

WEST YORKSHIRE ADOPTION JOINT COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 18TH DECEMBER, 2018

Present: Councillor L Mulherin (Leeds) – Chair
Councillor R Forster (City of Wakefield MDC)

Councillor H Hayden (LCC)

In Attendance: S Tariq (LCC), S Johal (LCC), V Schofield (Wakefield MDC), S Whiteley (OAWY), E Booth (OAWY) and J Grieve (LCC)

12 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair introduced and welcomed Vicky Schofield the new Service Director for Children's Social Care at Wakefield District Council.

13 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

14 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.

15 LATE ITEMS

There were no late items of business identified.

16 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests.

17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor V Kendrick (Kirklees)

18 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 6th July 2018 were accepted as a true and correct record.

19 Matters Arising from the Minutes

Head of Service Report (Minute No.8 referred) – With reference to Resolution (iii) and the decision to supply Members with details of the interagency budget pressures. The Chair reported that the requested information had been

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supplied to Assistant Directors but regrettably had not been passed onto Members. The Chair emphasised the need to keep Members informed directly when information was requested at the Joint Committee. Furthermore the Chair noted that each local authority needed the information in relation to financial pressures which elected members would need to take into account in budget setting.

20 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 last report in July 2018, which included issues around:

- Staffing & HR
- Accommodation
- Information Technology
- Budget
- Duty System
- Partnership Working
- Centre of Excellence Project (Separate agenda item)
- Meetings with Medical Advisors
- Virtual School Head (VSH)
- Special Guardianship
- Performance Management (Separate agenda item)
- Recruitment and Assessment
- Adoption Support
- Family Finding
- Development and Service Development

Referring to staffing and HR, the Head of Service reported that Mary Brudenell, Service Manager had recently left the service, having emigrated to New Zealand. Although a positive move for Mary it was a loss to the service. A new Service Manager Michelle Rawlings had since been appointed.

Members noted that issues around information technology are progressing, the new adoption support workflow was being developed and was due to be finalised by the end of the year. Accessing local authority systems from a portal on the Leeds laptop remains an outstanding issue. This issue had been escalated within the local authorities in order for the work to be prioritised.

Members were informed that following the rollout of Enterprise Voice technology a revised Duty system came into effect on 2nd July 2018. This meant that duty was now rotated between the 3 main office bases in Bradford, Huddersfield and Leeds on a weekly basis. This had reduced the amount of time staff spend travelling to Kernel House and there had been no adverse impact upon the ability to take calls and respond effectively. The Head of Service said that the change has been viewed positively by staff and that the teams working within each office had more opportunities for networking and

sharing knowledge and good practice as they come together more frequently. Members noted there had been ongoing issues within two local authorities about the capacity of medical advisors to undertake medical health assessments of children's health needs in a timely manner. Members were informed this had led to some delays for children progressing care plans. The issue had been discussed by each local authority with commissioners in health seeking improvements to the service.

Councillor Forster said that delays in children's medical checks was a concern. He asked if he could be supplied with further details with a view to taking up the matter directly with health partners.

Members noted a number of issues had arisen following the One Adoption West Yorkshire staff survey and event feedback – 2nd October 2018, and queried if the issues raised had been addressed.

In responding the Head of Services said all the issues had been addressed, and it was the general view of staff that they felt that they had been listened to and matters addressed.

Members welcomed the offer/ delivery of training from One Adoption West Yorkshire to other Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) across the country and requested if local Members could be informed when such events were going ahead.

The Head of Service confirmed that local Members would be notified accordingly.

Speaking in general about the operation One Adoption West Yorkshire, in particular the Management Board and the Joint Committee, Vicky Schofield (Service Director for Children's Social Care at Wakefield) asked if she could be supplied with the structure/ Governance arrangements for both the Management Board and the Joint Committee.

In responding the Head of Services confirmed the requested information would be provided.

On a similar theme the Chair asked if the agendas and minutes for meeting of the Management Board could come to the Joint Committee as a matter of routine.

The Head of Service confirmed that the agenda and minutes of the Management Board would be included on the agenda for future meetings of the Joint Committee.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note the continued progress of One Adoption West Yorkshire
- (ii) To support the progression of the arrangements
- (iii) That details around the delay in providing Children’s medical checks be provided to Councillor Forster with a view to taking up the matter directly with health partners.
- (iv) That structure/ Governance arrangements for both the Management Board and the Joint Committee be circulated to the Service Director for Children’s Social Care at Wakefield
- (v) That the agenda and minutes for meetings of the Management Board be included on the agenda for future meetings of the Joint Committee.

21 Centre of Excellence for Adoption Support - Project Update

The Director of Children’s and Families submitted a report which provided an update on the Practice Improvement Fund Project to develop a Centre of Excellence in adoption support.

The Chair introduced and welcomed: Suzanne Whiteley, Practice Improvement Lead (Barnardo’s) and Eva Booth, Project Manager (OAWY) who spoke in detail about the project and the progress made.

By way of background Members were informed that in January 2017 the Yorkshire and Humber Adoption Consortium secured funding from the Department of Education (DfE) to develop a centre of excellence for adoption support to improve the positive outcomes for children and families through an evidence based multi- agency assessment of need and support, in partnership with children, carers and others.

Members were informed that three interconnected work strands would be developed:

- Standardised Assessment for Adoption Support
- A Multi-disciplinary model of specialist Assessment

- A multi-agency CPD Programme, adoption practitioners/ professionals

The areas of work to be covered would include:

- Working in partnership with health and education sectors
- Working with adopters
- Adoption support assessment framework
- Assessment framework
- Multi – disciplinary assessment framework
- Continued professional development programme
- Training delivery

It was reported that there had already been ongoing discussions and engagement with local authorities, health, education and voluntary sector partners as well as the development of the work with adoptive parents and young people about the project.

Reference was made to training delivery, in particularly training outcomes, with Members querying if these outcomes were measured, were there any performance indicators.

Members were informed that training outcomes could be measured via the use of a “strength and difficulties question” which would be used as an evaluation tool.

Reference was made to education, one Member suggesting that “every school needs to be good for adopted children” but how do you ensure consistency for all schools.

In responding the Head of Services said engagement between the School and the parents was key. The parents need to understand what support is available from the school, the school need to be aware of the child’s needs. The ambition was for schools to be good and “attachment friendly” to understand and respond appropriately to the needs of children who had experienced trauma and loss.

In offering comment the Chair said School Governors also need to be aware of issues around adopted pupils, with a view to providing training opportunities to designated governors.

The Chair thanked officers for their attendance and presentation and requested that further updates be provided.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note the contents of the report
- (ii) To support the continued development of this work

22 Performance Report

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which provided the second quarter performance statistics of the regional agency.

Addressing the report the Head of Service said the report provided the basis for performance across the region with an aim to improve practice internally and across the partnership.

Members were informed that adoption support remained one area that continued to be an issue at a national and regional level, with the delay in the implementation of a national dataset. A new adoption support workflow within the One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) case recording system would start to address the issue, with new reports being developed in the first half of next year. It was anticipated that reporting regarding adoption support would start in April 2019.

Members queried how many adopters had been recruited and approved.

In responding the Head of Service said that it was intended that a figure of 120 adopters would be recruited by the end of the March 2019, compared to 69 for the previous full year. The half year figure was 51 as reported in the performance report. In stage one of the process of recruiting adopters there were delays in waiting for the medical needs assessments completed by GP's of applicants and less so a delay in processing the DBS checks. This could lead to delays in stage one of the process, which leads to delays in approvals

Members queried if it was still difficult to recruit adopters for sibling groups.

The Head of Service said getting adopters for sibling groups continued to be challenging, locally and nationally. This was due to issues around the adopters feeling confident in their ability to meet the needs of a sibling group as well as having suitable housing and ensuring that good support packages were available to adopters.

In summing up the Chair said it was pleasing to see that overall performance was going in the right direction

RESOLVED –

- (i) To note the proposed performance information
- (ii) To support the further development of this work

23 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED – That future meetings be scheduled as follows:

- Wednesday 13th March 2019 at 1.00pm
- Monday 8th July 2019 at 1.00pm

(All meetings to take place in the Civic Hall, Leeds)