Scope of Adoption Scrutiny Review 2016-17

Report of the Director of Operations, Children’s Care and Support Service

Open Report | For Decision
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**Accountable Director:** Anne Bristow, Strategic Director Service Development and Improvement

**Summary:**
Following an options paper which was circulated to the Children’s Services Select Committee (CSSC) by the Scrutiny Officer, the CSSC has opted to undertake a scrutiny review on Adoption in 2016/17.

This Report puts forward suggested Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Review and provides a draft timeline for completion of the Review, including suggested methods to obtain the views of service users and gather evidence, which will form the basis of any recommendations the Committee makes as a result of this Review.

**Recommendations**

The Committee is recommended to:

(i) Agree the final Terms of Reference for the Review and

(ii) Agree the final methodology for this Review.

**Reasons**

In order for a scrutiny review to be successful, it is essential that Members agree upon an effective Terms of Reference and methodology to ensure that recommendations arising from the review are evidence based and will drive improvement in public services.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 On 9 June 2016 Councillor Kangethe, the Chair of the Children's Services Select Committee (CSSC) met with the Strategic Director for Service Development and Improvement to have a discussion about potential items for the Committee’s Work Programme for 2016/17. The need to undertake an in-depth scrutiny review was discussed as part of this and in preparation, Children’s Services officers had put forward three potential areas for a Scrutiny Review. These were Care Leavers,
Adoption and Specialist provision for children and young people with additional and complex needs. The Scrutiny Officer circulated the briefing papers for each of these areas (see Appendix 1) asking the CSSC to choose their first preference for a Scrutiny Review. The topic that the majority of the CSSC chose as their first preference (including co-optees) was Adoption (Option 3).

2. **Key Lines of Enquiry**

1.2 The option paper for Adoption listed the below as potential key lines of enquiry for the Review:

1. Requesting further information on the reasons for reduced Adoption Scorecard performance and for this to include benchmarked data.
2. Information on outcomes for children and young people
3. Information about alternatives to adoption that impact the number of children adopted (Special Guardianships)
4. Actions in place to improve performance
5. Information about where the performance is monitored.

If at the meeting, the Committee expresses agreement to the above Key Lines of Enquiry, officers will produce and circulate a set of Terms of Reference for the Review to ensure members continue to keep focus on the priorities of the Review throughout the process.

3. **Methodology**

3.1 Below is an outline of the methods and information gathering tools officers have identified at this early stage that may support Members to obtain the information they need to progress a Review on Adoption, together with a draft timeline for completion:

3.2 The Review could include:

- To begin with, a discussion with the Director of Operations, Children’s Care and Support and Group Manager, Children in Care, to provide an understanding of the national strategy on adoption and the Adoption Score Card. At the same time to include a discussion on the local strategy for improving the timelines of adoption and the B&D adoption scorecard.
- A session with the Independent Chair of the Adoption Panel, Roy Stewart, and another member of the panel. At this meeting to consider Member representation on the Adoption Panel.
- A meeting with a young person who has been adopted.
- A meeting with parent(s) of children who have been adopted.
- A meeting with social workers, team managers and a legal representative who are involved with children going through the adoption process. At this meeting to include a discussion on alternatives to discussion such as Special Guardianship.
- To hear from Skittlz, our Children in Care Group, their views on adoption and its alternatives.
The dates for CSSC meetings are set out below. Following a discussion on 18 July some or all the above will then be set against the meeting schedule below. This is likely to mean that more than one speaker/s may be at each meeting.

- 18 July: Agree terms of reference and methodology
- 19 September 2016
- 25 October 2016
- 6 December 2016
- February 2017
- March/ April 2017: Draft report and recommendations presented to the Committee and Cabinet Member for Social Care & Health Integration
- May/ June 2017: Final report and recommendations agreed with a request for an action plan to be prepared to implement recommendations.
- November 2017: monitoring report to show progress of recommendations and impact on service.

4. **Financial Implications**

4.1 Financial implications will be completed by Katherine Heffernan. Children’s Services budgets have significant savings targets to achieve in 2016/17 and in subsequent years. Recommendations will need to undergo cost benefit analysis to determine financial affordability and viability.

5. **Legal Implications**

5.1 Legal implications will be completed by Lindsey Marks, Principal Solicitor Children’s Safeguarding.

5.2 There are no legal implications in this report.

**Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:**

None.

**List of appendices:**

Appendix 1 Scrutiny Review Options for the Children’s Services Select Committee