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Report of Director of Children and Families

Report to West Yorkshire Adoption Joint Committee

Date: 23rd September 2021

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:	X No

Summary of main issues

1. This report is a brief report and provides a summary from the Head of Service on the developments of the service since the annual report was completed in May 2021.

Recommendations

1. The Joint Committee is requested to:
 - a) Note the progress of the agency; and
 - b) Support the progression of these arrangements.

1.	Use of Resources
1.1	<u>Staffing & HR</u>
1.1.1	Staffing is largely stable with a number of new staff joining the last year. The Head of Service is moving onto a new role in September on a secondment basis for an initial period of one year. Michelle Rawlings has been appointed to cover this position from the 16 th September. Michelle is moving from being a service manager within OAWY and Rhian Beynon is going to be moving to cover Michelle's role.
1.1.2	Following discussion at the last management board, OAWY have recruited to the permanent and temporary family finding positions and they are expected to join the service in September. Recruitment is underway for the letterbox team given some recent changes.
1.2	<u>Adoption Panel</u>
1.2.1	Panels continue to be busy and there are increasing pressures during the summer months due to social worker and foster carer plans for leave. We have recently recruited two new panel chairs: Michaela Bass and Bridget Puddepha who have taken up post this week. The panel protocols are in the process of being reviewed and we are developing our guidance for new panel members in recognition of the challenge of joining panels remotely. Coffee and Catch up meetings have also been arranged for panel members to allow them chance to meet socially and ask and questions they might have in response to feedback that this has been lost from the virtual panels. From August adopter approvals at panel will include a question from an adopted child; the questions have been devised by our Tween Group.
1.2.2	After lengthy discussions with the provider and health commissioners in Wakefield they have now agreed a permanent medical advisor to cover for the additional panel.
1.2.3	<u>Budget</u> The budget at the end of period 4 is currently projecting a pressure of £75K. This is due to a reduced income from the Adoption Support Fund and Interagency Income. Despite reducing the income levels last year this remains problematic and is largely due to the pandemic and impact of direct work only just restarting and families not been matched with children from outside West Yorkshire as they are being used for children within the region. However, an action plan is in place with savings identified from other budget lines with regards to travel and expenses and settling in grants in order to ensure that the budget comes in as agreed.

1.2.4	The recent discussions with the trade unions regarding the pay award that are underway will cause additional pressure and local authorities are aware of the need to address this in line with the partnership agreement.
1.2.5	There are a number of staffing pressures across family finding discussed with the management board which may create pressures in the staffing budget and a number of staff in the adoption support teams about to go on maternity leave which causes additional pressures as positions need to be covered to ensure an essential service can be provided.
2	Partnership working
2.1	The variation to the partnership agreement for the changes to the funding formula has been agreed by all local authorities and arrangements are in train with legal services for this to be formally signed and completed.
2.1.2	The partnership agreement has been in place for almost 5 years and a mid way review point has been reached. I have been in contact with Directors of each local authority to provide their agreement for the continuation of the partnership agreement for a further 5 years. Agreement has been received to date from Calderdale, Wakefield and Bradford and I have followed up with Leeds and Kirklees. Once agreed then Leeds legal department will discuss with other legal advisors any amendments to the agreement necessary for completion of the review and continuance of the arrangement for another 5 years until the term of the agreement is reached.
2.2	Performance Management
2.2.1	The first quarter report is attached at Appendix 1
3.	Practice, quality of provision and management oversight
3.1	<i>Recruitment and Assessment</i>
3.1.1	Planned changes to the recruitment and assessment service structure have been made, with a new stage one team having been in place from 1st April. The initial review has highlighted that while the change has been challenging for some of the adoption advisors, they are positive about the change and are feeling more valued as a result.
3.1.2	The numbers of adopters entering the process increased last year and more recently we have seen a reduction right across Yorkshire and Humberside. Marketing activity has been stepped up to ensure that we get a good number of enquiries coming through. This may be due to

	<p>uncertainties given job security now that furlough arrangements are reducing.</p> <p>The Adoption Passport, a new service developed by adopters for prospective adopters to provide a varied array of webinars and training and increased level of preparation for adopters has been included as part of the preparation training for adopters. This gives adopters a safe space to meet with other adopters as well as providing support and resources regarding a wide range of issues. This is excellent value for money and came about from trialling this approach during the pandemic with the Covid ASF funds.</p>
3.1.3	
3.2	Family Finding
3.2.1	<p>The teams delivered a pre-recorded virtual sibling event on the weekend of 21 – 24 May (with the event running from 4pm on Friday 21 May until 9am on 24 May). 12 children (6 sets of sibling groups) were profiled, 51 adoptive families registered to attend the event and following the event 7 expressions of interest were submitted for 4 groups of siblings. Following the exploration of the expressions of interest 2 sibling groups had positive linking meetings and the matches have been booked into panel. Feedback from adopters, family finders and adoption social workers following the event was positive.</p>
3.2.2	<p>Adopters said : <i>“We are really pleased that we attended the event. We've attended some in person events recently, and they can be quite overwhelming, especially with the current covid safe way of running them, so being able to go through the video profiles at our own pace and being able to re-watch them was, a much calmer and more organised way of attending a profiling event...we didn't feel rushed and could engage with only the profiles of children who we think we are suitable for”</i></p>
3.3.3	<p>Given the positive feedback we have continued to use this format of profiling events and presented our second pre-recorded profiling event the weekend of 16 – 19 July. 23 children were profiled (including 8 sets of siblings). 81 adoptive households registered for the event, as well as 16 adoption social workers. Initial expressions of interest have been received, on Monday 19 July 9 expressions were received in relation to 3 children.</p>
3.3.4	<p>The contract with the VAA's has been utilised well over the last year and Suzanne Whiteley, service manager lead for family finding has completed a review of the profile of children where external placements have been agreed. This was presented to the management board for discussion and oversight.</p>
3.4	Adoption Support
3.4.1	<p>The Adoption Support service has continued to be busy and requests for a service from us remain high, with all 4 of the teams having a waiting list (of varying sizes) of families waiting for an allocated social work</p>

	<p>service from us. Overall, there has been stability in the staff group in adoption support, although a number of workers will be taking maternity leave in the autumn and this will seriously impact the service. Whilst previously cover has generally been managed and agreed where necessary within existing budgets, the pressures this year on the budget will need to be considered and can be discussed in more detail.</p> <p>3.4.2 There has been an ongoing and specific issue regarding capacity within the adoption support service and specifically regarding the team based in Leeds. This is with regard to long term sickness in the team, a long waiting list and now exacerbated by two members of staff about to go on maternity leave at the same time within the team. The management board are aware of the issue and discussions are ongoing about how we address these issues.</p> <p>3.4.3 Social workers are working more of a hybrid model with families, undertaking some face to face visits where it is assessed there is a need to visit and it is safe to do so, but working remotely on all other occasions. The team managers have worked really hard at creating opportunities for them and their teams to meet up out doors when they have been able to do so.</p> <p>3.4.4 Triage pilot – in May we commenced a pilot in the Leeds Adoption Support team involving a specific worker undertaking a ‘Triage’ role with enquiries coming across from duty and also those families who are currently waiting for an allocated social worker. This pilot will be evaluated in Autumn but early indicators are that it is proving useful for families waiting to have a ‘keep in touch’ call from the worker; also some advice or signposting to other services by the worker is proving useful to hold families in the meantime; finally, there are some ‘one off’ tasks that have been able to be completed by the worker thus meaning the family don’t need to be allocated.</p> <p>3.4.5 Training and workshops – we have been able to successfully deliver an NVR (Non-violent resistance) training course for parents via Zoom and also a Talking Teens programme (also delivered remotely) has been commissioned and delivered. There are plans for more of both programmes to be offered later in the year. Both are funded via the ASF (Adoption Support Fund). We have continued to deliver workshops remotely, namely around education and brain-based parenting.</p> <p>3.4.6 Support groups – the general Adopters’ support group has continued to run online on a monthly basis. We have been able to move the single adopters’ support group to a hybrid model with an online meeting once a month and actual meet-ups with children twice a year. I am pleased to report that we have also launched our dads’ support group – also run online once a month; this is aimed at any dads or father figures who are involved in adoption. Our stay and play groups are again up and running face-to-face, although not all are yet back inside a building.</p>
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3.5	<p><u>Commissioned Services</u></p> <p>The Approved Providers list for therapeutic support is in the process of being reviewed with a revised new date for a new framework for April 2022. North Yorkshire County Council take a lead on the procurement for this.</p> <p>The Peer mentoring contract has been awarded with Adoption UK being awarded the new contract. OAWY is contract managing this contract and North and South Yorkshire will be charged for this contract management.</p> <p>The contract for adult work, birth parent work and voice and influence work with adopters is due to be extended for 1 year in March 2022.</p>
4.	<p>Special Guardianship</p> <p>4.1.1 The management board held a workshop on the 21st April regarding Special Guardianship listening to those with lived experience in the region and to meet with officers to discuss the priorities for the development and improvement in service delivery across the region. The majority of this work is carried out within the local areas by the local authorities. However, it was felt that there are some areas where it may make sense to collaborate and to join resources and to provide some things across the West Yorkshire region. This follows on from the successful contract with Kinship to deliver services across the region and the implementation of the support plan being used by all 5 local authorities as well as the development work regarding the improved financial support and work on the regional approach to financial assessment of adopters and special guardians. The notes from the workshop are attached at Appendix 2</p> <p>4.1.2 Calderdale, Leeds and Kirklees Cabinets have now formally agreed the implementation of the regional support provision for adopters and special guardians and the revisions made to the financial assessment tool. Bradford are supportive of this in principal but other priorities are taking precedent at the moment. Wakefield were taking advice regarding the regional approach at the last board meeting and were assessing any implications for their local authority.</p> <p>4.1.3 Nationally, the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board are asking for good practice examples across the country regarding financial support to special guardians and the work across the three local authorities who have implemented the changes are seen as extremely positive and shared as a pioneering example across the country.</p> <p>4.1.4 The commissioned service with Grandparents Plus is due for re-procurement at the end of March 2022. The service is very much valued by special guardians in the region and the project workers have worked hard with each LA to develop the offer and the voice and influence of SG's in the region.</p>

5	<p><u>Accommodation</u></p> <p>Given the relaxation of lock down we are looking at a rota for staff to return to the office in hybrid manner with continued working from home for part of the week. Discussions are being progressed with the relevant asset manager in each area to determine suitable meeting spaces and accommodation as this is a key challenge for the agency. There is no identified space for teams to come together in Kirklees or Calderdale at the present time and accommodation and appropriate rooms for direct work with families (free of charge) is an issue we are discussing with local authorities and CAMHS services to try and resolve and gain access to.</p>
6	<p><u>Staff development and service Improvement</u></p> <p>An all staff event was held at the end of June with 114 staff in attendance. The focus of the day was to bring people together to update each other on the different developments in the services. Work was also undertaken in teams regarding the work we are progressing regarding the cultural cohesion quality mark (CCQM). This followed on from last year's staff event regarding Black lives matter. We have now completed Phase 1 (Foundation) and have moved to Phase 2 (Developing) with access to a wide range of online resources via the CCQM website and all staff and managers are building in some time over the next year within team meetings to further their understanding and knowledge regarding these issues.</p> <p>During the last 18 months the training and development of staff has been on hold. Over the next year we have agreed a focus on gender variation training, theraplay and Dyadic Development Psychotherapy in order to better work with families across the region and ensure that staff are skilled in working with the children and families to promote improved relationships and understanding of the impact of trauma.</p>