

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 16 March 2026

Report Title

South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency (SYRRA)

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

In January 2021 Rotherham partnered with Barnsley, Doncaster, and Sheffield children's social care departments to create One Adoption South Yorkshire (OASY) as their Regional Adoption Agency. The arrangement was agreed for 5 years and has progressed since this date. The partnership agreement was scheduled to end in December 2025; however, the four local authority Directors of Children's Services agreed to an extension through to April 2026 as a review had just been completed making recommendations relating to the operating model and the associated funding formula.

Recommendations

That Cabinet approve a further 5-year partnership arrangement with Barnsley, Doncaster, and Sheffield to deliver adoption services as part of a Regional Adoption Agency (OASY).

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 - Part A – Initial Equality Screening Assessment.

Appendix 2 - Climate Impact Assessment

Background Papers

None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency (SYRRA)

1. Background

- 1.1 In June 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) reported that local authorities should be working towards Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) models by 2020. There was an expectation that local authorities would begin planning, developing, and working with partners to shape their RAA. The DfE's commitment to this approach was such that the Education and Adoption Act 2016 gave power to the government to direct a local authority to enter into a RAA (or a partnership with a Voluntary Adoption Agency) if they deemed that there was insufficient evidence of engagement in the process.
- 1.2 The Government vision behind the regionalisation of Adoption Services was to accelerate the pace of change to ensure those children, for whom adoption is the right path, were given the best chance of finding a loving, permanent family as quickly as possible. The DfE provided start-up funding to support local authorities to take forward their proposals.
- 1.3 One Adoption South Yorkshire was the 30th Regional Adoption Agency created in England and is a partnership model RAA. It brings together the Adoption Services from the four local councils of South Yorkshire - Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, City of Doncaster Council, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and Sheffield City Council.
- 1.4 Doncaster is the 'host' agency but in a partnership model, practitioners do not all move to the host agency either through secondment or TUPE but remain employed by their existing employer. Doncaster hosts a small team of central 'hub' staff who operate across the whole service.
- 1.5 The RAA has delivered adoption services for the four local authorities for some years now and the recent review by Ofsted during the Rotherham 2025 ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) inspection noted that: *The strong working relationship between the local authority and the regional adoption agency helps to ensure that the needs of local children with a plan of adoption are met. There is a clear recruitment strategy in place to increase the number of adopters approved by the agency. The assessment, training and support of adopters is robust. High-quality preparation training supports prospective adopters to fully understand the varied needs of children who need adoptive families and prepares them well for a child joining their family.*
- 1.6 The operating model, and associated funding formula for the Regional Adoption Agency was the subject of an independent review in Autumn 2025 commissioned by the Regional Adoption Agency's Strategic Board. This review presented recommendations to the board around an updating of the model, recognising that demand has changed over the last five years in relation to this area of social work practice. This required greater flexibility in relation to use of staff as demand changed in terms of recruitment and post adoption support. As part of the review, it was also established that the funding formula whereby the four LAs contribute to the RAA needed to be updated. An

update will result in a saving for RMBC. All these recommendations were accepted by the Strategic Board in principle.

- 1.7 The performance of One Adoption South Yorkshire has been comparable with other Regional Adoption Agencies. There has been a reduction in the number of children being placed for adoption alongside an increase in the number of families accessing support for adopted children (post-order support). There are several reasons for this and locally this is supported by an improved Early Help offer as well as a stronger focus on children remaining in their wider family as part of the broader Kinship agenda. The data supports the position above. In 2023, 21 children were placed for adoption with 20 being placed in 2025.
- 1.8 Despite the reduction in children being placed for adoption, there are regional and national challenges regarding adopter sufficiency. This has meant that there have been challenges, on occasion, in relation to placing children as swiftly as would be hoped. Despite the challenges, the Regional Adoption Agency continues to perform better than the England average. The changes noted in this report are likely to improve output and performance of the Regional Adoption Agency, and it is likely that the increased efficiency of the service and the ability to pivot based on trends in demand will improve access to services for both children waiting to be adopted as well as those seeking to adopt.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 There is a continued need for Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council to deliver adoption services. This is a statutory obligation and ensures that children with a care plan for adoption can secure legal permanence through an adoption process when no longer considered safe or in their best interest to remain with their parents or wider family network.
- 2.2 The partnership arrangements to date have been a broad success. There has been development since their inception and some of the challenges experienced have been addressed more recently following a review of the operating model by an external consultant.
- 2.3 The proposed revised delivery model will see an increase in flexibility within the RAA enabling more efficient service delivery. This will also address the reduction in adopter approval activity that we have seen in recent years alongside the increase in the need for post order support services. These are the services that are offered to families who have adopted a child and require support in the years that follow. This is a national trend, and the local area reflects the general downward trend in permanent homes being provided via adoption.
- 2.4 The continued partnership arrangement will see a move towards a thematic model of working aligning the service under 3 workstreams (Adoption Support, Recruitment and Assessment and Family Finding) rather than four Local Authority adoption services operating within a RAA almost independently of each other. It also builds in capacity for a *Keeping-in-Touch* team within adoption support (a known growth area) and the potential for a recruitment and

assessment front door team. Keeping in Touch (KIT) in adoption refers to agreed, often voluntary, arrangements allowing adopted children to maintain relationships with birth relatives or significant people, supporting their identity and emotional wellbeing. This model will generate the additional capacity by moving resource from the family finding team (where work has been reducing) to the other workstreams. It also generates flexibility to manage short term absence and crucially to deliver a consistently high standard of service across the South Yorkshire Region.

2.5 The associated cost reduction for RMBC is based on a revision of the funding formula of the RAA. This is based primarily on the reduction in the number of children Rotherham are placing for adoption. There are a variety of reasons for this including a comprehensive and robust Family Help offer, the enhancements in the use of Family Network Activity and an improved Kinship offer leading to more children and young people remaining at home with their parents or wider network. The reduction in costs has been absorbed in the alternative delivery model meaning a redistribution in Service Manager capacity and management of inter-agency budgets. The inter-agency budget is the fund used when the RAA purchase adoptive placements from other RAAs or may income generate from selling placements to other agencies. It is not considered that there will be an impact on service delivery and there are no risks in relation to redundancy based on these proposals.

2.6 The implementation plan aims to move to this model of delivery in April 2026.

2.7 There is ongoing engagement with staff regarding the model of service delivery. The changes will be minimal in terms of expected output other than they will work across the South Yorkshire sub region rather than just the one local authority area as they predominantly do in the current model.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Operating outside of a Regional Adoption Agency is not considered a viable delivery option as this is a requirement of the Department for Education; as such this option has not been considered.

3.2 Not continuing to deliver services as part of One Adoption South Yorkshire is an option; however, this would require Rotherham partnering with an alternative Regional Adoption Agency or partnering with a Voluntary Adoption Agency. There is no identified benefit of this model at this current time that would suggest it should be explored in more detail.

3.3 Engaging in a continued partnership as the council have since January 2021, with the revised operating model and the reduction in associated costs with a revised funding formula, is the preferred option. This will ensure consistency of service delivery for staff, adopters and children and young people. This will ensure RMBC operate adoption services as required, that have also been externally verified and validated as effective, with a reduced associated cost. This is the recommended proposal.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 The Executive Director of Children and Young People’s Services has consulted with regional Directors of Children’s Services and there is collective agreement to this approach. She will also take over the role as chair of the Strategic Governing Board of the Regional Adoption Agency for the next 24 months.

4.2 Staff engagement is underway in relation to the alternative delivery model; however, there are no significant changes to roles for any staff concerned.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 The partnership agreement, subject to the approval of Cabinet, will be endorsed.

5.2 An implementation plan was presented to the Strategic Board on 15th January. The agreement will commence from 1st April 2026 and continue until 31st March 2031.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 The One Adoption South Yorkshire (the Regional Adoption Agency) was established on 1 January 2021 under a Section 101 agreement between the four South Yorkshire local authorities. The current agreement expires on 31 March 2026. In preparation for this, work has commenced to develop a revised agreement and extend the regional arrangement for a further five years. This work is being informed by the findings of an independent review.

6.2 The proposed financial and funding arrangements for the Agency under the revised Agreement remain largely unchanged. However, a review of the funding model has resulted in a reduction to Rotherham’s funding contribution of £117k. This cost reduction has been incorporated within the Budget and MTFs. The table below sets out the agreed funding contributions from all four South Yorkshire local authorities for 2026/27, which is the first year of the new Agreement:

	SCC	BMBC	RMBC	DCC	Total
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Baseline contributions	1,817	1,090	1,384	1,305	5,596
Pay & contract inflation	24	20	26	19	91
Funding model changes	-	-	-117	-	- 117
Proposed funding (26/27)	1,841	1,111	1,293	1,325	5,570

6.3 Under the proposed financial arrangements, local authority funding contributions will be subject to annual uplifts to reflect pay and contract inflation. Financial risks and in-year pressures will be managed by the Agency. Any year-end overspends will be met collectively by the four local authorities, apportioned in line with their respective budget contributions. In-year

pressures will be managed by the Agency. Any year-end overspends will be met collectively by the four local authorities, apportioned in line with their respective budget contributions

- 6.4 There are no direct procurement implications associated with the recommendations detailed in this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 Local authorities in England are mandated under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to maintain a comprehensive adoption service, including recruiting adopters, assessing needs, placing children, and providing adoption support services. They must offer counselling, information, and financial support (if eligible) to adoptive families and birth families.

- 7.2 In June 2015, the Department for Education set out proposals to move to regional adoption agencies in its paper 'Regionalising Adoption'. The paper sought to kick start a move to regional adoption agencies on a voluntary basis.

- 7.3 The Education and Adoption Act 2016 put the move to regional adoption agencies on a statutory footing. Section 3ZA of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (as amended by the Education and Adoption Act 2016) empowers the Secretary of State to direct one or more local authorities in England to make arrangements for any or all of their specified adoption functions to be carried out on their behalf by one of the local authorities named or by another adoption agency.

- 7.4 RMBC currently operates its adoption services as part of a Regional Adoption Agency (One Adoption South Yorkshire) and has done so since 1 January 2021. The current agreement will expire on 31 March 2026. The recommended proposal at 3.3 is for this to continue and in doing so the local authority will continue to comply with its statutory duty as set out above at 7.1 and will avoid arrangements being imposed on it by the DfE.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 Staff within the Regional Adoption Agency continue to be employed by RMBC as this is a partnership model. There will be no changes to the roles staff are employed in; however, their scope of work will become more varied.

- 8.2 Staff engagement is underway in relation to the changes to the operating model.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 The delivery of effective adoption services is critical for those with a care plan of adoption. Children with such a care plan require responsive services that can identify and assess prospective adopters whilst also ensuring that there is capacity to offer post-order support services for adopted children.

- 9.2 The current arrangements were reviewed recently by Ofsted who were complimentary of the services offered. Further to this a recent external review has made recommendations to enhance service delivery which have been accepted by the board.
- 9.3 The continuation of services in this format is expected to prove to be a positive for children and young people of Rotherham as well as prospective adopters who adopt Rotherham children.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 The legal framework surrounding the adoption of children in England is clear and based on the principles as set out in Section 1 Children Act 1989. Furthermore, the Human Rights Act 1998 (incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights) at Article 8 gives a clear focus on an individual's right to a family life.
- 10.2 An effective adoption service that can progress a child's care plan of adoption will ensure compliance with these expectations. Conversely, the ineffective delivery of adoption services risks children and young people's care plans not progressing effectively and as such would be a risk to the council as corporate parents.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 There are no associated climate implications in this decision.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 This is a positive arrangement for the region and will see the continued delivery of services from an established RAA that Rotherham have been a part of since inception.
- 12.2 Agencies across the wider children's partnership have well established interconnection with One Adoption South Yorkshire and as such support this approach.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 There are clear associated risks in not progressing as recommended as this would see RMBC not delivering adoption services effectively.
- 13.2 There are clear implementation plans to ensure the seamless commencement of a new partnership agreement with established partners to deliver adoption service on behalf of the council.

14. Accountable Officers

Stuart Williams, Service Director – Children's Social Care.

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	John Edwards	27/02/26
Executive Director of Corporate Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	24/02/26
Service Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	25/02/26

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