

WEST YORKSHIRE ADOPTION JOINT COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 12TH JANUARY, 2018

Present: Councillor L Mulherin (Leeds) – Chair
and Councillor O Rowley (City of Wakefield MDC)

Councillor H Hayden (LCC)

In Attendance: S Johal (LCC), H Lovelady (LCC), M Prout (LCC),
R Stevenson (LCC), J Jenkins (Calderdale MBC) and J Grieve (LCC)

24 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

25 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.

26 LATE ITEMS

There were no late items

27 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

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

28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillor E Hill (Kirklees MBC), Councillor M Swift (Calderdale MBC) and Councillor V Slater (City of Bradford MBC)

29 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 4th October 2017 were agreed as a true and correct record.

30 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Head of Services Report (Minute No.20 referred) – Reference was made to the Adoption Support Fund and the different criteria regarding the levels of financial support in adoption across different local authority areas.

In responding the Head of Service reported that an item dealing with this issue appeared elsewhere on the agenda

31 HEAD OF SERVICE REPORT

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

- Staffing
- Relocation of staff
- Information Management and Technology
- Children Planning & Family Finding
- Adoption Support
- Adoption Support Fund
- Centre of Excellence
- Recruitment & Assessment
- Operational Leads Group

It was noted that the last of the recruitment activity for business support and social workers had now been completed. The structure was now fully established, with staff due to start in January.

Members were informed that meetings had taken place with Trade Unions and staff regarding those staff wishing to move over to Leeds terms and conditions (market supplements). The majority of staff had opted to move over to Leeds with implementation taking place on the 1st December 2017.

It was reported that IT issues were 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 had also generally improved although access to the other local authority systems remained an issue and work was in progress to address this.

Members were informed that the Family Finding service were developing more creative and streamlined processes for finding families for the children in West Yorkshire with a confirmed adoption plan. This had included the further development of the Regional Placement Group to look at children and families in the assessment process at an earlier stage.

It was reported that the adoption support teams were almost fully staffed and waiting times for assessments had reduced. However, there was still a waiting list for adoption support assessments between 6-8 weeks across the region

On the issue of the Adoption Support Fund the Head of Service reported that the matter was the subject of a separate report elsewhere on the agenda

It was noted that the Centre of Excellence grant had now been agreed and recruitment of the project team had been completed (An adoption manager and an education specialist plus a business support officer). They would be in post in January and would work with officers who are working across the adoption support fund and Centre of Excellence across the region.

Recruitment & Assessment was the subject of a separate report elsewhere on the agenda

Referring to the operational lead group Members noted the group had met on three occasions with discussions 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.

In summing up the Chair said that the transition continued to progress.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note and welcome the progress of the agency
- (ii) To support the further progression of these arrangements

32 Regionalisation of the Adoption Support Fund Pilot Report

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which set out details for piloting the regionalisation of the Adoption Support Fund Pilot.

Appended to the report was a copy of a letter from Robert Goodwill MP, Minister of State for Children and Families, which provided details about the Adoption Support Fund (Appendix A referred)

The Head of Service presented the report and explained that the main aims through piloting the regionalisation of the ASF were to improve adoption support across the region by:

- Regional commissioning of the ASF
- Engaging users in the development and testing of regionalised support services
- Improving the speed and quality of adoption support assessments and

- Developing the adoption support market across the regional agency
- Improving links with other services such as health, education and Centres of Excellence
- To test out how the ASF could be managed in a regionalised structure including how human and financial resources for adoption support would be deployed
- To inform future national policy and delivery of ASF and share emerging practice with other regional adoption agencies.

Members were informed that the regionalisation of the Adoption Support Fund was being piloted in three areas: West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester & Cheshire and Summerset & the South West. The pilots would run from September to March 2018 but it was understood that that a six month extension was being sought.

It was reported that one of the main tasks would be to draw up a protocol which would include a criteria to receive grant, ensuring that requests for support assessment were dealt with in a timely manner.

In offering comment the Chair suggested that it was important that the pilot be extended.

RESOLVED –

- (i) That details of the Adoption Support Fund Pilot be noted
- (ii) To support the continued development of this work

33 Practice Focus- Recruitment and Assessment Report

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which set out details of the recruitment and assessment strategy and action plan for One Adoption West Yorkshire.

Addressing the report the Head of Service reported that it was a requirement of the partnership agreement that One Adoption West Yorkshire would be responsible for the recruitment and assessment of adopters.

Mandy Prout, Service Delivery Manager, Children & Families said that One Adoption West Yorkshire (the agency) would recruit, assess and prepare sufficient numbers of adoptive families who could go on to meet the varying needs and backgrounds of the children across West Yorkshire who had a plan for adoption. The Service would provide a responsive, friendly, and

supportive service to prospective adoptive families that was underpinned by a clearly defined, open and fair process.

Members were informed that a series of five themed videos had been produced to assist in the recruitment process and provide more in depth information to adoptive families.

The Committee went on to view one of the videos "Finding Families for Older Children".

In the discussion that followed Members became more aware of the challenges potential adoptive families may encounter when seeking to adopt older children. It was accepted that teenagers were more likely to try to contact their birth parents and this was made easier by the use of social media. Unless such issues had been discussed previously by the child and adoptive parents it may become problematic later on.

The Head of Service suggested that there was a need to encourage the adoption of older children and that potential adopters need to be clear about having as much information as possible about the impact of early trauma and videos gave good information from people who had themselves adopted.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note the strategy and action plan
- (ii) To support the continued development of this work
- (iii) That further information can be obtained from <https://www.oneadoption.co.uk/west-yorkshire/about-one-adoption-west-yorkshire>

34 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which set out the second quarterly performance report of the new regional agency.

Addressing the report the Head of Service 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 had been built upon since the first quarter report.

Members were informed that Adoption Support was one area that required more detailed consideration. It was reported that there were a number of discussions nationally about the data requirements that would assist in measuring performance and the adopter voice forum was working closely with

officers from One Adoption in developing this. This work had been delayed at a national level and work was ongoing. One Adoption were set to pilot a new dataset from July 2018 to take this forward.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note the proposed performance report format and information
- (ii) To support the continued development of this work

35 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED – That the next meeting be arranged for mid July 2018, exact date and time to be confirmed at a later date.