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Report of Director of Children and Families

Report to West Yorkshire Adoption Joint Committee

Date: 18th December 2018

Subject: Head of Service Report

Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	X No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number: 2	X Yes

Summary of main issues

1. This report provides a summary from the Head of Service on the developments of the service since the last report to the committee in July 2018.

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 July 2018.

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

<u>**Use of Resources**</u>

3.1 Staffing & HR

3.2 The staff group remains largely stable with a small number of staff leaving to take up other career opportunities or retiring in the last 6 months so there has been ongoing recruitment to these positions. There remains a very small number of staff who are on long term sick leave and we are working closely with the managing attendance team and occupational health to address these issues. All team managers have received training regarding managing attendance procedures and all are now clear on the arrangements and procedures in place to support staff with their return to work.

3.3 A new lead officer for marketing and communications has been seconded for 18 months from the Corporate Communications team in Leeds. One Adoption West Yorkshire is the lead agency regarding the regional marketing strategy and Emma is also working with the leadership team to improve communications internally in One Adoption West Yorkshire and with our approved adopters.

3.4 Mary Brudenell, service manager left the service in November, having emigrated to New Zealand. This was a positive move for Mary but a loss for the service. However, we have appointed a new service manager, Michelle Rawlings to replace Mary. There has been a change in lead responsibilities and Mandy Prout is leading on family finding and Michelle is taking a lead on recruitment and assessment work.

3.5 Julia Pearmain, one of the independent adoption panel chairs, has reduced the number of panels she is able to chair and we have therefore recruited a new Panel Chair to provide more flexibility in covering the panels. Andy Stott is an experienced manager with local authorities in the North West and more latterly as the operational manager for Barnardo's across Yorkshire and Humber.

3.6 Accommodation

3.7 Work is progressing on moving from 5 office bases to 3 with touch down space in two of the offices as previously discussed. This has been slower than anticipated

due to local priorities in each LA and has been dependent upon other staff groups moving to create space for One Adoption staff. The move will enable three teams across recruitment and assessment, family finding and adoption support to be co-located with one service manager. It is anticipated that the move will now take place in the New Year.

3.8   Each of the local authorities will retain a key service manager and team manager who will link in with the local authority and in family finding the role of the Advanced Practitioner is key in tracking and providing advice to the agency regarding children's planning as well as looking at practice improvement with local authorities. There will also be some key family finding staff that will maintain established links and build new relationships with teams. However, across the region family finders and adoption support workers will be deployed flexibly, collapsing boundaries where appropriate and required. OAWY has increased the management capacity from within existing resources to create an additional teams in Recruitment and Assessment, Family Finding and Adoption Support. These teams will be based out of the Leeds office to reduce travel time, being closer to Wakefield than the Bradford office in the original proposals and also reflecting the increased needs across this part of the region.

3.9   Information Technology

3.10   The IT project team is continuing to work with the teams on developing business processes and integrating forms into the mosaic workflow as well as developing improved reporting from the system. The new adoption support workflow is being developed and is due to be finalised before the end of the year. This should simplify the workflow as well as improve the reporting ability. A monthly reporting meeting is now in place to look at prioritising the development of reports for use within the service.

3.11   The work regarding accessing the local authority systems from a portal on the Leeds laptop remains outstanding and was due to be completed by the end of September. A project manager remains in position to ensure that this work is driven forward and there has been a number of technical issues that have prevented this from being delivered in Bradford and Calderdale. These issues have been escalated within the local authorities in order for this work to be prioritised. Kirklees have implemented a new case recording system and we are currently training the staff who need access to this system as well as exploring with them the quarterly returns. Portal technology will be explored once the implementation has been completed.

3.12   Budget

3.13   The Management Board held a separate budget meeting on 12th September 2018 looking into the detail of the work across the agency and the impact of inter-agency fees. The summary position on the budget, provided for the Chief Executives

meeting across West Yorkshire details the impact for 2018/19 budget and 2020/21 budget (**Appendix 1**).

3.14 Duty System

3.15 Following the rollout of Enterprise Voice technology a revised Duty system came into effect on 2nd July 2018. This essentially means that duty is now rotated between the 3 main office bases in Bradford, Huddersfield and Leeds on a weekly basis. This has reduced the time staff spend travelling to Kernel House and there has been no adverse impact upon the ability to take calls and respond effectively. In fact, it has had a positive effect with staff feeling more positive about this approach with a growing feeling of connectivity across the bases.

3.16 Partnership working

3.17 Operational leads group

3.18 The Operational Leads group meets every three months and provides a good opportunity to discuss practice issues. Child Permanence Report training & sibling assessment training has been commissioned across the region with take up from some authorities. The legal planning & adoption panel training plus contact and adoption training is in the process of being commissioned.

3.19 A protocol regarding foster care adoptions has been agreed between One Adoption West Yorkshire and across the operational leads group that will improve the timeliness of progressing these.

3.20 A working group is being established to look at the interface between One Adoption West Yorkshire and the front door services across the region and to look at best practice for children and families, developing a clear protocol regarding the involvement of the respective services.

3.21 Centre of Excellence Project

3.22 This will be addressed as a separate item.

3.23 Meetings with medical advisors

3.24 The medical advisors across the region meet with One Adoption West Yorkshire staff twice a year. A medical advisor protocol is in the process of being agreed and this is particularly relevant where there are differing views about medical opinions. There have been ongoing issues within two local authorities regarding medical advisor capacity and the time to undertake medicals regarding children's health needs in a timely manner. This has led to some delays for children in progressing care plans and the matters have been discussed within each local authority with commissioners in health to seek improvements in this regard.

3.25   *Virtual school heads (VSH)*

3.26   The management board agreed to the proposal regarding a service level agreement between One Adoption West Yorkshire and the five virtual school heads (VSH) to assist in implementing the new duty placed on VSH in each locality. A small amount of the grant was top sliced and pooled to enable an education worker within One Adoption West Yorkshire to work with VSH to help implement the new duty. A central telephone helpline is now in place and specific pieces of work have been agreed. The funding will enable the education worker to undertake an agreed programme of work with the VSH's, beyond the timescales for the centre of excellence project. This is pioneering work and is seen as an example of good practice by the Department of Education.

3.27   *Special Guardianship*

3.28   In July the management board agreed to another initiative, overseen by One Adoption West Yorkshire, working in partnership with grandparents plus and the five local authorities to provide support to special guardians in the region. This is a project developing a model that has been successful in the north east working with kinship carers providing a strong focus on peer support as a sustainable and effective way to support kinship carers. Two project workers have been recruited and came into post on 1st October 2018 and work has been progressing with the team managers in the fostering services to ensure that all are aware of the service, referral process and to look at identifying appropriate groups/ families to work with. Quarterly reports will be provided and taken to the operational leads group for oversight. **Appendix 2** provides a summary of the work.

3.29   Performance Management

3.30   This is addressed as a separate item.

3.31   Practice, quality of provision and management oversight

3.32   In October this year One Adoption West Yorkshire was awarded a national award for Excellence in adoption practice. This was the first time a regional adoption agency has won a national award and this has aided with raising the profile of the agency, resulting in more interest from prospective adopters. One Adoption West Yorkshire has also been shortlisted for the 2018 Local Government Chronicles Award and are through to the second round. This award is for working across public partnerships and is seen as a good example of regional working. One of the adoptive families also won the Adopter Champion of the year. They adopted four children and assist in the training of early permanence adopters.

3.33 Recruitment and Assessment

3.34 The adopter training offer is continuously developing, with the first two sessions led by birth parents for adopters, focussing on openness in adoption and contact issues. Adopters talk very positively about these sessions at adoption panel, and the panel members have been very impressed by this feedback. In addition the birth parents have stated that they have felt personal benefit and reward from taking part in this training, with one birth parent who was previously active in a campaign group against "forced adoption" stating that she no longer feels the need to be involved in this group as being involved in training adoptive parents has helped her to "move on".

3.35 Early permanence practice in the region continues to grow with the adopter training being run by the advanced practitioners with positive feedback and attracting interest from outside agencies. The professionals training which is run jointly with Barnardo's is going well with attendance from all Local Authority partners.

3.36 Emma Whittell has joined us from Communications and Marketing to grow our presence on social media and to promote the brand in the press, although, adopter recruitment remains a challenge. The data matrix developed helps us closely monitor our sufficiency and conversion rates so that we can be clear where we need to focus our attention month by month. This is directly linked to the children who need adoptive families so that we can be sure we are focussing our recruitment on the right types/groups of adoptive families.

3.37 The piloting of the virtual reality training is underway with careful training and preparation being undertaken with staff with a view to start using this with adopters from January 2019 onwards.

3.38 Adoption Support

3.39 There continues to be a waiting list for families accessing support and this is extremely difficult for the service in terms of managing this. The waiting list stands around 70 and this was discussed at length at the last management board budget meeting.

3.40 Peer mentoring is going from strength to strength and there are now 26 mentors who are up and running, and have a good flow of referral's coming in. We have just trained our second group of mentors and are still receiving interest from experienced adopters who wish to join our Peer Mentoring ranks.

3.41 The new Adoption Support Fund portal on the Government website came into force at the beginning of July. This is much more user-friendly and this plus our improved business support processes which we have put in place around making an application has meant that we have had a higher number of successful applications for therapeutic support for families.

3.42   We have run a number of well attended and successful activity based events over summer in Huddersfield, Castleford and Brighouse. These involved a large number of children and families attending with One Adoption staff attending in support.

3.43   A newsletter went out to all adoptive families across the region in June. There is a timetable and editorial working group now in place to ensure these go out to families four times a year.

3.44   One of the stay and play groups has been relaunched following consultation with parents. A successful Foundations for Attachment programme was undertaken with 20 families having accessed this since the start of the year.

3.45   One of the teams has begun working on a consultation model to offer adoptive families who are currently waiting for a service with assistance from the centre of excellence staff. This is due to start in November.

3.46   Family Finding

3.47   The Family Finding teams have continued with the regional linking meeting to look at children and families in the assessment process and having established strong links with Adoption Match (National Adoption Register) we have a good regional view of children and families in the system. However, the national register is being suspended from April 2019 and therefore discussions are now underway with another provider, Linkmaker to look at how we can develop this work to provide a collective matching approach to maximise the resources available and reduce the time taken for family finding in making links.

3.48   The children's profiling events continue to take place and the last event was in October, inviting adoptive families from across the region and beyond to consider a selection children awaiting adoption who were featured with high quality photos, DVDs and personalised displays.

3.49   23 families attended and we featured 37 profiles totalling 48 children, resulting in 26 Expressions of Interest from 16 families regarding 12 profiles (17 children in total).

3.50   A key issue is the mismatch locally, regionally and nationally between the numbers of children in the adoption process and the number of adopters available. We are trialling a bespoke family finding approach for some children who have very complex needs with a couple of children and are working with those local authorities as a higher level of publicity and advertising is required to find specific families for these children.

3.51   Case File Audits

3.52   There has been ongoing audit activity across the agency looking at children waiting for adoption placements carried out jointly between the head of service and the operational leads in Wakefield and Bradford to date. This has been a helpful exercise to look at the planning for the children and to pick up any issues with

regards to practice and recording. The senior leadership team spent a day at the end of August looking at 20 case files across One Adoption West Yorkshire looking at a mixture of cases to look at how effectively the staff are using the mosaic case recording system to record their work. There is a positive picture about the use of mosaic case recording system but some specific challenges regarding some of the tracking forms. These require some simplification for staff to use more effectively and work is underway to address this.

3.53 Continuous Professional Development and Service Development

3.54 Service Improvement Plan

3.55 Following the completion of the 3 Year Plan the One Adoption West Yorkshire Service Improvement Plan (SIP) was created. The SIP actions link to the 3 Year Plan, the Equality Impact Assessment, the Adoption Charter as well as actions identified by the team. The SIP is tracked via monthly meetings with service managers (the action owners) with shared actions discussed at SLT. A quarterly update report is presented to SLT to provide an overview of progress and discuss/ resolve any issues.

3.56 Feedback

3.57 A new online feedback process is now in place and we use this to survey staff, adopters, bump into meetings, designated teacher and staff training. Further surveys for adopter training, information events and adoption support are in production. This method has brought consistency, allowed greater analysis and eliminated the resource burden associated with the former manual feedback process.

3.58 The staff survey and the report card regarding the voice and influence of children and adopters is attached at **Appendix 3 and 4**.

3.59 Staff Skills Development

3.60 Staff are able to attend a range of training and there are development sessions for each area of practice looking at developing knowledge and skills to support their work. We held an all staff event in October looking at becoming a trauma aware service, with input from Dr Matt Woolgar. There has also been a workshop on contact and adoption and a conference across the region regarding "identity", based on research findings and young people speaking about their experiences. The adoption panel training was recently undertaken with input from Dr. John Simmonds at Coram Baaf looking at issues of identity in relation to matching. This training was well received and enables us to start to address some of the bigger issues regarding adoption practice, ensuring that this is focussed on the individual needs of children and young people as they grow and develop into adults with a good understanding of their own identity.

3.61   A skills development template has been produced which identifies the aspirational/ enhanced skills would like their team members to possess. The templates will be updated by team managers with staff in their supervision to determine if development is required. The returns will be collated and a development plan created by December 2018 for a clear workforce development plan to work alongside the 3 year plan.

3.62   One Adoption West Yorkshire Offering Training

3.63   One Adoption West Yorkshire delivered a learning lessons event to other Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) across the country in July regarding the first year as a regional agency with support from the Leeds Relational Practice Centre. This was positively received by other RAA's and we held a second event in October regarding Early Permanence. One Adoption West Yorkshire staff and adopters have also presented at national conferences regarding the journey of the first year as a regional adoption agency and regarding early permanence practice. This is helping with our vision of becoming a flagship adoption agency that promotes and develops best practice.

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 regarding accommodation. 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.

4.3   Resources and value for money

4.3.1   There is a projected overspend this year due to an in year increase in inter agency fees and the capacity issues within adoption support. Appendix 1 covers this in more detail

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 potential financial risks with regards to the budget and the inter agency spend and demands within adoption support. Regular financial monitoring is in place and the management board are meeting in the next two months to discuss budgetary issues further.

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 documents[1]

None

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[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.