One Adoption West Yorkshire Annual Report 2019/20   June 2020

1   Purpose of this report

1.1   This report sets out the developments within One Adoption West Yorkshire from April 2019 to March 2020.

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.

2.2   Adoption remains a key priority for the government and there are now 24 regional adoption agencies (RAA's) up and running covering 115 local authorities. A further 30 local authorities are involved in 8 projects to develop RAAs and 2 local authorities have plans to join an existing RAA. There are only 4 local authorities remaining that are not currently involved in an RAA project.

2.3   There continues to be a gap between children waiting and adopters available and an increase in the number of children waiting with a placement order for 18 months or more and the government have invested £645k to the adoption sector to improve the recruitment of adopters, with a key focus on attracting more adopters from the black and minority ethnic communities. A national campaign was due to commence in March but was postponed due to the coronavirus crisis.

2.7   The future of the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) remains still remains uncertain although a cross party all parliamentary group fully supports the continuation of the fund and the fund is committed to continue until July 2021. The next Spending Review will hopefully clarify the longer term plans for the adoption support fund.

3   Main issues

3.1   COVID-19

3.1.1   <u>OAWY response</u>

The coronavirus has impacted on the whole service and although it emerged towards the latter end of the year it is important to address this issue before going onto review the progress over the year.

Our whole team have been working from home since the 18th of March. The team have adapted well and have found creative ways to ensure that families are supported and children's plans progressed as far as possible. We have been very aware of the impact on staff wellbeing as a large number of staff have been juggling caring for children at home as well as continuing to work. We have aimed to support staff with a range of materials and tips for self-care in these difficult times, and have advocated flexible working.

Despite Covid19 we have continued to receive enquiries from people interested in adopting and have quickly had to adapt how we carry out our recruitment and assessment of adopters. We have created a new online information film, complemented with regular live Facebook question and answer sessions, to replace our information events. And, whilst we are unable to carry out initial home visits and assessment sessions in person, we have put in place mechanisms for these to take place virtually for the most part.

With many GPs currently unable to offer appointments for medical assessments, we have implemented a self-declaration form for adopters in stage one of the process which will allow many applicants to proceed into the next stage of the process without the usual health check. However, further discussions are ongoing about this issue with health services as we cannot approve adopters until a health check has been fully completed.

Virtual Adoption Panels have quickly become the norm across the region and despite the length of panels being reduced, these have continued to progress with minimal delays. The lockdown has required us to put a lot of thought into how we move children on from foster care to adoption. Utilising technology to support the "getting to know you" phase of introductions has enabled us to move some children from foster care to adoption during this time. However, we approach these on a case by case basis, looking at the risks, so it has not been possible for all children, and unfortunately some plans have been delayed.

We continue to provide a social work service to 800 children via WhatsApp, Skype and telephone calls, and have been able to connect with our teen support group through video conferencing. Although our support groups, workshops and training are currently suspended, we are already exploring how we might deliver some of these differently, given the different audiences and modes of delivery available, taking into account security, ease of use and information governance.

Maintaining the letterbox service has been particularly important to us so we are encouraging families to use electronic means wherever possible, although we have been able to maintain a reduced service for hardcopy mail as well.

This is particularly anxious and uncertain time for birth families, with increased concerns about their children's wellbeing. Therefore we are working closely with our commissioned service, PAC/UK, to ensure support is available for families in our region.

Communication with staff and key stakeholders has been key and OAWY website and social media platforms are updated regularly to provide updates; all adopters on the OAWY mailing list have been emailed directly and the Duty line is still up and running with staff working from home and connecting via Enterprise Voice; Letterbox and internal mail is actioned by business support staff from each of the regional offices on a fortnightly rota.

The impact of the pandemic will be long lasting and the service is actively considering the longer term implications and adaptations required to ensure that we can maintain social distancing and provide a good quality service for children and families moving forward.

3.2 Use of Resources

3.2.1 Staffing

Staffing generally remains stable, although there are a few vacancies across the service due to the retirement of staff and staff being promoted within the service. Recruitment to posts was temporarily put on hold whilst we prioritised other areas of work with the current issues around COVID-19. However, recruitment activity has now started again.

One of our long standing service managers retired this year due to ill health and a temporary appointment was made to cover the position initially and is in the process of being made a permanent replacement. We have also had some changes with the team manager cohort during the year with two managers going on maternity leave and one manager leaving due to a change in personal circumstances. This has provided opportunities for internal staff to progress their career within the service.

During the course of the year there have also been a number of people leaving within the business support team and this had significant pressure on the service. However, four new staff have been recently appointed, increasing the capacity to better meet the needs of the service with two more members of staff recently recruited and awaiting start dates. There are a range of development opportunities within business support and some staff have taken up apprenticeships and we continue to look closely at staff retention in this area of the service. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused delays to both training and bringing in new staff and the team are looking at alternative ways to deliver induction and training for staff. All of the staff are currently working from home and have risen to the challenge incredibly well.

3.2.2 Duty System

Following on from an increase in the number of teams based at Kernel House last year a further evaluation of the duty system took place in the summer last year and 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.

There were 5,119 calls to the duty line during 2019/20. Due to COVID-19 the Duty line is being run by staff working from home and connecting via Enterprise Voice. During the lockdown the number of calls to the duty line is lower than usual, however the families that are calling in are tending to require longer and more in-depth support from the duty worker than typical calls.

3.2.3 Accommodation & service delivery

Work completed last summer 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.

The increase in teams at Kernel House in Leeds is causing pressure on space and is causing difficulties for staff. Constructive discussions are underway with asset management to address this issue. However, COVID-19 has forced different ways of working. All staff are now working from home and making better use of the technology we have available. When things return to normal, some of these ways of working may be adopted permanently which may then ease pressure on office space and we will keep this under review.

3.2.4 Information Technology

The Bradford, Calderdale and Wakefield portals are now up and running effectively. This has proved to be essential as all staff are now working from home. Further work with Kirklees still needs to be progressed and discussed as some staff are still using two computers.

3.3   Partnership working

3.3.1 <u>Operational leads meetings</u>

The operational leads group continues to meet quarterly to discuss practice issues and have discussed a range of issues during the year from foster carer adoptions, adoption support, and access to records and most recently discussed transitions and moving children onto adoption. The coronavirus has created some clear difficulties moving children on and we are taking a case by case approach with a risk assessed decision being made and a guidance document has been provided for staff.

3.3.2 <u>Centre of Excellence Project- adoption support</u>

The Centre of Excellence project team came to an end at the end of March 2020. The local authorities and the clinical commissioning groups within health have agreed to fund a 3 year extension of the project to implement a multi- disciplinary team within OAWY working across the region. The team will consist of 12 staff with a Team Manager, 2 Therapeutic social workers, 2 Education workers, 1 Early Years Practitioner plus 1.5 Clinical Psychologists and an Assistant Psychologist, 1.2 Occupational Therapists and a Speech and Language Therapist. In addition the team will have access to consultancy support from Educational Psychologist, Paediatrician and Psychiatrist, and will 1.5 business support staff to support this work. We are working closely with Leeds Community Health Trust to recruit the health staff and there are some delays in taking this forward as health providers focus on the response to the COVID19 crisis.

During the course of the year the team has continued to work with the management team in OAWY providing support and training to embed the new assessment framework as part of the standard practices. The basic framework training has been completed in the Yorkshire and the Humber region, with over 150 professionals partaking in the two day training.

3.3.3 <u>Agency Medical Advisors</u>

The agency continues to communicate regularly with Medical Advisors across the region where there is a need to discuss practice issues. The medical advisor protocol remains in place and there have been some improvements in the availability of medical appointments across the region more recently.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted upon the capacity of medical advisors to offer medical advice in relation to children, adopters and to the Adoption Panels and for GP's to carry out medical assessments regarding prospective adopters. There has been a commitment across the region to continue providing medical advice in order to achieve permanence for children wherever possible and discussions with commissioners and providers have been progressed to ensure that this remains a key focus to prevent delay for children in moving to their permanent family. There will however, inevitably be some delay for children during this time.

3.3.4 <u>Virtual school heads (VSH)</u>

OAWY and the VSH continue to meet on a termly basis to share information around the issues that are currently impacting on adopted children and their families. It is an opportunity to build and develop the skills and knowledge in the region and promote a shared knowledge base for those who are living or working with these children. The Adoption Education Duty line continues to be used by parent's social workers and schools across the region and informs the VSH of the current challenges people are facing. Virtual Schools have embraced the Secure Base Model – resulting in one authority effectively using parts of this model within their Personal Education Planning. It has been reported that the Virtual School representatives value this opportunity to come together to focus on this particular cohort of children and think about their needs. Information from the Schools' Survey (which has been carried out twice across the region) will be a strong measure of the impact of the work and also identify areas where the group needs to focus next. Linking this meeting with grandparents plus project workers who support special guardians has been positive and further discussion is required to support this work moving forward.

3.3.5 <u>Special Guardianship</u>

The Grandparents plus contract has now being extended for a 2 year period. They have adapted their work since the restrictions came into play and this has been working well to date. The regional work around the policy development and financial support for special guardians has progressed well this year and a support plan template is currently being piloted in two local authorities. The management board have looked at a regional approach to financial support, with a refreshed financial assessment tool in the process of development and a revised policy framework. There have been some challenges around adopting a regional approach however there is a clear consensus on the aspiration to have a streamlined approach and this work is progressing well with decisions progressing through local governance arrangements for agreement.

3.4   Performance Management

3.4.1 The agency provides quarterly reports to the management board. This data provided has developed over the last 3 years and is gathered to ensure that we are aware of how much work is undertaken, how well was it undertaken and if anyone is any better off.

A)   Sufficiency: Are enough of the right kind of adopters being recruited and approved to meet the needs of the children waiting:

3.4.2 The children with a plan for adoption during 2019/20

Approved Adoptive Households in year
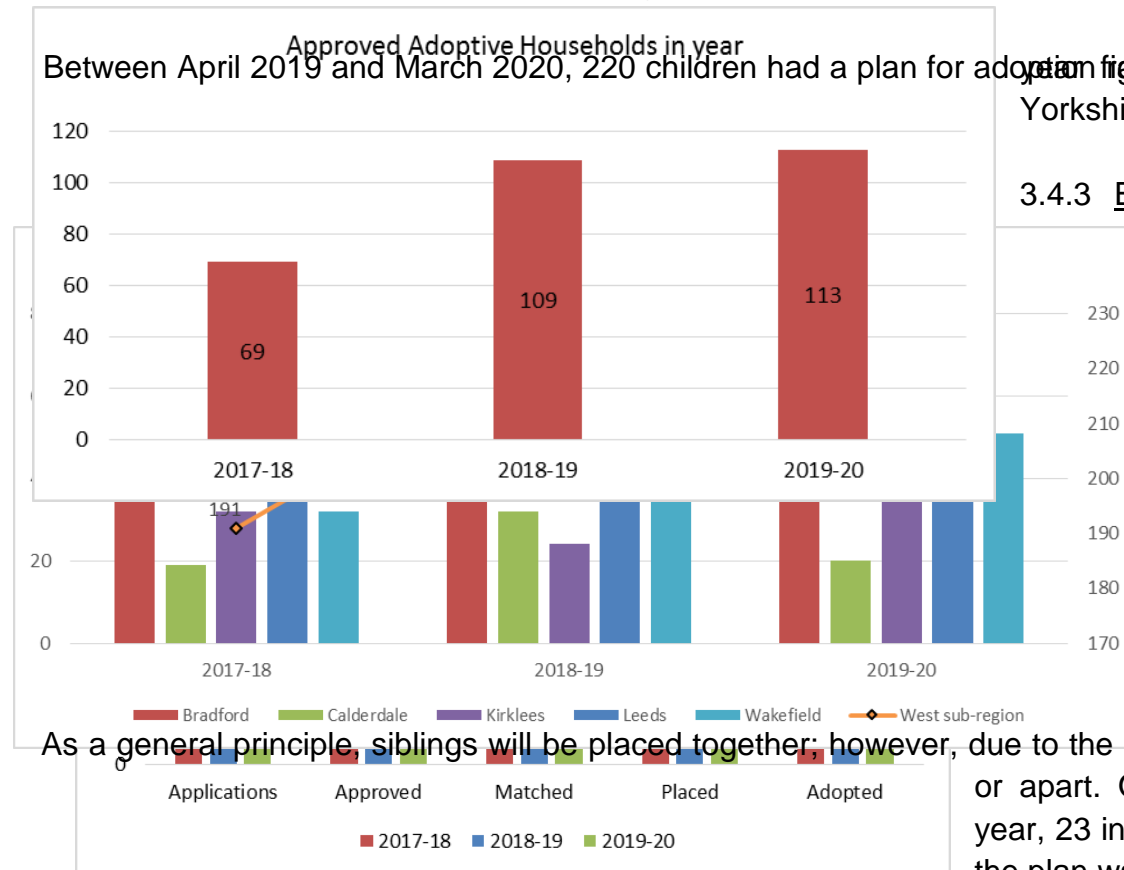
Between April 2019 and March 2020, 220 children had a plan for adoption ratified by the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities.

3.4.3 Ethnicity

Of the 220 children with a plan for adoption ratified this year, 174 (79%) children were from white British backgrounds (including information not obtained) and 42 children (19%) were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, including children from eastern European, Gypsy Roma, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds.

3.4.4 Placement with Siblings

As a general principle, siblings will be placed together; however, due to the individual needs of children, this is not always appropriate evidence based on the individual needs of children, placed together or apart. Of the 71 individual siblings placed during the year, 23 individual children were placed apart, for which 22 the plan was to be placed apart.

3.4.5 Adopter recruitment

113 adoptive households were approved during the year and you will note from the table below that this is another increase from year-end 2017-18 and year end 2018-19.

Within the 113 households, 219 individuals were approved throughout 2019-20. Of these, 21 (10%) are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds (last year it was 11%). We need to improve our percentage of BME carers and keep a focus on ensuring that we approve a full range of adoptive families to meet the range of children requiring placement, while at the same time not relying on matching children with regard to ethnic identity as an overriding factor. This is a key issue for the service and we have commissioned an organisation called My Adoption Family to work with us in engaging with Black African and Black Carribean communities in the region to help us increase the diverse range of adopters available. We have a webinar planned with key organisations to discuss local reflections on the barriers for people coming forward and to seek their help in our campaign to attract more adoptes to come forward.

Households approved for sibling groups decreased slightly this year with 16 households approved for sibling groups, 14 for 2 children; 2 approved for a sibling group of 3 and 34 households open to an Early Permanence Placements. There is still more to do around recruiting adopters for sibling groups and a new training programme was due to be implemented in April and due to Covid19 is now being adapted for an online course so implementation has been delayed.

3.4.6 Children currently with an adoption plan

As of the end of March 2020 there are 162 children with a plan for adoption and have 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 are between 2 and 4 years and 29 children are 5 years of age or older.

From the children waiting for a placement there are 110 girls and 116 boys, and 22% are children from BME backgrounds (including children from eastern European, Gypsy Roma, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds). 61 children are from sibling groups. The plans for these children are actively reviewed with the local authorities with clear monitoring and tracking systems to understand the range of family finding activity going on for these children and whether adoption remains the right plan for each child. The delays for these children are related primarily to the needs of the children; the need to place siblings together, the age of the children or their particular special needs or complexity.

3.4.7 Adopters available

As of the end of March 2020, there are 50 approved adoptive households that have not been matched and 43 are in the process of looking and are in discussions about considering placements and 7 have a panel date booked.

On the 31st March 2020 113 adopters are in the process of assessment (in stage 1 or 2) although these will take a number of months to become approved. There is a steady increase in those within the assessment process overall.
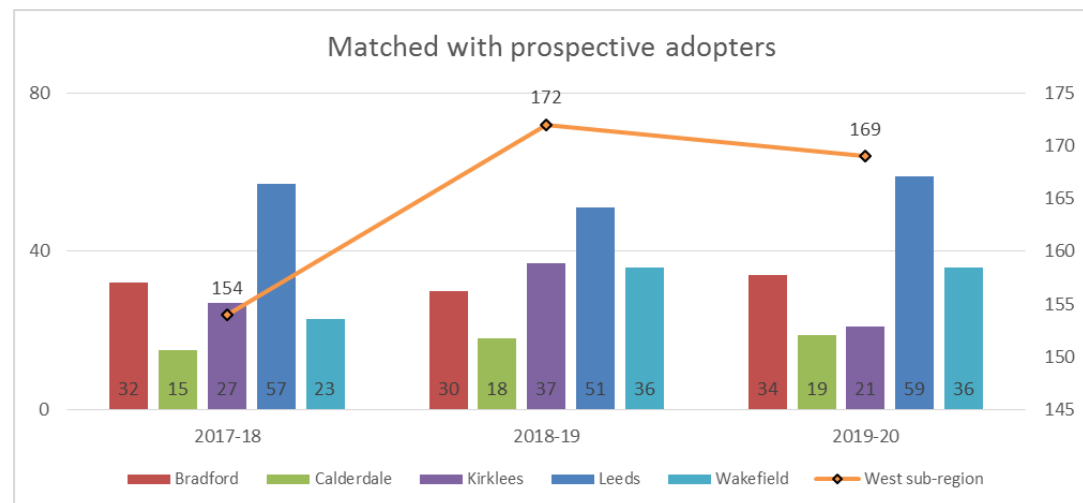
B) Timeliness: Are children being matched and placed without delay including those children who wait longer?

3.4.8 Children matched in the year for adoption

Between April 2019 and March 2020, 169 children from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities were matched with families at adoption panels; this is a slight decrease of 3 children matched between April 2018 and March 2019 from across the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities. From April 2019 to March 2020, 25% (42) of the children matched were from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and this is extremely positive news as these children often wait longer to be placed.
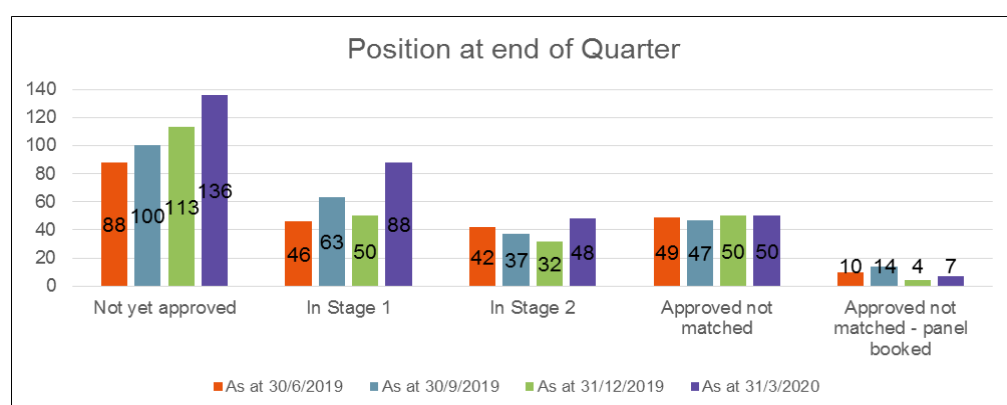

- 130 of the children matched were 0 to 2 years old;
- 31 children matched were 2 to 4 years old;
- 8 children were aged 5 years or older;
- 72 children were part of a sibling group (of the 169 matched);
- 64 children (of the 169 matched) were placed who are part of a sibling group of which 23 were placed apart, 22 had a plan to place apart due to their individual needs;
- 14 children (of the 169 matched) had been previously placed in early permanence placements (8 during the year) of which 7 of these 14 children have been adopted in the year. This is a very positive step in reducing the number of moves for children before they reach their permanent family.

3.4.9 Provision of Placements

We placed 168 children this year. The percentage of placements provided in-house within the region has increased significantly this year.
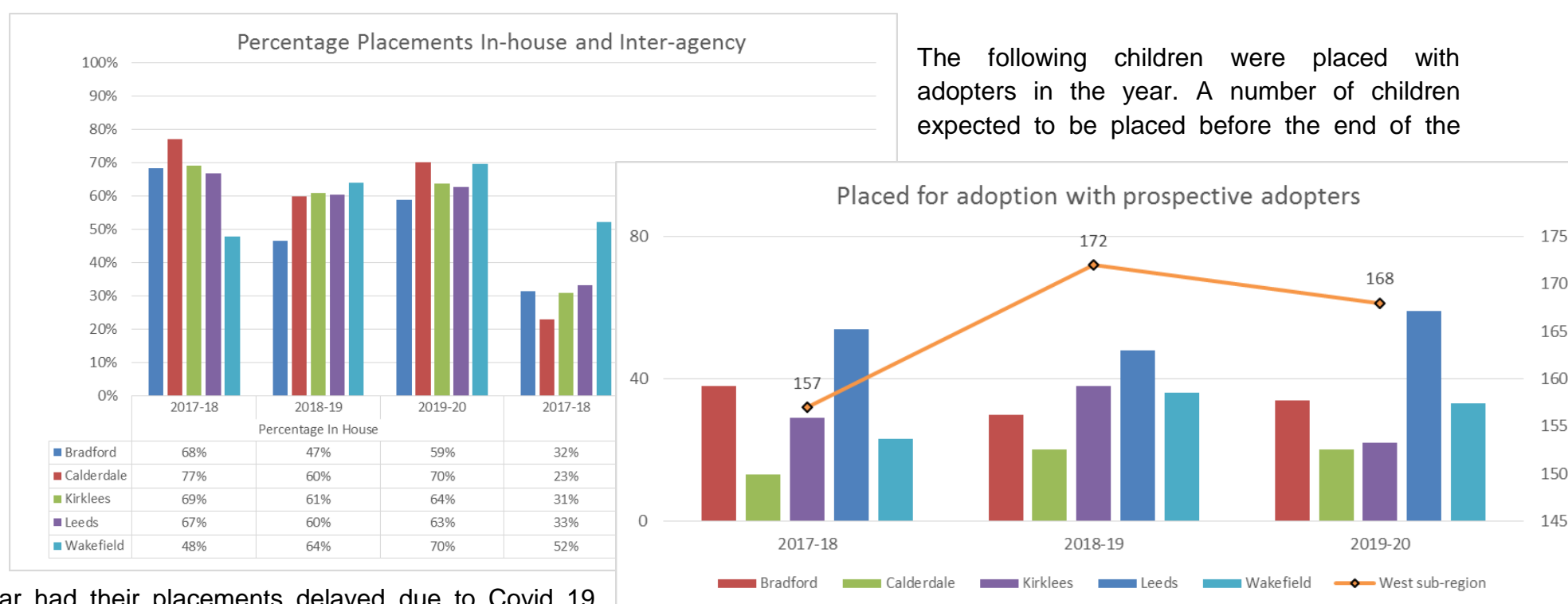
- 108 children within OAWY;
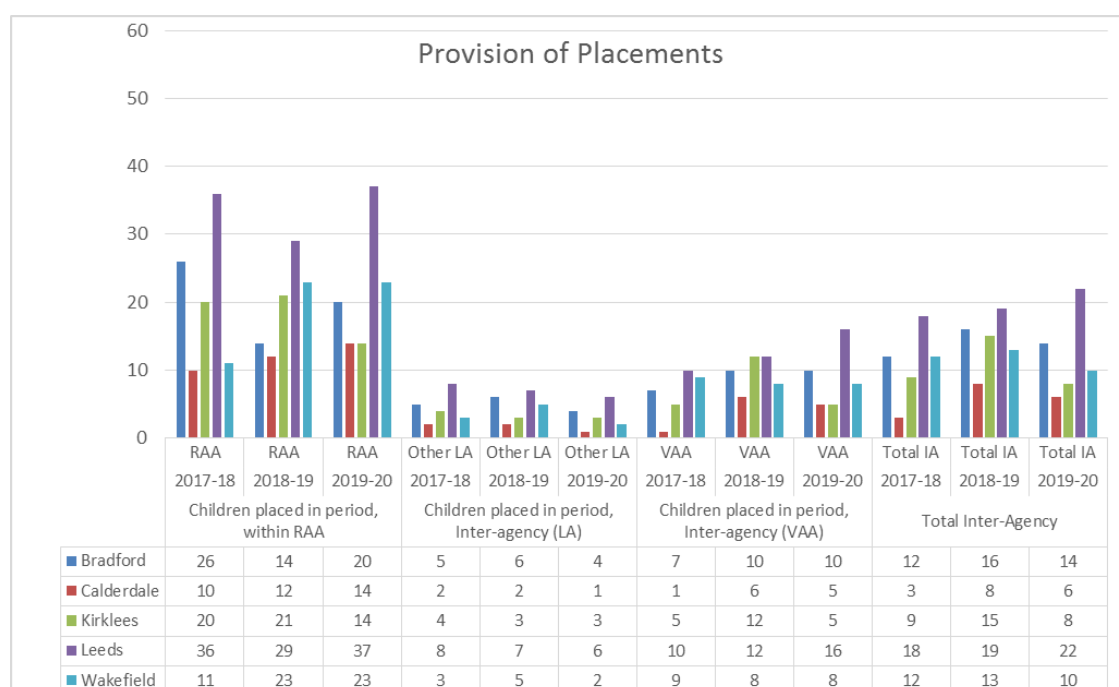
- 16 children with other local authorities or other Regional agencies;
- 44 children with Voluntary Adoption Agencies

The percentage this year was 64% in house and 36% interagency. Last year it was 59% in house and 41% interagency. It is clear from the table below that the trends for LA's in the use of

	RAA 2017-18	RAA 2018-19	RAA 2019-20	Other LA 2017-18	Other LA 2018-19	Other LA 2019-20	VAA 2017-18	VAA 2018-19	VAA 2019-20	Total IA 2017-18	Total IA 2018-19	Total IA 2019-20
	Children placed in period, within RAA			Children placed in period, Inter-agency (LA)			Children placed in period, Inter-agency (VAA)			Total Inter-Agency		
Bradford	26	14	20	5	6	4	7	10	10	12	16	14
Calderdale	10	12	14	2	2	1	1	6	5	3	8	6
Kirklees	20	21	14	4	3	3	5	12	5	9	15	8
Leeds	36	29	37	8	7	6	10	12	16	18	19	22
Wakefield	11	23	23	3	5	2	9	8	8	12	13	10

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interagency placements has changed with all LA's increasing last year on the previous year but decreasing again this year.

Percentage Placements In-house and Inter-agency

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-18
Bradford	68%	47%	59%	32%
Calderdale	77%	60%	70%	23%
Kirklees	69%	61%	64%	31%
Leeds	67%	60%	63%	33%
Wakefield	48%	64%	70%	52%

The following children were placed with adopters in the year. A number of children expected to be placed before the end of the

Placed for adoption with prospective adopters

year had their placements delayed due to Covid 19 and their plans for moving in with their family are regularly reviewed and will take place as soon as is possible.

3.4.10 Adoption Scorecards

A1 indicator

The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (indicator A1) for children in West Yorkshire is 476 days, the National Indicator target is 426 days and the England 3 Year Average is 486). Whilst this is above the national target, it is below the England 3 year average and is based upon children adopted in the period.

Adoption scorecard A1 - Annual figures
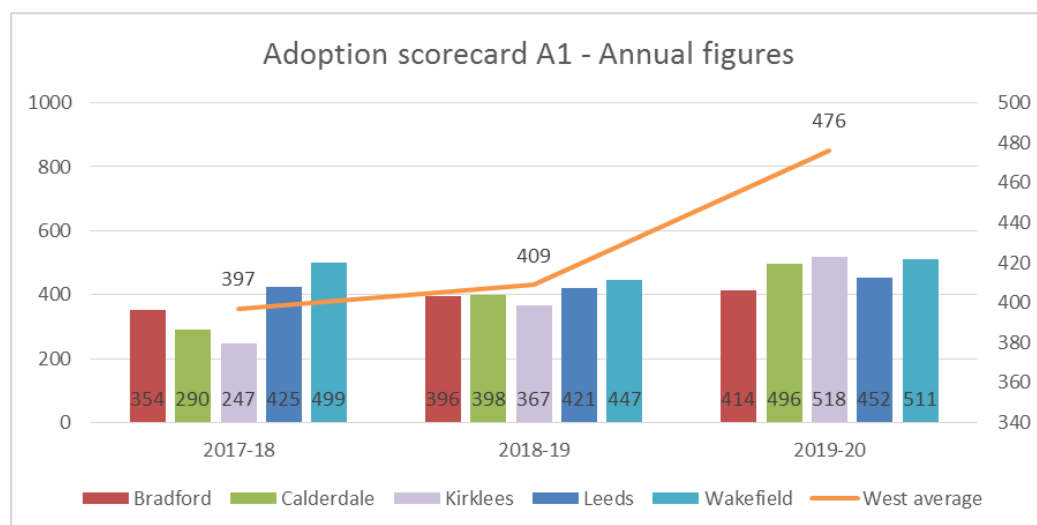
- o 42 of the 174 children adopted entered care more than 3 years ago;
- o 91 of the 174 children adopted were hard to place children;
- o 67 of the 174 children adopted took more than 500 days between entering care and being placed,
- o Of the 67 children that took more than 500 days 49 of the 67 were hard to place children with 22 having 2 or more characteristics

It is clear that there are some children where there have been some issues regarding drift in care planning and there are also some of the children being older and with more complex needs resulting in adoption taking longer to achieve. It is important to look at the individual local authorities but on the whole most of the children will have actually been placed in the last 3 years and formally adopted more recently, reflecting a number of years of local authority practice and care planning from a number of years ago.
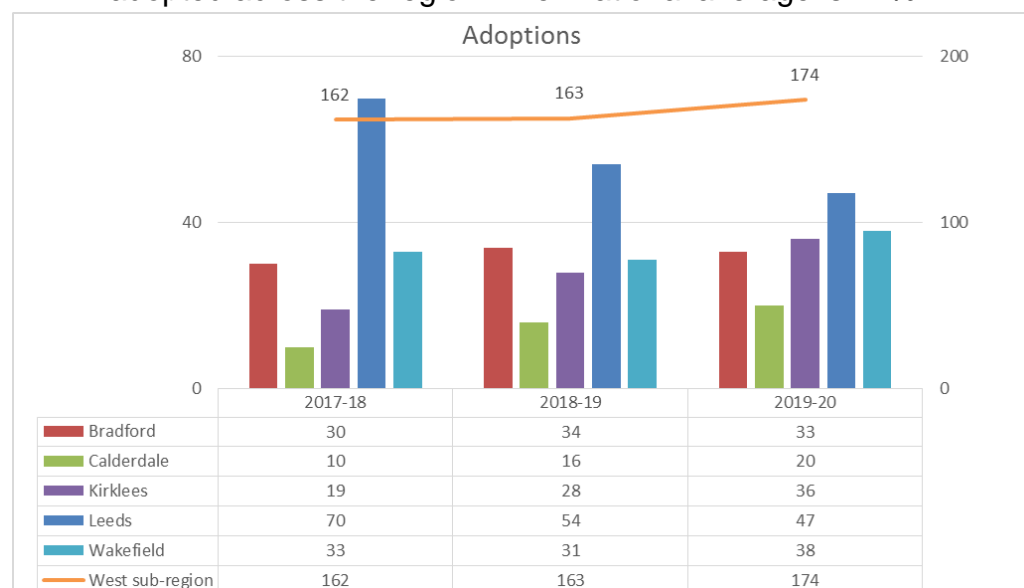
A2 indicator

The average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (Indicator A2) for children in West Yorkshire has increased to 243 days, the National indicator target is 121 days and the England three year average is 201. This is above the national indicator and reflects an issue of a national decline in the number of adopters available and the complexity of children waiting for adoption.

Adoption scorecard A2 - Annual figures
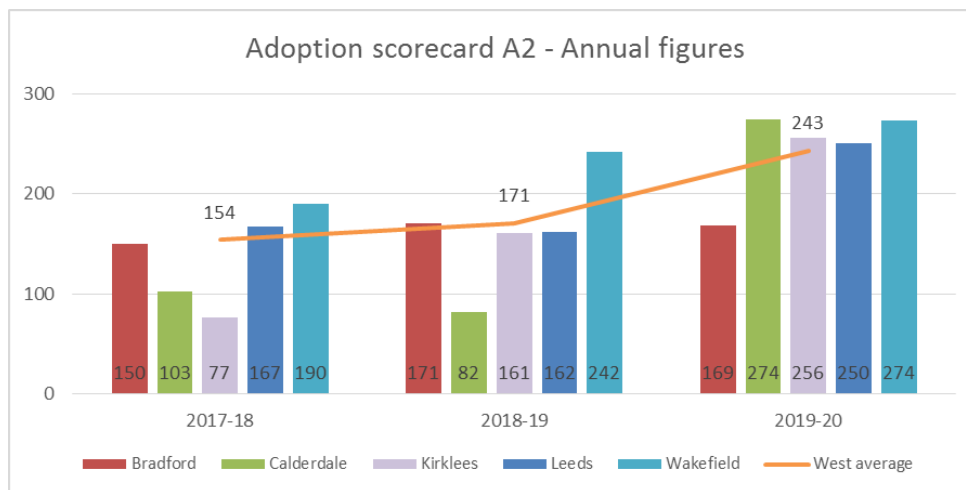
3.4.11 Children adopted from care

The number of children who have been formally adopted has increased by 11 (174) with 13% of children leaving care being adopted across the region. The National average is 12%.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Bradford	30	34	33
Calderdale	10	16	20
Kirklees	19	28	36
Leeds	70	54	47
Wakefield	33	31	38
West sub-region	162	163	174

3.5   Practice, quality of provision and management oversight

3.5.1   Recruitment and Assessment

In May 2019 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 use of Virtual Reality is now well embedded in our preparation and assessment of prospective adopters. We have trained an additional cohort of staff in the use of the VR headsets, in particular focusing on adoption support staff as there are new films soon to be available which will be relevant to adoption support work with content such as knife crime, county lines etc. We had training planned regarding the new content, which has been postponed due to COVID19. However, we have had 2D versions of the existing films made available for use in preparing prospective adopters in the interim.

The adopter preparation training has been fully reviewed and a new programme developed. This was due for implementation from April 2020. However, in response to COVID19 this is being reviewed further and an online preparation training program is currently being devised. Here are some comments from those attending the adopter preparation training:

- *Was great again having the adoptive parent there! Was great at answering any questions and it felt very real!*
- *Personable, patient, honest and realistic whist still being positive;*
- *Excellent training and brilliant for preparing us as parents;*
- *I feel like I gained a lot of insight, knowledge and confidence from the training.*

The adopting sibling training programme has been developed, however, we have been unable to implement this as planned. We are currently exploring how this, and the EPP training, can be delivered virtually to prospective adopters. Here are some comments from those who have attended the EPP training:

- *Great training. Very honest and realistic;*
- *We were pretty sure we wanted to do EPP but the training confirmed we definitely do;*
- *The key learning for me was being able to listen to and ask questions to someone who has gone through the process and ask her opinions and thoughts;*

The review of the website has been ongoing. Proposals for the content and layout were shared with prospective adopters for their feedback. This will now be moved forward with the web developers. We hope to extend the online functions available to adopters, such as booking training, following the success of the online submission forms for visit requests and the Registration of Interest.

The impact of Covid19 on the pipeline of adopters coming through is not clear as yet. We had to cease the information event for a period of five weeks during the first phase of lockdown and given that we had a backlog of enquiries to deal with once we got the information event online this suggests we may not have an issue in due course. However, the impact of not being able to approve adopters due to the lack of medical assessment and advice is one we need to keep a close eye on in the coming months.

3.5.2 Adoption Panels

A review of adoption panels was undertaken throughout January and February 2020. It found that despite there being 7 panels taking place on a monthly basis, with three chairs and a varied membership, there is a high degree of consistency in the implementation of panel protocols. Recent recruitment to Business Support vacancies has improved the efficiency of panels, for example in relation to outcome letters being distributed in a timelier manner.

In response to COVID-19 Adoption Panels are now taking place virtually, with members joining the meeting via video or conference call. Despite some small technical issues, overall panels are going well and positive feedback has been received. Prospective adopters are not currently routinely 'attending' panel; this is something we will continue to review as panel members and attendees become increasingly confident with the technology. We have reduced the number of items on each panel due to the new way of working, but have capacity to provide additional panels, should they be required.

3.5.3 Family Finding

Agreement was reached that a research informed practice model developed by the University of East Anglia for moving children from foster care to adoption be adopted in the region and implemented in Leeds and Calderdale in the first instance and discussions have taken place to support services with this, including training for foster carers and there have been a number of introductions that have taken place utilising this model. In the other areas where full implementation has yet not been possible, elements of this model have been used, such as a greater use of video calls to familiarise children with their new families in the getting to know you stage.

Due to the current restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic introductions have more widely utilised technology and whilst a number of transitions have taken place some have been delayed due to a range of issues relating to the health needs of children, adopters and foster carers, the distance and logistics in being able to undertake transitions. Where plans have been delayed these are kept under regular review.

The children's profiling events continued to take place with the last event being in January, 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 49 children, resulting in 17 expressions of interest. 2 of these expressions of interest have led to linking visits and 1 is being explored further.

Fun Days were piloted in 2019/20 with 2 being held resulting in 4 children being matched. The 3rd Fun Day, scheduled for March, was cancelled due to COVID-19. The Fun Days were very well received by those attending. Comments from the adopters who attended stated "A r*eally great experience. Well worth it;" and "it was great to talk to the foster carers about the children and to meet the children".*
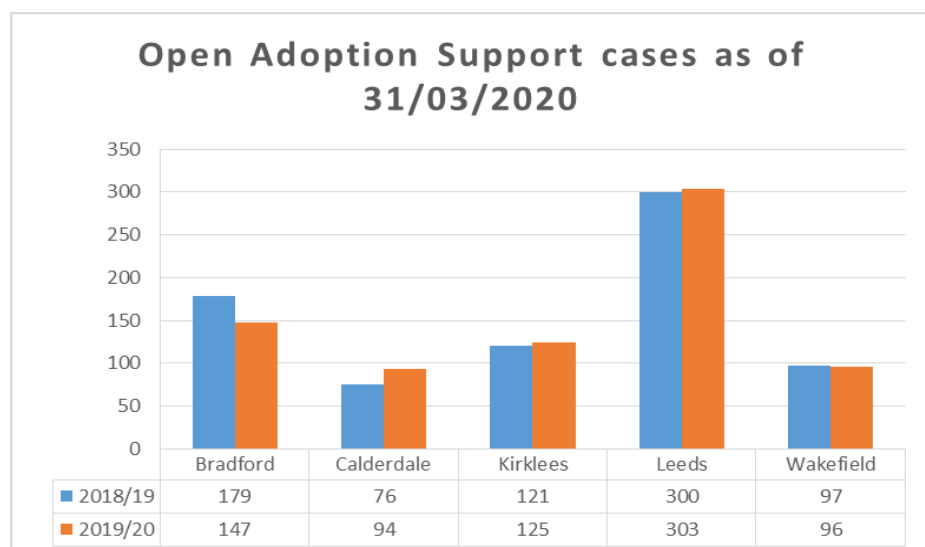
We are exploring undertaking profiling events virtually so that these can continue during this period of uncertainty, the profiling events have had a positive impact in raising the understanding of adopters of the needs of children with a plan of adoption and have led to a number of matches.

We have progressed with commissioning 30 placements from the Voluntary agencies alliance in order for children to move into families within the region. This faltered slightly with the impact of Covid-19 but the contract was awarded on the 28st May.

3.5. 4 Adoption Support

a) **Adoption support**: Do children and families have timely access to high quality support services?

The service has continued to provide a direct social work service to almost 800 children. There continues to be a number of families waiting for allocation for an assessment of their support needs not on the allocated list below, however this number is reducing following some increased capacity and different processes put in place to manage new enquiries from families. Workers have successfully applied for £1.78m funding from the Adoption Support Fund for therapy services for children and their families.

Open Adoption Support cases as of 31/03/2020

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield
2018/19	179	76	121	300	97
2019/20	147	94	125	303	96

Since the introduction of restrictions as result of Covid-19 Social workers have been maintaining contact with families via virtual means, this has meant we have had to consider the way we work with families and how we deliver of our core offer of support.

Through most of the year we have continued to provide a number of events and support groups for adoptive families across the region including non- violent resistance, Foundations for Attachment, Therapeutic Playgroup, and Sensory Integration programmes. We have put on workshops across the region for parents on Brain Based Parenting, Education, and Therapeutic Parenting. However, these are all currently suspended and we are currently exploring how we might deliver some of these via more virtual platforms in light of the current restrictions.

We are very mindful about the difficulties COVID-19 places upon families and we have provided updated information about the service with links to a range of online resources for people to access.

The letterbox service has continued to facilitate over 5,000 exchanges across the region. Work is nearing completion in creating electronic records for children who have an arrangement. Since the Covid-19 restrictions we have continued to scan and email letters wherever possible.

Through our contract with PAC/UK they have been able to amend their offer to remote working to continue to offer their existing service. They have also been working with us particularly to ensure that birth families are supported as this can be a very anxious time for both birth families anxious about the welfare of their children.

3.5.5 <u>Peer Mentoring – PAC-UK/ Adoption UK</u>

There are now 27 active peer mentors (Bradford 4, Calderdale 1, Kirklees 3, Leeds 17 and Wakefield 2) supporting 56 families across the region. The table below shows the number of referrals received and the number that have gone on to access the service broken down by area.

No. referrals 19/20	Brad	Cald	Kirkls	Leeds	Wkfld	Total
Received	19	3	11	37	9	79
Accepted Support	15	3	9	25	8	60

Here are some comments from those accessing the mentoring service:

- *We would highly recommend the mentoring service. We have a very close knit support group with our family and friends however they don't all fully understand what we are always going through so having the mentoring service available has been invaluable to us;*
- *It was an outstanding experience, having somebody who was able to listen and discuss different aspects of the adoption process with.*
- *The mentoring scheme has allowed me to ask questions throughout the process as they come to mind, it is reassuring to have someone there to chat to 'as and when' I need to.*

3.5.5 <u>Non Agency Adoption</u>

One Adoption West Yorkshire undertakes non-agency adoption on behalf of Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield councils, Bradford and Leeds councils undertake their own.

Over the last 12 months there were a total of 38 enquiries received for non-agency adoption. 61% of enquiries were from families living in Wakefield, 21% were from families living in Calderdale and 18% were from families living in Kirklees.

Over the past 12 months we received 24 Notifications of intention to apply for an order we received with 38% from families living in Kirklees, 33% were from families living in Wakefield and 29% were from families living in Calderdale.

Over the past 12 months there were 14 non-agency adoption orders granted, 43% were for families from Calderdale, 36% were for families from Wakefield and 21% were for families from Kirklees.

3.5.7 Disruptions

There were 7 disruptions of adoption placements (pre adoption order) during 2019/20 which relate to 6 placements (2 children were part of a sibling group). This is an increase from last year of 4 disruptions. The children's ages at disruption ranged from 11 months old to 10 years, the length of placement ranged from 9 days to 5 months. Of the 6 placements, 1 of these was an in-house placement and 5 external (RAA, LA and VAA) placements. Some of the themes from the review of these are as follows:

- The majority of placements were at distance;
- In 2 cases there were risks identified in progressing to adoption, one being the age of the child (who was 9 at the time of placement) and one where it was recognised that there would be a high need for therapeutic support;
- Access to local service provision where placements are at a distance is at times challenging;
- Presenting behaviour of the child in placement and adoptive parents ability to cope with the level of need;
- Experiences of children in early life;
- Initial preference for approval age for 2 sets of adopters was lower than the age of the child placed with them;
- Lack of connection developed between the adoptive parent and child (2 cases).

A detailed review of the themes emerging from disruptions is been undertaken and will be used to share learning with partner agencies.

3.5.8 Quality Assurance

One Adoption West Yorkshire has developed a practice improvement framework and is committed to an improvement culture of learning. The principal sources of feedback are:

- Views of Children and Families: The views and experiences of children & young adults;
- Performance Data: Any statistical data that helps us judge the quality and effectiveness of our professional practice;
- Practice Wisdom & Knowledge: The practice wisdom of those staff who work with children, young people and families, adoption panels and learning from disruptions;
- The findings of external and internal inspections, audits and evaluations of our practice.

A Quality Assurance (QA) mechanism for panel work is used as a matter of course and has found that the majority of prospective adopter reports (PARS) were of a good or outstanding standard (8% outstanding, 74% good, 2% satisfactory, 8% requiring improvement and 8% not recorded). This is an improvement on last year's figure. The Child Permanence Reports (CPR's) provided by local authority social workers over half were considered good or outstanding (3% outstanding, 54% good, 12%satisfactory, 29% requiring improvement and 2% not recorded) - this is a slight improvement on last year. OAWY continue to work with the 5 local authorities to raise the quality of CPR's and support them with training and development work more detailed feedback is provided for each local authority.

With regard to feedback from service users at adoption panels; an online survey was introduced this year and return rates have been low. However, we will be working to improve the return rate. 7 questionnaires were received from attendees at panel who could rate the overall experience as either very good, good, neither good nor poor, poor or very poor. All responses rated the experience as very good or good.

- 6 (85.7%) respondents rated the experience as very good;
- 1 (14.3%) respondents rated the experience as good.

There were 23 complaints made regarding the Adoption Service during 2019/20. Eleven complaints related to post-adoption support or payments, four focused on letter box contact issues, four were unhappy with the assessment process, three were about staff attitude/customer service and one for delays in the adoption process. 21 complaints were resolved at stage one and of the stage one responses three were inconclusive or locally resolved, four were not upheld, eleven were partially upheld and three were fully upheld. Each year we look at any themes arising from complaints to ensure that we can learn from these and feedback into practice improvement.

3.5.9 Case File Audits

Dip sampling case file audits was undertaken with three Local authorities to look at family finding activity for those children waiting (Leeds, Wakefield and Kirklees). The Head of Service, Service managers and team managers also complete audits 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. An audit schedule has been agreed for 2020/21 and results are reported quarterly into OAWY senior leadership team.

3.5.10 <u>Voice and Influence of Children, Young People and Adopters</u>

Appendix 1 provides the Voice and Influence of Children, Young People and Adopters report card. This highlights examples of work undertaken to capture the views of service users to help develop and shape the service.

3.6 Continuous Professional and Service Development

3.6.1 <u>Staff development and support</u>

All of the staff receive regular monthly supervision and have an appraisal. This is an opportunity for staff to ensure that there is reflection regarding their work and addresses their own personal and professional development and practice.

3.6.2 <u>Training</u>

During 2019/20 a range of training has been delivered across the teams. Here are some highlights:

- Post-commencement training for Adoption Support Managers;
- Non Violent Resistance - Level 1 and Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP) - Level 1 for Adoption Support workers;
- Attachment Style Interview training for recruitment workers;
- Virtual Reality training;
- Transitions – delivered by Professor Beth Neil at an all staff event;
- Introduction to Theraplay, Parenting with PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) and Neuroscience & Trauma at a Recruitment & Assessment and Family Finding development day.

A skills gap analysis for social work staff was completed in 2019/20 which is directing a staff development plan. Training workshops on trauma and home inventory scheduled for delivery in April and May '20 had to be cancelled but will be re-booked when possible. Plans are also in place to source training for DDP level 1 and 2 as well as Theraplay level 1 and 2 during 2020/21.

The Business support team has worked together to agree a core competency framework which will link to annual appraisals and feed into the further development of bespoke training for business support staff. A number of training opportunities are available and a number of staff have taken up apprenticeships.
The family finding teams across West Yorkshire provide regular clinics to local authority social workers within the region to provide information, advice and support regarding individual cases and processes in adoption. Workshops are also provided across the region focussed on key themes, i.e. child permanence reports, early permanence placements and direct work with children. OAWY also contribute to newly qualified social work programmes, legal training in some areas of the region as well as supporting foster carer groups and contributing to sessions focussed on adoption.

OAWY delivered a conference at the end of January regarding Adoption & Contact –valuing relationships and identity. This was well received with 185 social work practitioners present from across England. The feedback was excellent. There is a real appetite for change and progressing practice around this area of work and we are looking at a follow up workshop with adopters, birth parents and social workers to explore the issues further.

3.6.3 <u>Strategic issues and forward plans</u>

OAWY's plan on a page, Appendix 2, outlines the vision, mission, outcomes and priorities up to 2020/21. Activities linked to the delivery of the plan are tracked through the OAWY Service Improvement Plan. Work will commence this year with a forward three year plan to be ready for the end of 20/21.

<u>Corporate Considerations</u>

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

There has been ongoing engagement with staff over the year. 2 all staff events are held twice a year, one in June and one in October which covered identity and lifelong relationships and rethinking children's moves from foster care to adoption respectively. Following staff feedback on communication there is now a quarterly newsletter in place to keep staff updated. Ongoing engagement with adopters, young people through adopteens and birth parents is an integral part in order to co-develop and co deliver the services provided for children and families in the region.

4.2 Equality and Diversity/ Cohesion and Integration

The OAWY Equality Impact assessment can be found as **Appendix 3**. Actions from this are fed into the annual service improvement plan and tracked throughout the year. Please note this Equality Impact Assessment is in the process of being reviewed and will be completed by October 2020.

4.3   Resources and value for money

4.3.1   The 2019/20 final outturn position of OAWY was £5k underspend.

There were some pressures on the 2019/20 budget specifically the shortfall of Inter Agency Income £247k and Commissioned Services of £109k, however, these was mitigated by Staffing savings of £139k, Inter Agency expenditure savings of £22k and a combination of additional income (£195k) and running cost savings of £5k.

5.   Conclusions

5.1   We continue to see the increase in adopters coming into the process which is positive and children who generally wait longer for adoption are moving in with their adoptive families. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought many challenges for the service and we have adapted quickly to the new "norm". We are now   starting to reflect and think about how we operate moving forward with social distancing likely to be in place for a long period of time. There are many things that we have started that we will continue to do in the future and we have kept a learning log to help us understand what has worked well and what has not worked well to inform future planning. The staff in the agency are extremely committed and passionate about improving outcomes for children in the region and to being part of a developing a flagship adoption service that promotes and develops best practice.