

WEST YORKSHIRE ADOPTION JOINT COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 4TH OCTOBER, 2017

Present: Councillor L Mulherin (Leeds) - Chair
Councillor V Slater (City of Bradford), Councillor M Swift (Calderdale MBC)
and Councillor O Rowley (City of Wakefield MDC)

Councillor H Hayden (LCC)

In Attendance: S Johal (LCC), S Tariq (LCC), and J Grieve (LCC)

13 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

14 EXEMPT INFORMATION - POSSIBLE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items identified where it was considered necessary to exclude the press or public from the meeting due to the confidential nature of the business to be considered.

15 LATE ITEMS

Although there were no formal late items, the Chair did accept the inclusion of supplementary information in respect of Agenda Item No.8 - "Birth Parent Voice – Proposed Consultation for One Adoption" (Minute No. 20 refers)

16 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests made at the meeting.

17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor E Hill (Kirklees MBC)

18 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 28th June 2017 were agreed as a true and correct record.

19 Matters Arising from the Minutes

There were no issues raised under matters arising.

20 Head of Service Report

The Director of Children's Services submitted a business report and provided an update on the following:

- Staffing
- Business Support
- Information Management and Technology
- Implementation of the One Adoption Duty System
- Adoption Panels
- Establishing the culture
- Voice and influence of young people
- Birth Parents
- Adoption Support
- Practice Improvement Fund projects
- Centre of Excellence
- Early Permanence Placements (EPP)
- Recruitment and Assessment
- Children's Planning and Family Finding
- Links with Health
- Links with Education
- Marketing, Website
- Performance

It was noted that recruitment staffing was progressing well with all the 4 adoption advisors starting in post in the last two weeks. Advanced practitioner posts were all now recruited. Business support staff were moving into positions, with a further round of recruitment ongoing. The Practice Improvement Manager had been appointed with a start date at the end of October.

Members were made aware that progression of the IT systems had been problematic. It was noted that issues around: connectivity, reliance on Wi- Fi, intermittent strength; use of the guest Wi-Fi, timescales for login back in; printing; slowness and freezing screens were all issues which required further attention.

Members expressed disappointment about the IT issues and requested if the necessary actions could be put in place to ensure a reliable service was provided.

A discussion ensued on the Adoption Support Fund. Members suggested that there appeared to be raised expectations by adoptive parents on the level of funding that could be expected from the Local Authority that was over and above the limit imposed by the fund for therapeutic support. It was suggested

that greater communication was required with adoptive parents in order to clarify the arrangements.

In responding the Head of Service said at the present time there was different criteria regarding the levels of financial support in adoption across different local authority areas. It was suggested that some consideration be given by the officers to look at this across the local authorities.

In summing up the Chair said that the transition continued to progress, although there appeared to be a number of issues around IT connectivity and reliability which required addressing.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note and welcome the progress of the agency
- (ii) To support the further progression of these arrangements
- (iii) That the issues around IT connectivity and reliability be addressed as a matter of priority.

21 Voice and Influence of Children & Young People Report

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which set out details of the work undertaken by One Adoption West Yorkshire to ensure that the voice and influence of children and young people was at the heart of the adoption service.

The report provided details about the Adopted Teens Identity Group (AT_iD), a project set up by the Yorkshire & Humber adoption consortium with a vision of offering adopted teenagers the opportunity to express their views over the development of the adoption service and the services they accessed.

Members noted the project was overseen by PAC/UK who employ a child & family project worker to oversee the development of the group which included:

- AT-iD Website - open to anyone, offering useful information & insight into the experiences of adopted teenagers
- Online Chat Forum – A safe online space where adoptees could talk, share, rant, giggle and support each other. Members can also ask questions or seek support from the project workers via the chat forum
- Activity Days – providing an opportunity to make new friends and make new memories. They are held 4 times a year and participants get to have a say in what the group does

- Youth Council – for those who are looking to get more involved and make a difference in adoption, members aged 13+ can join our panel and attend workshops with the aim of using views and experiences to help professionals and policy makers.

Members were informed that in 2014 “After Adoption” brought together groups of young people on its national TalkAdoption programmes along with the AT-ID group in Leeds to get a national picture of the needs and expectations of adopted young people. “The Big Consult” was published in 2016 and is attached at Appendix 1 of the submitted report.

Members were made aware that in 2016 the AT_iD group made a film about adopted young people “Voices of Adopted Teens” The film talks about their experiences of being adopted and is used to raise awareness with prospective adopters; professionals and to share nationally with other Regional Adoption Agencies the views and experience of young people who are adopted.

The film “Voices of Adopted Teens” was viewed by the Committee.

Members welcomed the film commenting that it sent out a powerful message.

A discussion ensued about some of the themes covered in the film: making contact with birth parents, a child/ young person deciding for themselves about if they wanted others to know they are adopted and, as an adopted child, they did not want to be treated differently.

Reference was made to “open adoption” the Head of Service explained that this was where a child lives with adopted parents but occasionally meets with birth parents so the child has regular contact with their birth family. Members were informed this was agreed on an individual basis depending upon the circumstances and needs of each child.

In drawing the discussion to a conclusion the Chair reiterated the comments made earlier that the film did send out a very powerful but positive message.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions.

Members requested if “outcome statistics” for adopted children could be circulated to the Committee and a report be brought back to a future meeting focusing on the outcomes for adopted children, including education.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note the information provided by the AT-ID group.
- (ii) To support the continued work of the agency in encouraging the voice and influence of adopted children and young people.
- (iii) That a report be brought back to a future meeting focusing on the outcomes for children adopted including educational outcomes.

22 Performance Report

The Director of Children’s Services submitted a report which provided the first quarterly performance report of the new regional agency.

The Head of Service reported that the partnership agreement required that One Adoption West Yorkshire would develop a performance management framework and would comply with the key performance indicators set and report upon performance in relation to these, to the Management Board of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), the Adoption Leadership board and any other statutory body as required.

It was reported that work had been undertaken to establish the key performance criteria which would form the basis for practice improvement for the agency and this was discussed at the last meeting.

Members were advised that the first two quarterly reports were likely to be light in detail as trend analysis and data was not yet available for an extended period.

The key performance indicators were set out in Appendix 1 of the submitted report.

Members welcomed the report, noting that as more Adoption Agencies came on stream, more data would become available for analysis and comparison.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note the proposed performance report format and information

(ii) To support the continued development of this work

23 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – That the next meeting be arranged for Friday 12th January 2018 at 1.00pm in the Civic Hall, Leeds.