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To: The Chair and Members of the
Children's Scrutiny Committee

County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
Devon
EX2 4QD

(See below)

Your ref :
Our ref :

Date : 6 March 2020
Please ask for : Wendy Simpson 01392 384383

Email: wendy.simpson@devon.gov.uk

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 16th March, 2020

A meeting of the Children's Scrutiny Committee is to be held on the above date at 2.15 pm at
Committee Suite - County Hall to consider the following matters.

P NORREY
Chief Executive

A G E N D A

PART I - OPEN COMMITTEE

- 1 Apologies
- 2 Minutes
- 3 Items Requiring Urgent Attention
Items which in the opinion of the Chair should be considered at the meeting as matters of urgency.
- 4 Public Participation
Members of the public may make representations/presentations on any substantive matter listed in the published agenda for this meeting, as set out hereunder, relating to a specific matter or an examination of services or facilities provided or to be provided.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION OR REVIEW

- 5 Scrutiny Committee Work Programme
In accordance with previous practice, Scrutiny Committees are requested to review the

list of forthcoming business and determine which items are to be included in the Work Programme. The Scrutiny Work Programme can be found [here](#).

The Committee may also wish to review the content of the Cabinet Forward Plan and the Children's Services Risk Register to see if there are any specific items therein it might wish to explore further. The Cabinet Forward Plan can be found [here](#) and Risk Register [here](#).

6 Adoption in Devon (Pages 1 - 4)

Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (CS/20/05), attached.

7 Progress of the SEND Improvement Plan

Presentation from the Head of Education and Learning.

MATTERS FOR INFORMATION

8 Information Previously Circulated

Below is a list of information previously circulated for Members, since the last meeting, relating to topical developments which have been or are currently being considered by this Scrutiny Committee.

- Link to the Children & Family Health Devon website, providing further information about the children's community health services they provide (including CAMHS, autism and speech and language services).

Briefing notes can be found at [here](#).

PART II - ITEMS WHICH MAY BE TAKEN IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

Nil

Membership

Councillors R Hannaford (Chair), D Sellis, S Aves, F Biederman, J Brazil, C Channon, I Chubb, G Gribble, J Hawkins, L Hellyer, R Hosking, T Inch, A Saywell, M Squires, C Mabin, A Connett and P Sanders

Declaration of Interests

Members are reminded that they must declare any interest they may have in any item to be considered at this meeting, prior to any discussion taking place on that item.

Access to Information

Any person wishing to inspect any minutes, reports or lists of background papers relating to any item on this agenda should contact Wendy Simpson 01392 384383

Agenda and minutes of the Committee are published on the Council's Website and can also be accessed via the Modern.Gov app, available from the usual stores..

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Public Participation

Devon's residents may attend and speak at any meeting of a County Council Scrutiny Committee when it is reviewing any specific matter or examining the provision of services or facilities as listed on the agenda for that meeting.

Scrutiny Committees set aside 15 minutes at the beginning of each meeting to allow anyone who has registered to speak on any such item. Speakers are normally allowed 3 minutes each.

Anyone wishing to speak is requested to register in writing to the Clerk of the Committee (details above) by the deadline, outlined in the Council's [Public Participation Scheme](#), indicating which item they wish to speak on and giving a brief outline of the issues/ points they wish to make. The representation and the name of the person making the representation will be recorded in the minutes.

Alternatively, any Member of the public may at any time submit their views on any matter to be considered by a Scrutiny Committee at a meeting or included in its work Programme direct to the Chair or Members of that Committee or via the Democratic Services & Scrutiny Secretariat (committee@devon.gov.uk). Members of the public may also suggest topics (see: <https://new.devon.gov.uk/democracy/committee-meetings/scrutiny-committees/scrutiny-work-programme/>)

All Scrutiny Committee agenda are published at least seven days before the meeting on the Council's website.

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Induction loop system available

Committee Terms of Reference

1) To review the implementation of existing policies and to consider the scope for new policies for all aspects of the discharge of the Council's functions concerning the provision of personal services for children including social care, safeguarding and special needs services, schools and learning;

(2) To assess the effectiveness of decisions of the Cabinet in these areas of the Council's statutory activity;

(3) To relate scrutiny to the achievement of the Council's strategic priorities and objectives and of delivering best value in all its activities;

(4) To make reports and recommendations as appropriate arising from this area of overview and scrutiny.

NOTES FOR VISITORS

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The nearest mainline railway stations are Exeter Central (5 minutes from the High Street) and St David's and St Thomas's both of which have regular bus services to the High Street. Bus Service H (which runs from St David's Station to the High Street) continues and stops in Wonford Road (at the top of Matford Lane shown on the map) a 2/3 minute walk from County Hall, en route to the RD&E Hospital (approximately a 10 minutes walk from County Hall, through Gras Lawn on Barrack Road).

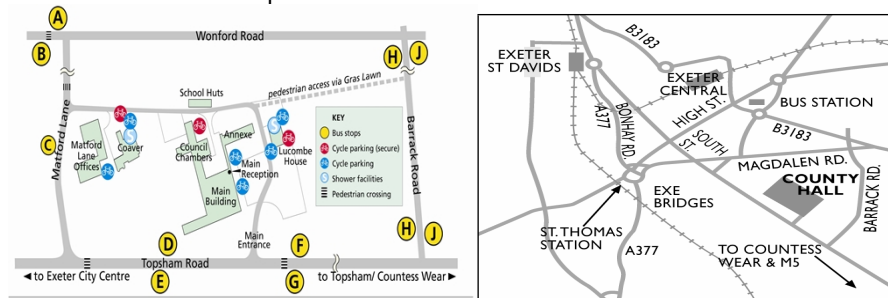
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Car Parking and Security

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As indicated above, parking cannot be guaranteed and visitors should allow themselves enough time to find alternative parking if necessary. Public car parking can be found at the Cathedral Quay or Magdalen Road Car Parks (approx. 20 minutes walk). There are two disabled parking bays within the visitor car park. Additional disabled parking bays are available in the staff car park. These can be accessed via the intercom at the entrance barrier to the staff car park.



NB   Denotes bus stops

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First Aid

Contact Main Reception (extension 2504) for a trained first aider.

Adopter Sufficiency and adoption support - Adopt South West

Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (Deputy Chief Officer)

1 Background

- 1.1 The Children's Scrutiny Committee have previously received a report (20 March 2018) outlining the background to the introduction of Regional Adoption Agencies. [Link to Report.](#)
- 1.2 The Children's Scrutiny Committee have since received briefing notes in March 2019 and January 2020.
- 1.3 Adopt South West manages the adoption services for children and adopted adults from the Local Authorities of Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, Somerset County Council and Torbay Council.

2. Adopter sufficiency

- 2.1 Identifying and assessment sufficient numbers of suitable adopters is a national challenge and improving our Adopter Sufficiency remains one of our key activities
- 2.2 The Adopt South West Service Manager sits on the RAA leaders National Recruitment Steering group. A national campaign recently commenced, and Adopt South West are at the forefront of this.
- 2.3 Locally the teams were very active during national adoption week and staged, amongst many other activities Facebook Live events making good use of the region's adopters and sharing expertise.
- 2.4 The team have an active presence on social media, local radio and television, and the numbers of potential adopters are increasing.
- 2.5 In November 2019 we had 22 enquiries from prospective adopters. In December there were 40 and in January there were 70 enquires. This is very encouraging. We are receiving approximately 1-2 registrations of interest a day.
- 2.6 Adopt South West is building a good reputation as an adoption agency and numbers of applicants are increasing.

3. National Recruitment Campaign

- 3.1 Recognising the challenge of Adopter sufficiency, the Department for Education has given the Regional Adopters Agency Leaders Group £645,000 for marketing. Just prior to Christmas the DfE announced an additional £1m for RAA leaders to spend collectively with VAAs/voluntary sector, on recruitment in 2020-21, on top of the funding for last year – this includes for 2020 National Adoption Week.
- 3.2 The national campaign starts on 26 March 2020.

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- 3.3 We are confident that this will generate more interest and further enquiries, but it should be recognised that this raises its own challenges in terms of our capacity to assess applicants, and to support them in the future. The service is planning for this.

4. Close working with social care teams in Devon.

- 4.1 Adopt South West work closely with DCC childrens services in order to provide the best outcomes for children needing adoptive placements.
- 4.2 Permanency and Tracking Panels for children are held weekly in each locality area. Adopt South West attends these Panels to give advice and to start to track children if they may need an adoptive placement.
- 4.3 Referrals are received at the earliest opportunity and allocated to a Family Finding social worker. In November 2019, the team received 7 new referrals for family finding for Devon children, 3 of which were requests for Fostering for Adoption placements, and 5 Best Interest decisions were made.
- 4.4 The Adopt South West agency adviser works with the childrens team to support them in presenting a request for best interest decision from the Agency Decision Maker.

5. Family Finding

- 5.1 Support is offered to the child's social worker to write the Child Permanence Report. A key document for the child and the adoption process. Consideration is given to what support adopters are likely to need to care for the child.
- 5.2 Adopt South West make use of a range of media to try to identify and match prospective adopters with children who are to be adopted.
- 5.3 Family finders will look to placing a child initially with adopters approved by Adopt South West. If there are none that would prove a suitable match for the child, then permission is sought from the Service Manager to start an external search so as to avoid unnecessary delay for the child.
- 5.4 The team undertake a broad range of family finding activities, including:
- Local Stay and Play Days – bimonthly - 10 children attend- supporting early links
 - Mini exchange events through South West Adoption Consortium
 - National Exchange days – London and Leeds at least quarterly
 - Specialised Family Finding events through National exchange days. Black Asian Minority Ethnic children, siblings and older children.
 - Children referred to New Family Social through National events
- 5.5 In the period 1 April 2019 – 31 December 2019 Adopt South West matched 30 Devon children with new families.
- 5.6 As at 18 February 2020, there were 26 DCC children that Adopt South West were actively family finding for.

6. Linking and Matching

- 6.1 Once a potential link has been made for a child, Adopt South West chair a linking meeting to agree progressing the link with the childrens teams. This meeting will also consider the family's support needs.
- 6.2 Once matched at panel, Adopt South West will chair the Transitions Meeting. The Transitions policy of Adopt South West has been nationally recognised and commended by Professor Beth Neil and her team at the University of East Anglia.

7. Early Placement Support

- 7.1 Once placed, Adopt South West offer early placement support up to the point that the Adoption Order is granted. All of our practitioners are trained to level 1 for Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), and in the Spring, staff will be trained in level 1 Theraplay. We want this embedded in all our work with adopters right from the very beginning, through their training, assessment, matching, transitions and early placement. We offer relationship based 'play groups' for adopters with young children, and a variety of activities for young adoptive families.

8. Training for Childrens Teams

- 8.1 We undertake training of childrens social work teams. Last year Julie Young from the University of East Anglia came to the South West and spoke about helping children keep in touch with their birth families. Staff from DCC's Childrens teams, fostering teams, and IRO's attended. Later this spring the University of East Anglia is coming to the South west to talk to staff for across the childrens teams of the Adopt South West region on Transitions, and helping children move into their adoptive families.
- 8.2 Adopt South West run workshops for childrens social workers on Life Story Work, and feedback on these is very positive. A workshop for all Agency Decision Makers across the region to consider common themes and practice issues will be held in the Spring.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 Whilst the recruitment of adopters remains a challenge both nationally and regionally, Adopt South West has seen an encouraging increase in expressions of interest in recent months and continues to develop its recruitment strategy and the support offered to adopters that makes it well placed nationally.

Darryl Freeman
Head of Service (Deputy Chief Officer) Children's Services

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools: Councillor James McInnes

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS
None

Contact for Enquiries: Kath Drescher, Service Manager (Adopt South West)
email: kath.drescher@devon.gov.uk Tel: 01392 383000

