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Report of Director of Children's Services

Report to West Yorkshire Adoption Joint Committee

Date: 28th June 2017

Subject: Head of Service Report

Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?

Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?

Yes No

If relevant, access to information procedure rule number:

Appendix number:

Summary of main issues

1. One Adoption West Yorkshire formally opened for service on the 1 April 2017. It brings together the councils of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees Wakefield and Leeds to provide adoption services to our region of West Yorkshire. The five councils have now signed and entered into a partnership agreement, which provides for the delegation of Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield's adoption functions to Leeds City Council. One Adoption West Yorkshire is pioneering the way forward for regionalisation of adoption.
2. This report provides a summary from the Head of Service on the developments of the service in the first two months of becoming established

Recommendations

1. The Joint Committee is requested to:
 - 1.1 Endorse and comment upon the progress of the agency and to support the progression of these arrangements.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report sets out the structural and reporting arrangements for the Regional Adoption Agency.

2. Background information

- 2.1.1 Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield adoption functions as specified in the partnership agreement were delegated on the 1st April 2017 to Leeds City Council. One Adoption West Yorkshire formally opened on this date.

3. Main issues

3.1 Senior Leadership Team

One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) opened as Regional Adoption Agency on Monday 3 April 2017. It is led by the senior leadership team of:

Sarah Johal, Head of Service

Mary Brudenell, Service Delivery Manager

Julie Chew, Service Delivery Manager

Mandy Prout, Service Delivery Manager

Aretha Hanson, Business Support Manager

- 3.2 The Head of Service will have overall responsibility for the operations of One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) and she will undertake the role of the agency decision maker for adopters. One Service Delivery Manager will take a strategic lead on family finding, while taking on the line management of staff in the Bradford and Wakefield offices and links with those Local authorities. Another Service Delivery Manager will take a strategic lead on adoption support, with line management for staff in the Leeds office and linking with that Local Authority (LA). The third Service Delivery Manager will take a strategic lead on recruitment and assessment, line manager for staff in the Halifax and Huddersfield offices and linking with Calderdale and Kirklees LA. The Business Support Manager will manage the administrative business support to all of the teams based in the 5 offices. She will have the strategic lead on seeking rationalisation of business processes, where beneficial and practicable.

3.3 Staffing

108 staff were affected from December 2017, 96% of these affected staff transferred on 31 March 2017 to become One Adoption West Yorkshire.

- 3.4 The collaboration between the Leeds HR business partner and his counterparts in the other 4 LA's enabled as smooth a transition as possible. The staff were all paid in April 2017.
- 3.5 The trade unions have been actively involved in the process and they have reported that there haven't been any instances of staff expressing concerns to them during transition.

- 3.6 It is noted that the OAWY teams consist of staff that have a range of terms and conditions which vary between the 5 LA's. It was agreed at a meeting with the Leeds trade unions (as all staff are now employed by Leeds City Council) that they would consult with their new members to engage their views and wishes in relation to the possibility of aligning the terms and conditions going forwards.
- 3.7 All new staff will be recruited on Leeds terms and conditions and greater than 50% of staff are already engaged accordingly (existing Leeds staff and newly appointed promoted posts).
- 3.8 Recruitment to vacant posts continues with ongoing recruitment for adoption advisor, advanced practitioner, social worker and business support positions. The largest gap remains business support and further interviews are planned through June and early July.
- 3.9 Teams in transition
- 3.10 On 3 April 2017, all staff from the erstwhile adoption teams of the 5 LA's continued to work in their existing office with their existing team manager. During April and May 2017, the staff have been meeting with their new manager and in new shadow team meetings in preparation for the new line management and team arrangements to be operational from 5 June 2017.
- 3.11 All staff have been provided with a One Adoption mobile phone, which will assist in enabling them to access the Leeds ICT system, including Mosaic the integrated children's case recording system utilised by OAWY. All staff now have a your.name@oneadoptionwy.leeds.gov.uk e mail address.
- 3.12 There has been active consideration about the best means of delivering a duty function for OAWY, which avoids the duplication of staff being deployed in all 5 offices. The major areas of duty calls are adoption support referrals and prospective adopters. A decision has recently been taken that this will be undertaken from a single site from the 1st week in July.
- 3.13 Key IT training is underway throughout June on the Mosaic case recording system for all staff & induction training for staff regarding the self service, Performance and Learning system (PALS) and finance system is taking place from June through to mid-July.
- 3.14 Adoption Panels
- Adoption panels have been rationalised (from 11 per month to 7) and they will be chaired by two independent adoption panel chairs, Julie Archer and Julia Pearmain. Julia and Julie were successful in a ring fenced recruitment process from the former pool of independent chairs for all of the 5 Local Authorities. 7 adoption panels will sit per month across three of the OAWY bases (Bradford, Huddersfield and Leeds). The panels will make recommendations about proposed matches for all 5 partner LA children, which will be decided upon by the agency decision makers in the 5 LA's. The panels will make recommendations regarding the suitability of prospective adopters to be approved, which will be decided by the OAWY agency decision maker. These arrangements will be brought together in the next few months with one electronic panel process co-ordinated centrally. A panel training day has been arranged for the 13th June.
- 3.15 Establishing the culture
- Further work has been undertaken with the senior leadership team, the management team and with all staff to establish the vision and values of One Adoption West Yorkshire. The mission statement is clear: "To be an outstanding

adoption service achieving outcomes for children without delay; recruit adopters for all children who need adoption with an excellent adoption support service for all affected by adoption.”

- 3.16 The vision is to be a listening service; a learning service and a responsive service. This is underpinned by 3 behaviours: Children are the client; a sense of urgency to avoid unnecessary delay and working with families every step of the way.
- 3.17 Work continues with the staff regarding the importance of relationships as we build our OAWY identity and our teams, working in a culture of high support and high challenge.
- 3.18 Practice focus
The major focus on practice will be to ensure that the voices and messages of the key people in adoption are listened to and acted upon.
- 3.19 There are established reference groups for adopted young people (AT_ID) and adopters (Adopter Voice Forum) across the Yorkshire and Humber region. OAWY aims to maintain its good links with the Yorkshire and Humber wide groups while also aiming to consult with the young people and the adopters of West Yorkshire. A workshop has been set up with young people and work is ongoing with adoptive parents who are involved in various working groups to develop practice.
- 3.20 Support for the birth parents of children who may be adopted or are adopted has, for the most, been provided through contracts with independent adoption support agencies (PAC-UK and After Adoption). Work is ongoing to link with these providers to establish a West Yorkshire wide approach and offer to birth parents, as the scope of the support has differed between the 5 local authorities. Contracts have rolled forward for 2017-18 to ensure continuity in each locality.
- 3.21 It is envisaged however that a common specification for the required services for independent support to adopted adults, adoptive families and birth parents will be developed and used in a refreshed commissioning process with the adoption support agencies. Links with birth parent groups are being made for further work to improve their engagement with our services.
- 3.22 The outcome of the practice improvement fund bids in relation to the centre of excellence, early permanence and the involvement of the Voluntary Adoption Alliance (VAA) in developing services will become known around September.
- 3.23 Recruitment & Marketing, website
One Adoption West Yorkshire is the first regional adoption agency to become operational in the government’s 2015-17 initiative. It will work in close conjunction with the One Adoption North and Humber (planned for Autumn 2017) and One Adoption South Yorkshire (planned for April 2018) to ensure that opportunities for joint activity in marketing is targeted and cost efficient.
- 3.24 The One Adoption website has been launched and marketing activity has been undertaken to raise its web profile. Early indications are that prospective adopters are making contact with OAWY and attendance at the information evenings across the WY area has been reasonable. Further development work is ongoing regarding the website and marketing to meet the needs of the region.

3.25 Two key areas for the agency are the prompt and efficient recruitment of new prospective adopters and ensuring that the family finding teams are responsive in seeking the best matches for the children requiring adoption from the 5 LA's.

3.26 Matching

3.27 The family finding teams have identified that a significant number of children require placements at the outset of the agency and that "should be placed for adoption" (SHOBPA) decisions are likely to increase in the first quarter. Prompt in- agency matches have been identified for panels to consider. There is a strong link with the VAA, which recruit and approve families in Yorkshire and Humber and the North and an agreement has been agreed about how the alliance works with us family finding for children to avoid any delay.

3.28 Links with senior leadership teams in partner Local authorities

The Head of Service has attended the senior leadership meetings of each of the 5 partner local authorities during the past 3 months with the relevant service manager lead for each LA. These valuable meetings enabled a discussion regarding the service specification which delineates the service provided by OAWY and those which will continue to be the responsibility of the 5 LA's. The meeting indicated the range of issues upon which there will be interdependence between the adoption agency and the Local authorities.

In recognition of this interdependence, Sarah Johal has asked each local authority to designate a senior officer who will be the operation lead for adoption, with whom Sarah and the service delivery managers will regularly confer.

3.29 A schedule of "operation management group" meetings has been established at which the 5 LA leads for adoption will meet with OAWY senior leadership team in order to maintain a regular overview of adoption activity, performance and strategic planning to inform the agency's priorities and to provide peer support and challenge across LA's and OAWY. It is the proposal that issues arising from this group will feed into the management board and vice versa.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

4.1.1 There has been ongoing consultation and engagement with affected staff that have transferred in to the agency as well as formal consultation with the trade unions. This is ongoing. Consultation with service users is ongoing to inform the development of the service design and delivery of the agency.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

4.2.1 One Adoption West Yorkshire as a regional adoption agency will aim to ensure that there is an equal service provision which addresses the varied and diverse needs of the children and adoptive families of the West Yorkshire region.

4.3 Resources and value for money

- 4.3.1 A financial dashboard will be provided each quarter for the Joint Committee that is in development. It is clear that there are a significant number of children booked into adoption panels for matches across the region in the next few months that ensures that children's plans are being progressed that reduces the cost of children remaining in foster care. The bringing together of the adoption panels has also made some savings reducing from 11 adoption panels to 7. The service also has a number of children being matched with families from voluntary adoption agencies utilising the budgetary provision in place to progress permanence for the children waiting. There is a robust system in place to monitor this aspect of the budget and this will be regularly monitored.
- 4.3.2 There are a number of vacancies in the service at the moment and a number of staff on maternity leave. The agency is seeking temporary cover to assist with family finding and adoption support work across the region, working within the budgetary provision for the agency.

4.4 Legal implications and access to information

- 4.4.1 The Partnership Agreement has been signed by all Directors of Children's Services for Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield. This agreement forms the contractual basis upon which the agency will function. It has key schedules which cover:
- Service specification
 - Function of the Joint Committee
 - Information Sharing protocol
 - Legal context
 - Management Board governance arrangements
 - Financial protocol
 - Assets
- 4.4.2 Ofsted were notified of the changes to the arrangements in West Yorkshire advising them of the arrangements for Registered Manager status and Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) arrangements.
- 4.4.3 A statement of purpose has been drafted (Appendix 1) and is published on the website.

4.5 Risk management

- 4.5.1 The new regional adoption agency aims to reduce the risk of children who require adoption waiting for a prolonged period in West Yorkshire.

5. Recommendations

The Joint Committee is requested to:

- 5.1 Endorse and comment upon the progress of the agency and to support the progression of these arrangements.

6. Background documents¹

6.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.