



Report author: Sarah Johal

Tel: 0113 2783623

Report of Director of Children's Services

Report to West Yorkshire Adoption Joint Committee

Date: 12th January 2018

Subject: Head of Service Report

Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, access to information procedure rule number:		
Appendix number:		

Summary of main issues

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 and One Adoption West Yorkshire formally opened.
2. This report provides a summary from the Head of Service on the developments of the service since the last report to the committee in October 2017.

Recommendations

1. The Joint Committee is requested to:
 - a) Note the progress of the agency; and
 - b) support the progression of these arrangements.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report sets out the developments within One Adoption West Yorkshire since the last report in October 2017.

2. Background information

- 2.1 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

Staffing

- 3.1 The last of the recruitment activity for business support and social workers has now been completed to ensure the structure is fully established, with staff due to start in January. In addition, a number of temporary staff have been recruited to cover the maternity leave of existing staff in the field of family finding and adoption support.
- 3.2 Meetings have taken place with Trade Unions and staff regarding those staff wishing to move over to Leeds terms and conditions and with regard to market supplements. The majority of staff have opted to move over to Leeds with implementation taking place on the 1st December. Staff moving over will become eligible for an essential car user allowance after 6 months of employment, depending upon mileage. Given the current mileage use the majority of social workers will be eligible for this allowance.

IT

- 3.3 The IT issues are improving and the move to all staff having a Leeds laptops was completed at the end of November. The difficulties for staff working across offices have also generally improved although access to the other local authority systems remains an issue and work is in progress regarding accessing these via a portal from the Leeds laptops.
- 3.4 Connectivity has also improved across the region and the long term solution to this, via VPN access, is being piloted in Huddersfield with a view to rolling out across the other offices in the New Year. This will enable printers to be connected to the Leeds laptops from the end of January.
- 3.5 The migration of data onto Mosaic is still work in progress as this is a time consuming and manual task. The target to move all records for adopters in assessment prior to adoption order has largely been achieved with a small number of cases requiring documents uploading on to the system before closing down the local authority file.

- 3.6 Family finding work is also now on Mosaic. Adoption support work will be fully migrated by the end of January with business support assistance required in Bradford and Wakefield staff to move the work over.
- 3.7 Once the work is migrated the requirement for access to the local authority systems will be read only and this will ease the burden for staff needing to use more than one system for recording their work.

Practice

Children planning & Family Finding

- 3.8 There has been meetings with legal advisors across the region regarding the decision making process for children who require a plan for adoption (known as Shopba). This process was discussed and agreement was reached about templates and documents to be submitted with placement order applications and court bundles.
- 3.9 One adoption has been looking with local authorities to support the Shopba process and Huddersfield, Bradford and Leeds have now aligned their systems with legal advisors present and support from business support in arranging and the minute taking of these meetings. Work is in progress with Wakefield and Calderdale on finalising how these meetings will be supported moving forward.
- 3.10 Discussions with medical advisors and commissioners are ongoing regarding improving the quality of the written information provided, ensuring quality standards are in place for updating medicals and providing advice to adopters.
- 3.11 The Family Finding service have been working on developing more creative and streamlined processes for finding families for the children in West Yorkshire with a confirmed adoption plan. This has included the further development of the Regional Placement Group to look at children and families in the assessment process at an earlier stage.
- 3.12 Progress has been made on streamlining links with Adoption Match (previously the Adoption Register) and Linkmaker and in developing stronger links with the local Voluntary Adoption Agencies and now have a regional view of all the children and families across our region and in the New Year across the wider Yorkshire & Humber region.
- 3.13 In November 2017 we held our first Children's Profiling Event, inviting adoptive families from across the Yorkshire and Humber and the North West to consider a selection of 25 children awaiting adoption who were featured with high quality photos, DVDs and personalised displays. Interest has been shown in a number of the children featured here which we are actively following up. The intention is to hold a profiling event every quarter and invite approved adopters and those in stage 2 of the adoption process to see the children who have a plan for adoption with a view to making links for potential matches.

- 3.14 A focus for the family finding teams over this period has been the revision of the key forms that support the matching and placement process (Adoption Placement Report, Adoption Placement Plan and Adoption Support Plan) taking all the aspects of best practice to ensure a consistent high standard across the regional adoption agency. These are in the process of being discussed with local authority leads and staff across the region, with an aim to implement in January. Joint workshops and training will be arranged between One Adoption and LA staff in the new year to look at providing guidance for staff using the new templates.
- 3.15 A key issue that is the mismatch locally, regionally and nationally between the numbers of children in the adoption process and the declining number of adopters available. This will be discussed more in the performance report as we start to address sufficiency issues and the potential impact upon the inter agency budget for 2018-19.

Adoption Support

- 3.16 The adoption support teams are almost fully staffed and waiting times for assessments have reduced. However, there is still a waiting list for adoption support assessments between 6-8 weeks across the region. We have a prioritisation system in place and are trialling a triage system offering an initial visit to see if this assists in addressing concerns at an early stage and signposting where appropriate. The main assessment work that is waiting is where adoptive families are seeking therapeutic support via the adoption support fund. The expectations of adopters in accessing therapeutic support are high and there is further work for us to do across the region in ensuring that the adoption support offer across west Yorkshire is known to families. The development of a peer support service is moving forward with the adopter voice co-ordinators and Cornerstone to pilot this in house over the next year.
- 3.17 The Adoption support teams with business support held a development day on 11th October undertaking work on the information exchange (letterbox) service and adoption support needs assessments. Work has started on regionalising the letterbox service so that we provide a consistent approach to all families and ensuring that this work can be covered from different bases.
- 3.18 The Non Violence Resistance and Theraplay groups have been running and take up from families for both of these has been good with positive feedback from adoptive parents
- 3.19 A providers event took place in December regarding the re-commissioning of independent adoption support services for birth parents, adoptive families and adopted adults, including adding in the AT_ID group into the specification and the adopter voice forum. There is ongoing discussions with colleagues across the wider Yorkshire and Humber region about which local authorities will be part of this wider commissioned service.

Adoption Support Fund

- 3.20 This is a separate agenda item and will be addressed in detail.

Centre of Excellence

- 3.21 The Centre of Excellence grant has now been agreed and we have recruited staff to the project team. These include two sector specialists. Shelagh Ethell (adoption manager) and Julie Pocklington (education specialist) plus a business support officer- Daniel Borlase. They will come into post in January and will work with Howard Lovelady and Eva Booth who are working across the adoption support fund and Centre of Excellence across the region.
- 3.22 We have identified a psychologist from Leeds Community Health Trust and discussions are underway with Leeds Community Health to release the worker and in addition to provide a Band 4 trainee psychologist.

Recruitment & Assessment

- 3.23 There is a separate item for the committee on this topic with a strategy document and a video.

Operational leads group

- 3.24 The group has met three times and discussions have centred around the arrangements regarding Shopba decisions, Family Finding templates, discussions about the Adoption Support Fund & Adoption allowances; medical Advisors, adoption panels and access to records and archiving arrangements. These are helpful meetings to discuss streamlining arrangements around practice/ legal/court issues that crop up that.
- 3.25 Any concerns are flagged up in between meetings if they need addressing with operational leads in each local authority (LA) and escalated to more senior managers if matters are not resolved. The next meeting will focus upon performance issues and a more in depth look at the stages of the adoption process in each LA to see what can be shared and learnt about best practice at each stage of the journey.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 There has been ongoing consultation and engagement with staff who have transferred in to the agency as well as formal consultation with the trade unions. 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 There are no implications for this report. An Equality Impact assessment is underway and will be completed by March 2018 to inform any gaps and future improvement plans.

4.3 Resources and value for money

4.3.1 There are no budget pressures at the present time. (further to add here about next years budget)

4.4 Legal implications and access to information

4.4.1 There are no implications for this report.

4.5 Risk management

4.5.1 There are no implications for this report.

5. Recommendations

5.1 The Joint Committee is requested to:
a) Note the progress of the agency; and
b) Support the progression of these arrangements.

Background documents¹

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.