

WEST YORKSHIRE ADOPTION JOINT COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 28TH JULY, 2020

Present: Councillor F Venner (Leeds) – Chair
Councillors: A Wilkinson (Calderdale MBC) and C Thirkill (City of Bradford MDC)

In Attendance: S Johal (ODWY), J Jenkins (Calderdale MBC) 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

That, in accordance with Regulation 4 of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following parts of the agenda designated as exempt on the grounds that it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information so designated as follows:-
“The Head of Service Report” – Appendix No.3 of the submitted report were deemed exempt from publication in accordance with Access to Information Rule 10.4 (3) as it included Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). In those circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information. (Minute No. 9 referred)

3 LATE ITEMS

There were no late items of business identified.

4 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

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

5 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors; R Forster (City of Wakefield MBC) V Kendrick (Kirklees MBC) and A Farley (City of Bradford MDC)

Councillor C Thirkill was attending in place of Councillor A Farley

6 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14th February 2020 were agreed as a true and correct record.

7 Matters Arising

Referring to Minute No. 20 - Head of Service Report - It was reported that a report on Adoption Allowances (financial support for adopters and special guardians) was considered by the Executive Board in Calderdale, thereby aligning with the proposed Regional Framework.

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

The Director of Children's and Families submitted a report which presented the Annual Report of the One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) as required by the National Minimum Standards 2011 (Appendix A referred)

The report requested the Joint Committee to note the revised statement of purpose for OAWY (as referred to Appendix B). The Statement of Purpose is required as part of the national minimum standard in order to be able to provide those services.

Addressing the report the Head of Service spoke of the developments within One Adoption West Yorkshire from April 2019 to March 2020 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 noted the entire Adoption Team had been working from home since the 18th of March 2020, adapting to ensure that families were supported and children's plans progressed as far as possible. Staff had also been supported with a range of measures with flexible working been encouraged.

Members were informed enquiries continued to be received from people interested in adopting. New online information had been created and complemented with regular live Facebook question and answer sessions, replacing other face to face information events. Initial home visits and assessment sessions were also taking place virtually and self-declaration medical assessments had been implemented for adopters in stage one of the process which would allow many applicants to proceed into the next stage of the process. Virtual Adoption Panels had also been introduced with around 7 – 9 panels taking place each month

With reference to Partnership Working, it was understood that the Centre of Excellence Project Team came to an end at the end of March 2020. However,

the local authorities and the clinical commissioning groups within health had agreed to fund an initial 3 year project to implement a multi- disciplinary team within OAWY working across the region.

In terms of Performance Management; 113 adoptive households were approved during the year, within the 113 households, 219 individuals were approved throughout 2019-20. Of these, 21 (10%) were from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds (last year it was 11%).

It was reported there were 162 children with a plan for adoption and had a placement order, from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities not currently placed and requiring adopters. 91 children out of the 162 are 0 - 2 years, 42 were between 2 and 4 years and 29 children are 5 years of age or older.

In offering comment Members welcomed the increase in adopter enquiries, noting in one month alone 97 enquiries had been received, noting that Adopters from the Black African, Black Caribbean and Eastern European Communities continued to be an ongoing challenge.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To receive the annual report of One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY), as 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 and Families that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or services users.
- (iii) That the updated statement of purpose for OAWY be agreed

9 Head of Service Report

The Director of Children’s Services submitted a report and provided a summary of the developments within One Adoption West Yorkshire since the annual report was completed in April 2020, the developments included:

- Staffing & HR
- Accommodation
- Budget
- Partnership Working
- Financial Support in Adoption
- Performance Monitoring
- Practice, Quality of Provision and Management Oversight

Referring to Covid 19, the Chair queried if any adoption opportunities were being missed for children and young people in terms of decisions that are not been made due to the coronavirus.

In responding the Head of Service referred to the governments amendments to secondary legislation (Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020) which allows flexibilities within the regulations for a number of different situations. For example, one of these is for agencies to consider whether to refer cases to the adoption panel, or proceed to make a decision under regulation 19 without such a referral.

Members were informed the Adoption Panels were being held virtually and to ensure the continuation of approvals of adopters and matches of children, the Management Board had agreed that Agency Decisions could be made outside of the adoption panel process in the following circumstances, only where panel capacity would cause delay for the child or in approving the adopter where children are identified to be matched with them:

- Approval of experienced adopters
- Approval and Match of foster carer adopters
- Approval and Match of sibling adopters
- Approval of adopters who can consider early permanence placements and a child had been identified as a match.

Members noted that the agency would continue to ensure planning for children and adopters was appropriately scrutinised, each local authority having nominated officers responsible for the use of the flexibility (Head of Service level or above). The agency also had a central collation of the circumstances in which the flexibilities that are being used across the 5 local authorities to ensure appropriate oversight by the management board.

Referring to; Practice, Quality of Provision and Management Oversight, the Head of Service said the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement presents some very serious questions regarding our regional adoption service but it also presents an opportunity to address the issues raised.

Members were informed that discussions would be taken forward with staff, our service users and partners to set a reviewed vision of inclusion, diversity and equality for the future. These discussions would feed into a revised equality impact assessment and this would help form a clear action plan about the areas of focus for the next iteration of the 3 year plan.

At this point in the meeting the Committee went into closed session to discuss the Agency's Marketing Strategy.

RESOLVED -

- (i) To note the progress of the agency
- (ii) To Support the progression of these arrangements.

10 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – To note that the next meeting will take place in January 2021, exact date and time to be confirmed at a later date.