

Approval to award Grant Agreement for the development of The Black Adoption Project.

Date: 15/03/2024

Report of: Commissioning and Market Management

Report to: Director of Children and Families

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- In support of the National Adoption Strategy this report seeks the approval of the Director of Children and Families Directorate to award a grant agreement to Adopt London North (on behalf of Adoption London - a partnership of 4 RAA's) in support of the Adoption England Strategy on behalf of Adoption England, previously known as the National Adoption team.
- Within the Adoption England strategy there is an identified aim to improve matching of black children. A Workshop has taken place with stakeholders including Adoption England, DfE and Adopt London to consider proposals to implement, and fund, a phase 2 of The Black Adoption Project (BAP). BAP is a well-established, mature project that was born out of a commitment by the four Adopt London RAAs to address the stark disparities that exist within adoption for Black children and families. Adopt London covers 24 of the London boroughs. It was agreed the proposals presented by the BAP would support the desired outcomes to improve matching for black children. This is a long-term project that aims to make systemic change to improve adoption for black children. It is a phased approach based on funding available. Phase 1 of BAP has been focused on research.. The project has been seeking funding to move on to further phases of the project. that build on the extensive research already done. Based on this proposal stakeholders agreed to allocate up to £250k as a grant for this project.

Recommendations

- a) The Director of Children and Families Services is recommended to approve the award of a grant agreement to Adopt London North for a value of up to £250k for The Black Adoption Project to improve matching of black children from 1st April 2024 for a period of 18 months 30th September 2025.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

This proposal is based on direct funding from the DfE to the National Adoption team, now called Adoption England for the purpose of improving adoption for black children and families.

There are long-standing and persistent challenges in recruiting enough Black adoptive parents to provide sufficient options for Black children. Black children wait longer on average to be placed with adoptive parents and are more likely to have their plan changed away from adoption because adoptive parents could not be identified. Transracial adoption alone is not a solution to the disparities for Black children in the adoption system currently.

Research undertaken in phase one of BAP identified that there are insufficient Black adoptive households to provide the speed and accuracy of matching for children that is required. Black adoptive households are more likely to leave the adoption process without adopting a child.

The proposed phase 2 of BAP seeks to identify ways to increase the number of Black adoptive households, suitable to meet the needs of children waiting, who are approved for adoption – and therefore to improve the speed of matching and ensure there are choices available to provide every Black child with the adoptive family who is the best possible match to meet their needs. To achieve this the project will look at the importance of recruitment processes that are tailored to Black households, how to support the retention and experience of Black prospective adopters in the adoption assessment process, and how to grow a system which can be trusted by Black families throughout their adoption journey. The project will also undertake further analysis of the specific needs of Black children with Placement Orders and their family finding process to ensure we can tailor recruitment processes to those children's needs.

This funding is being provided to BAP as there are more black children waiting to be adopted in London than elsewhere in the country. However: the project is constructed to be able to share and disseminate learning throughout the project, and to producing materials or guides which can be easily utilised by other Regional Adoption Agencies and Voluntary Adoption Agencies for any areas in which success is identified. The project aim it so ensure everything that is tested out benefits the wider sector and has a positive impact on the adoption of Black children nationally. The direct focus of change is within the adoption system, however opportunities be utilised to influence others to create change outside the adoption system.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards Affected: N/A – regional provision

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

In additional to the aims of the project outlined in the section above: the impact & benefits of the project over the next 18 months is...

For children:

- Earlier attachments, reducing impacts of trauma and loss and improving life outcomes.
- Providing the best possible permanency opportunity for all children in the system by ensuring those likely to wait longer are identified earlier and family finding plans put in place.
- Reducing delay for children by diversifying the regional pool of adopters.

For Adoptive families:

- Confidence to come forward to adopt due to greater transparency within the system
- More timely matching and placement leading to earlier attachments.
- Adopters more aware of the needs of children waiting and better prepared to meet them

An Equality Impact Assessment Screening document has been undertaken – see Appendix 1. This identifies there is a positive impact in respect of equality and diversity in that it will advance equality of opportunity for children that are looked after, particularly those most vulnerable i.e. those from BME backgrounds

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

1. The proposal to award this grant to Adopt London North has been agreed by Adoption England and the DfE, and via a panel of representatives from the Adoption England Matching Working Group who act as the Commissioner for the Adoption England/DfE matching funding.
2. No individual wards in Leeds will be impacted by these proposals because the work will be delivered to support the National Adoption Strategy at a national and regional level.
3. There are no particular legal or statutory requirements to undertake consultation as part of this decision. Consultation has taken place regularly at regional RAA meetings with the National Adoption Strategic Lead and representatives from the DfE and RAA leaders to explore options on how to reduce the length of time black children wait to be matched to an adoptive family.

What are the resource implications?

4. The maximum value of this grant is £250,000 over 18 months.
5. This funding is additional revenue funding that is ring-fenced to deliver the outcomes specified in the DfE grant agreement. Issuing this grant agreement in this manner will not create additional financial pressure to the Council. Should the agreement not be issued, the Council, in consultation with the National Strategic Lead, will make other arrangements for the allocated amount with other activity or not claim this amount from the DfE (the Council is paid in arrears). Any underspend of funding over the two-year period would also not be claimed.
6. The Council, as the lead local authority, will receive and manage the funding on behalf of all RAAs The Power under which the grant is to be paid is Section 14 of the Education Act 2002 and will be claimed for quarterly in arrears.
7. Funding will be paid to the RAAs in two instalments in advance (May 2024 and November 2025). Advance payments in two instalments will ease the administrative burden on RAAs and is considered low risk given the payments are being made between local authorities.

What are the legal implications?

8. This is a Significant Operational Decision as it is a direct consequence of the Key Decision to accept and distribute DfE grant funding taken on 13 May 2022 (decision reference D55203). Therefore, this report is not subject to call in and does not contain any exempt or confidential information under the Access to Information Rules.
9. As this agreement is purely a grant of public money from the DfE, it is not classed as a procurement and therefore falls outside of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contract Regulations 2015.
10. Following the Subsidy Control Act 2022 a subsidy control assessment will be completed to ensure that no unlawful subsidy is provided.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

1. The DfE funding must be spent as described in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and therefore this project must contribute towards the intended outcomes of the grant.
2. A National Adoption Strategy Team, now called Adoption England, has been established within Leeds City Council and will work closely with representatives from the Commissioning and PACS services to ensure the grant agreement is awarded correctly and without providing any unlawful subsidy in line with the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth Health and Wellbeing Climate Emergency

- 1 Children in care benefit greatly from adoption leading to better outcomes for their wellbeing, education and future prospects. This grant will help to reduce the length of time black children wait to be matched to an adoptive family.

Options, timescales and measuring success

a) What other options were considered?

- 2 Other options have been considered including carrying out a full competitive tender however stakeholders agreed it would present best value for money to devolve this funding to Adopt London as it builds on work/research that has already taken place and doesn't duplicate/replicate other work in this very specialist area.

b) How will success be measured?

- 3 The RAA Leader's Group is responsible for ensuring projects and activities deliver the intended outcomes of the grant and that performance is robustly monitored against the priorities of the National Adoption Strategy.

c) What is the timetable for implementation?

- 4 The aim is for this project to commence 1st April 2024.

Appendices

- 5 Appendix 1 - Equality, diversity, cohesion and integration (EDCI) screening.

Background papers

6 None