

# WEST YORKSHIRE ADOPTION JOINT COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2021

**Present:** Councillor F Venner (Leeds) – Chair

Councillors: C Thirkill (City of Bradford MDC) and M Isherwood (City of Wakefield MDC)

**In Attendance:** S Johal (ODWY), M Rawlings (ODWY) and J Grieve (LCC)

## 1 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

## 2 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.

## 3 LATE ITEMS

There were no late items of business identified.

## 4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests made at the meeting.

## 5 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Wilkinson (Calderdale MBC) and V Kendrick (Kirklees MBC)

## 6 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 were submitted for comment/ approval.

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 were accepted as a true and correct record.

## 7 Matters Arising from the Minutes

There were no issues raised under Matters Arising.

## 8 Annual Report of One Adoption West Yorkshire & Statement of Purpose

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which presented the Annual Report of the One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) and provided an overview of adoption service activity from April 2020 to March 2021. (Appendix A referred). The report also provided an updated statement of purpose for One Adoption West Yorkshire, which was required as part of the national minimum standards to provide those services.

Addressing the report, the Head of Service spoke of the developments within One Adoption West Yorkshire from April 2020 to March 2021 which included:

- COVID-19 - OAWY response
- Use of Resources
- Partnership Working
- Performance Management
- Practice, Quality of Provision and Management Oversight
- Continuous Professional and Service Development

Members were informed the Covid-19 pandemic had brought many challenges for the service and the staff had worked tirelessly to ensure that families had been supported and plans for children moved on. Online working had worked well, and many positive changes had been made to improve service delivery. The Head of Service said the challenge was now to start to rebuild relationships with staff and encourage them to return to the office.

Referring to the Use of Resources (Staffing & HR) the Head of Service said the recruitment of health staff to the Multi-Disciplinary Team continued during the first quarter of this year with a number of posts been filled. Two Members of the Team had chosen to retire/ leave, recruitment to the two post was ongoing.

On the issue of child placement, the Head of Service informed Members that during the last period a total of 184 children had been placed. It was anticipated numbers would be lower due to covid, but this was not the case, homeworking assisting in the acceleration of some processes. Members were also informed that covid had also impacted on the Court Service with no face-to-face meetings taking place, resulting in a "slow down" of Placement Orders.

Referring to online working Members asked how families had adapted.

In responding the Head of Services said that the service had worked with approximately 800 adopted families. Many families had adapted well, children had spent time away from school and this had resulted in less pressure on school relationships and less problems in general. Other families had experienced a number of challenges and a range of support measures had been put in place to assist parents. Members were informed that face to face contact was important in building relationships, but some work could be carried out online: webinars and virtual training to support the assessment process.

The Head of Service said overall the service had adapted well to meeting everyone's needs.

Responding to a question on the work of Adoption Panels, Members were informed that Adoption Panels had moved to online working and had increased in numbers to eight panels per month. The Head of Service said it was the view of all involved: Members of the Adoption Panel and the Adoptive Parents that the process was working well.

Members asked if medical assessments had been carried out in a timely manner.

The Head of Service said that medical assessors had continued to support the adoption process but accepted there had been some delays due to the impact of Covid. It was highlighted there had been particular issues in Wakefield due to sickness absence by an individual GP.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions.

#### **RESOLVED –**

- (i) To receive the annual report of One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY), detailed in appendix A of the submitted report, as required by the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2014, pursuant to the Care Standards Act 2000.
- (ii) To note the assurance provided by the Director of Children's Services that the agency was effective and was achieving good outcomes for children and/or services users
- (iii) To agree the updated statement of purpose for One Adoption West Yorkshire

## **9 Head of Service Report**

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report and provided a summary of the developments within the service since the Annual Report was completed in May 2021: The developments included:

- Staffing & HR
- Adoption Panels
- Budget
- Partnership Working
- Performance Monitoring
- Practice, Quality of Provision and Management Oversight
- Family Finding
- Special Guardianship
- Staff Development and Service Improvements

Commenting on Staffing & HR the Head of Service said staffing was largely stable with a number of new staff joining the team in the past year.

Members were informed that Sarah Johal, the Head of Service was moving onto a new role in September on a secondment basis for an initial period of one year. Michelle Rawlings had been appointed to cover this position from the 16<sup>th</sup> September. It was also reported that following discussion at the last management board, OAWY had recruited to the permanent and temporary family finding positions with a view to joining the service in September.

Members enquired how vacant posts would be managed.

It was reported that all vacant posts had now been covered

Referring to the budget position, Members were informed that the budget at the end of period 4 was currently projecting a pressure of £75K. Members noted this was due to a reduced income from the Adoption Support Fund and Interagency Income.

The Head of Service said that an action plan was in place with savings identified from other budget lines.

Members sought further details of the Adoption Support Service.

The Head of Service said that requests for adoption support remained high, with all 4 of the teams having a waiting list (of varying sizes) for families waiting for an allocated social work service

In offering comment the Chair said it was important that families should not have to wait too long before receiving support.

Members were informed that families were being sign posted to early intervention strategies/ processes to keep the family engaged with officers who could provide support.

The Chair suggested that any lessons learnt as a result of the pandemic would be useful.

#### **RESOLVED -**

- (i) To note the progress of the agency
- (ii) To Support the progression of the arrangements, as set out in the submitted report.

## **10 Any Other Business**

The Chair reported that this would be Sarah Johal's last meeting as the Head of Service. Sarah was moving onto a new role in September on a secondment

basis for an initial period of one year shaping new legislation on adoption at a national level.

Members joined the Chair in expressing their thanks best wishes to Sarah in her new role.

## **11 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

**RESOLVED** - To note that the next meeting will take place in January 2022, exact date and time to be confirmed at a later date.