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Report of Director of Children and Families

Report to West Yorkshire Adoption Joint Committee

Date: 13th March 2019

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 December 2019.

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

Use of Resources

3.1 Staffing & HR

- 3.1.1 The staff group remains largely stable, although there continues to be some movement of staff between teams due to pending office moves and the re- alignment of resources to create the additional teams. Amy Wood took up her post as the team manager for the adoption support team, working 4 days a week. Amy will work across Wakefield and Leeds and three members of staff have now moved to this team. Recruitment is underway for the additional adoption support workers agreed to help clear the backlog of work.
- 3.1.2 There has been some movement in the business support teams with staff leaving and new staff joining the service. Unfortunately, there has also been a widespread flu virus within two office bases causing over a third of the staff to be off sick. This has caused specific issues regarding minute takers and processing finance requests in particular and is hopefully a short term issue. This continues to be reviewed by Aretha, business support manager.

3.2 Accommodation

- 3.2.1 Staff from the recruitment and assessment team based in Wakefield moved along with other staff from Bradford on the 5th February to the Margaret McMillan building. Agreement has not yet been reached about space at Huddersfield regarding staff moving from Halifax and the issue has been escalated to the assistant director to address barriers in this progressing.
- 3.2.2 Two desks have been identified in Wakefield within the looked after children's team for the family finding staff which will assist with closer collaboration and joint working.
- 3.2.3 The increase in teams at Kernel House in Leeds is causing pressure on space and discussions are underway with colleagues and asset management to address space for One Adoption and the looked after children's teams

3.3 IT

- 3.3.1 The new adoption support workflow was implemented in mosaic at the beginning of February and this simplifies the workflow as well as improve the reporting ability. The letterbox work will now start to be migrated as each exchange comes up onto the new system. It will take a year for all the exchanges to be lodged and moved across given the volume of exchanges in place.

3.4 Budget

- 3.4.1 The dashboard for this financial year will be discussed at the meeting (**Appendix 1**). In February the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies announced an inflationary increase in their inter agency fee from June 2019 .The impact of this will be discussed at the meeting but is not as significant as the previous increase.

3.5 Partnership working

3.5.1 Management Board

- 3.5.2 The management board met in on February 6th. The agenda and minutes of the meeting are attached (**Appendix 2**)

3.5.3 Operational Leads meeting

- 3.5.4 Operational leads met in early January and this is a helpful forum to discuss practice and performance issues. The joint commissioning of training across the region was discussed as some training has already been undertaken and this has been very positive. However, the take up of some training has not been as good as hoped and there have been issues with organising these. There is currently a mismatch between what operational leads may consider as priorities and what each workforce development leads in each LA see as a priority and it is important that the context of each LA is considered in relation to their practice. We have therefore agreed that I would meet with the workforce development leads to discuss the issues and see if we can find a way forward.

- 3.5.5 Discussions were held regarding the changes in letterbox arrangements moving forward and Julie Chew shared the work in progress about this work. The interface between OAWY and the LA front door across the region, developing a clear protocol for involvement of the respective services. Anne Tully is leading on this piece of work from Calderdale.

3.6 Performance Management

- 3.6.1 The Quarter 3 report is to be discussed as a separate item.

3.7 Practice, quality of provision and management oversight

3.7.1 Recruitment and Assessment

3.7.2 The piloting of the Virtual reality training is underway with the first use of these within the preparation training for adopters this week. The team have been working on developing the training offer for adopters during their preparation to adopt period to include sessions regarding infant mental health and baby bonding with a focus on a therapeutic parenting approach. One prospective adopter said “It makes you feel dizzy but the experience is brilliant as it looks through the eyes of a child and when turning your head you can see everything that is happening around them. It has made me realise that children do go through terrible experiences”.

3.7.3 The performance report will discuss the increase in adopters being approved but there is still not enough adopters in the system to meet the needs of children. The marketing and advertising work is continuing to attract prospective adopters and January is traditionally a busy time for those interested in adoption. The TV coverage over the New Year with Look North assisted in increasing the numbers attending information events in January with a record high of 52 people and 48 people at the first two events of the New Year which is encouraging. A report from Emma Whittell, marketing and communications officer is provided (**Appendix 3**).

3.7.4 Adoption Support

3.7.5 The adoption support teams remain busy and the new workflow introduced this week is designed to simplify the recording of this work which will assist staff in the longer term.

3.7.6 The peer mentoring pilot is going from strength to strength and there are now 29 mentors who are up and running, and have a good flow of referral's coming in. I attach a review report from the social worker who is developing the scheme for your information (**Appendix 4**). There has been some good reflections from an approved adopter who has become a peer mentor for OAWY in a national magazine (**Appendix 5**). One mentor said “I’m absolutely buzzing with positivity after my first peer mentoring meet tonight...couldn’t think of a better way of giving something back.”.

3.7.7 The work we have undertaken with Cornerstone as a pilot is coming to an end we have been in discussion with Voluntary agencies alliance (VAA) and specifically Adoption UK as the lead agency in this area of work about developing the peer support work further and rolling out the same approach out across the wider Yorkshire and Humber region. This is work in progress and we are in close collaboration to develop the service, ensuring that adopters get the best possible service and crucially a service run by adopters for adopters.

3.7.8 Over the last 18 months we have been working closely with partners across Yorkshire and Humber to commission a pan regional service to provide independent

support for birth parents and adopted adults. In addition the Adopteens group, adopter voice and birth parents participation work have been commissioned as part of this service. The contract was awarded to PAC/UK as a lead agency working with After Adoption and Adoption UK to provide the range of services across the Yorkshire and Humberside region. This came into effect on the 1st February with a formal launch of this work to be held in early April.

- 3.7.9 The national RAA leaders group have commissioned Mark Owers (professional advisor to the Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) to conduct an audit of adoption support work across England. Mark came to OAWY on the 30th January and met a range of staff. The report from this work will be written up with some recommendations to inform future practice in this area of work.
- 3.7.10 A newsletter went out to all adoptive families across the region in January this year.
- 3.7.11 As a management team we have had a real focus on adoption support during our meetings in the last few months with a real focus on what outcomes we are trying to achieve and the importance of adoption support. This starts from how we recruit adopters with support being an integral part of the messaging about parenting from the start of the process as well as ensuring that family finders are clear that the assessment of children's needs are of good quality and are clear about their future support needs.
- 3.7.12 The teams have been developing and refining the focus on therapeutic parenting and the core offer to adoptive families, looking at this with adoptive families; enhancing the early support to families to provide firm foundations for adoptive families as children grow and develop.

3.8 Family Finding

- 3.8.1 Mandy took over from Mary at the start of December and has been getting an overview and understanding of the issues in this area of practice. The most recent work has concentrated on increasing the understanding across teams regarding good practice in preparing children for adoption and ensuring that the necessary support is in place for children moving into an adoptive placement. The matching and linking meetings have also been adapted to make the better use of time for staff ensuring that the data captured within Mosaic reflects accurately the children coming through as the new workflow becomes more familiar and easier to use for staff.

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. This has been shared with the local authorities at the management board and with Finance officers within each local authority.

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 documents¹

None

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.