency will enhance our ability to find the right adoptive family for children as we will have access to a larger

	pool of approved adopters. This will mean that more children with an adoption plan will have adoption secured for them, and that we will be able to move children on to adoption in a timelier manner. This will contribute to more young children having a good start and improved life chances in early childhood.
Improving people's mental health and wellbeing	Providing stable and permanent family homes for looked after children through adoption will enhance their mental health and wellbeing. Children in adoptive families will benefit from an improved opportunity to develop healthy attachments to adult care givers, and to develop a positive sense of self. The regional agency will help us to place more children who need adoption with adoptive families and to provide consistent and comprehensive post adoption support to adoptive families, including therapeutic support.
Bringing people into employment and ensuring good work for all	Successful adoptions support children to develop into independent and responsible adults more ready for the world of work.
Enabling people to keep well and live independently as they grow older	Successful adoption will support children to grow into independent adults, more able to manage all stages of adulthood
Turning round the lives of troubled families as part of the Confident and Achieving Manchester programme	Successful adoption can transform the lives of looked after children who will have started life in a troubled family.
One health and care system – right care, right place, right time	Not applicable.
Self-care	Successful adoptions will support the aim for people to manage their own self-care.

**Lead board member:**

**Contact Officers:**

Name: Paul Dempsey  
Position: Head of Service Looked After Children  
Telephone: 07940459264  
E-mail: paul.dempsey@manchester.gov.uk

**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

The Report to the Children and Young Person's Scrutiny Committee – 20<sup>th</sup> June 2017 - Establishing a Regional Adoption Agency – The Report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services

## Introduction

- 1.1 This report is an information report. It seeks to inform the Board of the establishment of a new Regional Adoption Agency, of which Manchester City Council Adoption Service is a key partner. A more detailed report, which was considered by the Council Executive for approval to proceed, and the Children and Young Person's Scrutiny Committee, is attached as an appendix for additional information.
- 1.2 The new agency is called Adoption Counts. Adoption Counts is a partnership between Manchester City Council Adoption Service and four neighbouring local authority adoption services and two local voluntary adoption services. The four other local authorities are, Stockport, Trafford, Salford, and Cheshire East. The two voluntary adoption agencies are Adoption Matters and Caritas.
- 1.3 After considerable development work, supported by a Department for Education (DfE) development grant, Adoption Counts commenced operations on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2017. In terms of the legal status of the agency, it is not legally independent, but is being 'hosted' by Stockport Council.

## Background

- 2.1 The development of a Regional Adoption Agency commenced in August 2015 in response to a spirit of increased collaboration, the devolution agenda, and the Government policy paper, 'Regionalising Adoption', published in spring 2015. The Regionalising Adoption paper set out plans for all local authority adoption services to merge into larger regional adoption agencies by 2020.
- 2.2 Development work was undertaken by a dedicated project team. The work was supported by the DfE and the project team reported monthly to a Regional Adoption Agency Board chaired by the Director for Children's Services in Stockport Council, whose members included senior officers from all the partner agencies and experienced adoptive parents.

## Role and Aims of the Agency

- 3.1 Adoption Counts has taken on the role of recruiting, approving and supporting adopters across the region for all five local authority partners. The individual local authorities will remain responsible for planning for looked after children and supporting them on their 'journey' to adoption.
- 3.2 Key objectives of the agency are:
  - To provide children with the right adopters at the right time
  - To secure adoption for all children for whom it is in their best interests
  - To reduce delay through timely matching and placement of children with adopters
  - To succeed in securing adoption for more 'difficult to place' children
  - To reduce adoption placement breakdown

- To achieve cost efficiencies from delivering one regional service rather than five individual services

### **Structure of Adoption Counts**

- 4.1 Adoption Counts is operating across the five local authority areas in a 'hub and spokes' model.
- 4.2 The hub is made up of a centralised team dealing with overall service management, marketing, enquiries about becoming an adopter, performance management, adoption panel administration, and centralised tracking, linking and matching of children to adoptive families. The agency hub will be based in the Etrop Court building owned by Manchester City Council in Wythenshaw.
- 4.2 The three spoke offices, covering North, Central and South of the region will be engaged in adopter preparation and approval, early identification in each local authority of children who may require adoption, placing of children with adopters, and providing adoption support services. The staff serving the Central spoke will be based in Etrop Court alongside the hub staff, as will most of the staff serving the South spoke. The remainder of the staff serving the South spoke will be based in Middlewich in Cheshire East, and the staff serving the North spoke will be based in Swinton in Salford.

### **Staffing**

- 5.1 Staff who were in Manchester's Adoption Service before July 2017 have been seconded into Stockport Council as the host agency for Adoption Counts. This means they are still employees of the City Council but are managed and deployed by Adoption Counts management. In the same way, staff have been seconded from the four other local authority partners.

### **Funding**

- 6.1 Adoption Counts is funded through proportionate funding contributions from the five local authority partners. Manchester City Council funding contribution in year one is £1.769m. This is based on our budget for the Adoption Service in Manchester in 2016/17 plus an additional 10% to cover business overhead costs related to support functions.
- 6.2 Partners will look towards establishing a funding model based on most recent activity for year two and beyond rather than one based on historic budgets.
- 6.3 Where the Adoption Service does not have its own approved adoptive family for a particular child efforts are made to identify a suitable family approved by another local authority or voluntary agency. Where we use such placements we are required to pay the other agency a fee of £27k per child. Over recent years this expenditure has been re-funded by a DfE grant but the DfE grant has now ended. It is anticipated however that being in a regional agency with a larger pool of adopters to choose from will mean the Council avoids the likely significant costs of purchasing placements from other agencies had we

remained as a single agency. Based on historic activity the cost avoidance could be c£400k given the DfE grant in 2016/17 was worth £432k to Manchester.

### **Summary**

- 7.1 Being part of Adoption Counts Regional Adoption Agency will improve our ability to place our children in adoptive families and to do so in a timely manner. This will be good for children and will create cost efficiencies for the Council
- 7.2 Having a larger pool of adopters will reduce the need for Manchester as a single agency to purchase adoption placements from other adoption agencies at a cost of £27k per placement, therefore achieving a cost avoidance.
- 7.3 The move to a regional service is in line with the Greater Manchester devolution and increased collaboration agenda and the Government agenda to establish regional adoption agencies.