



## **Report of Director of Childrens and Families**

### **Report to the West Yorkshire Adoption Joint Committee**

**14<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

#### **Subject: Half yearly Adoption Agency report**

##### **1. Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 This report sets out the work and developments within One Adoption West Yorkshire between April 2019 and September 2019.

##### **2. Main issues**

###### **Use of Resources**

###### **2.1 Staffing & HR**

- 2.2 A new service delivery manager started work with us on the 1st August to cover long term sick leave of a member of staff on a temporary basis who is on long term sick leave.
- 2.3 One of the team managers sadly made the decision to leave One Adoption due to personal circumstances and left her post as of 31 October. There is currently an advert out to recruit a full time team manager to be based at Kernel House and this manager will also cover for another manager's maternity leave from January working with a team made up of family finders and recruitment and assessment workers.
- 2.4 A number of business support staff have left in the last three months to take up other career opportunities and there is ongoing recruitment to these positions. These vacancies are causing issues throughout the service and other staff are going over and above their required duties to maintain the business of the service. The aim is to have all the vacancies recruited to and staff in post by the end of the year.

###### **2.5 Accommodation**

- 2.6 Work is now completed moving from 5 office bases to 3 main office bases- with desk space remaining in Halifax and Wakefield. These moves have enabled three

teams across recruitment and assessment, family finding and adoption support to be co-located with one service manager.

- 2.7 The increase in teams at Kernel House in Leeds is causing pressure on space and is causing low morale and difficulties for staff. Constructive discussions are underway with colleagues and asset management to address this issue and the matter has been escalated to see if there are interim solutions that can be put in place to reduce overcrowding.

## **2.8 Information Technology**

- 2.9 The Bradford, Calderdale and Wakefield portals are now up and running effectively with staff being able to access the local children's systems from the OAWY laptop. The final area to address is with Liquid Logic in Kirklees and discussions underway to address this.

## **2.10 Budget**

- 2.12 The overall position of OAWY is forecasting a balanced position at Month 6, with some potential risks of non-achievement of Inter Agency income (£270k). This has been offset by an underspend on staffing due to vacancies and income from another source.

## **2.13 Duty System**

- 2.14 Following on from an increase in the number of teams based at Kernel House a further evaluation of the duty system took place in summer 2019. This was on the basis that there were more staff based in the Leeds office, but the quota of duty across the 3 bases remained equal which wasn't felt to be fair. Further changes were implemented in September 2019, which saw a 7 week rota introduced with the Leeds office undertaking 3/7 weeks on the rota and Huddersfield and Bradford offices 2/7 weeks each. In addition the following changes were also introduced at the same time:

- Spread sheet for calls ceased to be used – apart from new enquiries about adopting. Everything else now has an enquiry created on Mosaic;
- Adoption adviser capacity is presently at a premium to prioritise initial visits and therefore a decision was made that Advisers don't have to be present on duty all day, but to check in for email contacts and any other messages;
- Duty managers to share duty on a 3 day/ 2 day split across a week.

- 2.15 The above changes are early in implementation, so it is hard at present to fully evaluate the impact, however we do know that by having to create a Mosaic enquiry for everything is taking a lot more time for workers and this is being monitored carefully. Further potential changes that have been identified as possible implementation with business support (when staff capacity allows):

- Phones to offer a choice of numbers and letterbox calls be responded to by Letterbox BS in first instance;
- Use of back up workers at busy times – to be brought forward to take calls and free up front-line workers to create Mosaic records.

## 2.16 Partnership working

### 2.17 *Operational leads group*

2.18 Over the last 6 months this group has met twice and looks at interface issues. There has been recent discussions regarding streamlining our approach to adoption allowances and moving children onto adoption looking at research and evidenced based practice. There is ongoing project work being undertaken to develop a protocol regarding the interface between OAWY and children's services regarding adoption support as well as a piece of work about access to records and archiving of adoption files. Changes to the national collection of adoption data was also recently discussed which will assist in tracking the progress of sibling groups.

### 2.19 *Centre of Excellence Project*

2.21 The Department of Education has extended the funding for the One Adoption Centre of Excellence project until 31 March 2020 and training of staff across the region continued into May. The creation of multi-disciplinary model has been completed and a business case has been circulated to the management board and health commissioners across the region for discussion about future funding of the model and the benefits this can have for children and families in the region. I attach a briefing report on this for your information (see **Appendix 1**).

### 2.23 *Meetings with medical advisors*

2.24 The agency continues to meet with Medical Advisors across the region where there is a need to discuss practice issues. A medical advisor protocol has been agreed and there has been a series of peer support and auditing across the region to look at the quality of reports and this is helpful to improve the information provided for adoptive families. There has been challenges across two local authorities regarding capacity of medical advisor time and these issues continue to be addressed. There have been recent improvements with Wakefield, however, there is still continuing delays for children in progressing care plans in Bradford and this is being addressed at a local level.

### 2.25 *Virtual school heads (VSH)*

2.26 The work across the region from our education worker alongside the five virtual school heads (VSH) continues to progress positively in implementing the new duty placed on VSH in each locality last year for previously looked after children who are

adopted. The helpline is accessed by adoptive parents and schools and other professionals and the development of the web site will imminently provide an additional source of information for adopted parents and schools. We continue to work to increase the awareness of attachment and trauma at West Yorkshire schools by delivered training to school staff and by providing workshops to adopters in partnership with the service delivery teams and are continuing to explore piloting the secure base model for schools in the region. The discussions with the VSH involved the project workers for special guardians from Grandparents plus and these meetings are an opportunity for further exploration of the issues that need addressing for all these families moving forward. The team has completed and published the protocol for "Moving a School Age Children" and this has been shared as an example of good practice by the Department of Education and the National Association of Virtual School Heads.

### 2.28 *Special Guardianship*

The regional work regarding the special guardianship commenced earlier this year with the five local authorities and other key stakeholders including grandparents plus and the department for work and pensions, seeking to create a standardised policy and approach regarding adoption and special guardianship support, including financial support. The stakeholder meeting held in early October considered recommendations from the various task and finish groups and further discussions are taking place with special guardians and adopters and the management board to progress decision making.

2.29 The Kinship Connected project, working across the 5 local authorities, in partnership with grandparents plus and the five local authorities is providing a strong focus on developing peer led support groups as a sustainable and effective way to support kinship carers. The two project workers also provide individual support and signpost for advice and link with charities and other avenues of support to meet needs. This is very much an early help provision and is being used in some local authorities for other kinship carers, as well as special guardians and the website and helplines provide support for all kinship carers in the Local authority area. There has been an interim evaluation report regarding this project and consideration is being given by the local authorities as to whether to extend this project which comes to an end in March 2020. The interim evaluation report is attached at **Appendix 2**. The project is still in its infancy but the support is "having a positive and statistically significant impact on kinship carers' mental wellbeing and sense of isolation" .

2.30 Comments from Special Guardians accessing support from the project:

*"I don't necessarily need to access a lot of support but knowing that it's there is good and being contacted to be involved in the media side of Grandparents Plus as a case study/being on a video is positive.*

*"[My project worker] has done everything that has been asked and has been willing to support and advocate for me."*

*"If it wasn't for the support I got from [name of project worker] and the kinship support group at [name of LA] I would still be sat here making no progress. The help has been invaluable."*

*"I wouldn't have coped without the support."*

## **2.31 Performance Management**

2.32 This is addressed in more detail in **Appendices 3 and 4**.

## **2.33 Practice, quality of provision and management oversight**

### *2.31 Recruitment and Assessment*

In May 2020 Coram Baaf awarded OAWY the quality mark for Early Permanence Placements. This will assist us in attracting adopters and is a partnership approach with the five local authorities, giving confidence in the court arena that adopters are fully prepared for this task and that support is available for all parties involved in these arrangements.

The pilot project of using the virtual reality headsets has been extremely positive over the last 18 months with an increase in adopters understanding more about the felt impact of trauma, increased empathy and understanding the need for a therapeutic parenting approach. The headsets have also started to be used with adopters post approval in adoption support where they are struggling to understand the issues that children face and have been taken into schools to help teachers understand the impact of trauma.

2.32 The preparation training is being updated and reviewed with the involvement of adopters given feedback and the fact we have not reviewed it since going live, although feedback is very positive about the training ( comments below). The team are also implementing an extra days training looking at adopting siblings in order to attract more adopters to consider siblings.

*"Day 3 was my favourite day! I loved throughout the whole training that there was a parent at the training to answer any questions. I also found the family finder great on day 3!"*

*"I learnt about the Importance of identity. Telling your child that they are adopted and how to go about this. When/How/Age. To be honest and open from as early as possible."*

*"Kept our attention throughout, topics explained at a good pace (not too fast, giving us time to think) used humour as well, which was definitely needed when discussing some difficult topics."*

2.33 A review of the website is currently underway. Additional content has already been added alongside the online forms within the secure area accessed by adoptive

parents. The structure of the website is also to be updated to make it more attractive to potential adopters and more user friendly.

### 2.34 *Adoption Support*

2.35 Although there are still a number of families waiting for a social work service, this has started to reduce overall, and requests for therapeutic support from the adoption support fund are the situations where families are waiting the longest. The referrals are prioritised according to need and whilst families are waiting for this they are able to access a service through our core support service and the peer support service is been well utilised.

2.35.1 There are currently have 26 peer mentors, all of whom are supporting between 1 – 3 families. Two training workshops have been provided for mentors in the last 6 month period with another two planned for January 2020. 45 new referrals have been received in the last 6 months. The scheme is currently unable to accept referrals, unless they are urgent, until more mentors have been recruited and trained, as all our current mentors are at capacity. Adoption UK are currently recruiting experienced adopters from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences to support our families. A training date is set for 19<sup>th</sup> November 2019 for newly recruited mentors to develop their mentoring skills.

2.42 One Adoption has continued to make significant use of the Adoption Support Fund Over the last 6 months and the DfE has agreed further funding for 12 months.

We have run a number of well attended and successful activity based events in the last 6 months across the region and these involved a large number of children and families attending with One Adoption staff attending in support.

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

2.44 A 2<sup>nd</sup> single adopters group in the west of the region has commenced and the next three day 'Building Underdeveloped Sensory Systems' programme will be run with Sarah Lloyd, Occupational Therapist, towards the end of the year in the Wakefield/Leeds area.

2.45 A pilot has been completed looking at a consultation model to offer adoptive families who are currently waiting for a service with assistance from the centre of excellence staff. We are currently considering the learning from this pilot.

2.46 All Adoption Support staff have been trained in the last 6 months in Non violence resistance training and Dyadid Developmental Psychotherapy (level 1). This training is an approach and model for practice that uses what we know about attachment and developmental trauma to help children and families with relationships. Developng trust with the help of PACE (playfulness, acceptance,

curiosity and empathy) this DDP provides interventions for families and those who support them.

- 2.47 The Adoption support service is now running a series of evening workshops for adoptive parents on subjects including Brain Based Parenting and Education. These are being rolled out across the region throughout the year. The Adoption support managers and 2 social workers undertook training around access to records in Post-commencement Adoption cases which came into force in April 2019.
- 2.48 *Family Finding*
- 2.49 OAWY have agreed to work with the University of East Anglia in implementing a research and evidence based approach to managing transitions from foster care to adoption. This requires a partnership approach with local authority fostering and social work teams and workforce development leads. Beth Neil introduced the model at our all staff event on the 24<sup>th</sup> October and is discussed in more detail in the service improvement section towards the end of the report.
- 2.50 The children's profiling events continue to take place and the last event was in September, inviting adoptive families from across the region and beyond to consider a selection of children awaiting adoption who were featured with high quality photos, DVDs and personalised displays. 22 families attended and we featured 34 profiles totalling 47 children, resulting in 25 expressions of interest. 2 of these expressions of interest have led to linking visits and 4 are being explored further.
- 2.51 We are currently in the process of commissioning a number of voluntary agencies to provide 30 placements for OAWY. The aim of this is to ensure that children are placed more locally in order for support to be more effectively provided.
- 2.52 Two Fun Days have taken place, June and October 2019. The Fun Days enable adopters to mix with children who have a plan of adoption and active family finding is taking place. 47 children attended the events, 13 sibling groups and 20 single children. 31 adopters attend the events, these being a mix of adoptive families approved by OAWY and those approved by local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies. There were 27 expressions of interest in children at the event. 1 linking visit took place following the initial Fun Day and this is progressing to a match, 4 linking visits have taken place following the October event.
- 2.53 *Case File Audits*
- 2.54 Dip sampling case file audits have been undertaken with three Local authorities in the last four months to look at family finding activity for those children waiting (Leeds, Wakefield and Kirklees). The HOS and Service managers also completed audits in October looking at cases and team managers have audit activity planned during the autumn term. This is a helpful exercise to look at the quality of work and the

preparation of adopters, adoption support work and planning for the children which is generally of a good quality.

## **2.55 Continuous Professional Development and Service Development**

### *2.56 Service Improvement Plan (SIP)*

2.57 OAWY 2019/20 plan has actions link to the 3 Year Plan, the Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Impact Assessment, the Adoption Charter and actions identified by the team. The SIP is tracked via quarterly 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.

### *2.58 Feedback*

2.59 Online feedback is now in place for information events, adopter preparation training, Early Permanence Placement training, bump into meetings, adoption panel and twilight sessions. These are looked at and reviewed to inform future training and events. There are also annual surveys for adopters, staff and designated teachers. Further surveys for connected and day 4 adopter training are in development.

2.60 The 2019 staff survey identified positive areas as being a strong team, training & development, communications, innovation and adoption support as positive areas. The areas that attracted the most constructive comments related to lack of capacity in terms of undertaking the work, training and consistency - there are plans in place to address each of these areas:

- Consistency – reviews are underway for matching and contact. This will identify and address areas of inconsistency.
- Resources – caseload reporting is in place and work is underway to capture non-casework activity. Whilst we understand how the resource is allocated we can capture how resource is deployed and ensure it is targeted appropriately;
- Training – a skills development plan is being produced for social work staff and core competency framework for business support;

2.61 The report card regarding the voice and influence of adopters and children is attached at Appendix 4. The adoption panel chairs write a 6 monthly report for the agency and this will be shared with the management board once received.

### *2.62 Adoption Panels*

2.62.1 The adoption panels meet 7 times a month with three panel chairs. Panel Chairs complete a 6 monthly report and any learning from these is fed back in to the agency. Comments from adopters attending the panel are generally very positive. We had a response from 17 questionnaires from applicants between April and



September, out of these the lowest score was 7 out of 10 with 11 of these returned scoring 10 out of 10.

*“The panel was very friendly and we felt very at ease and comfortable talking to everyone and answering the questions we were asked. A very positive experience. The Chair of panel was very friendly and welcoming.”*

*“Everybody put is at ease. It was clear they had read and absorbed the PAR. The questions were not trying to 'trip us up'. Everybody was very kind. We were nervous, but we both found it an enjoyable experience.”*

### 2.63 Staff Skills Development

2.64 Two all staff events have been held since April. One in June and October relating to key priorities in our 3 year plan.

a). The first event focussed on the importance of building an adoption system that supports children’s relationship and identity and the issue of contact was looked at. Adopted teenagers, birth parents and adopters spoke at the event about their experiences and the research regarding contact in adoption was presented. Staff had an opportunity to put forward their ideas about opportunities, suggestions and barriers to developing a more open attitude to contact with birth families in adoption. A project plan has been developed to take forward strands of improvement work around this issue and we have linked with One Adoption North and Humber to take this project forward as part of our pan regional work. A conference for social workers across the wider Yorkshire & Humber region on this issue will take place in February 2020 with key input from adopted adults and teenagers, birth and adoptive parents.

b) the second all staff event in October focussed on the practice of Moving children from foster carer to adoption and hearing from Professor Beth Neil about the research and looking at implementing this in OAWY and getting ideas from staff on things that would bation of a model of undertaking this focussing clearly on children’s needs as well as life story work and a session in the afternoon about Life stories and narrative therapy which can be used in adoption support but also to assist family finders support social workers in the local authorities and assessment workers support their families more effectively.

2.65 The Business support team has worked together to agree a core competency framework which will feed into the development of bespoke training for business support staff.