



## 1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report sets out the developments within One Adoption West Yorkshire from April 2020 to March 2021.

## 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 The regionalisation of adoption services by the government as a structural reform programme is almost complete with 31 Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) and 145 local authorities (LA's) now live, with the remaining 6 local authorities likely join existing RAA's. The government is supporting the RAA's and is funding the development of a small national team to develop and improve services and support across for vulnerable children and families within the adoption system, working closely with Association of Directors of Children's services (ADCS) and others across the sector.
- 2.3 The latest figures released nationally show that there is no longer a gap between children waiting and the number of adopters available. However, there is a mismatch between the needs of the children requiring adoption and the adopters willing to consider these priority children. There remain a high number of children waiting with a placement order for 18 months or more. The government provided £1million to the adoption sector to improve the recruitment and preparation of adopters, with a key focus on attracting more adopters from the black and minority ethnic communities. The national campaign #YouCanAdopt was launched in September 2020 focussing on myth busting about who can adopt followed up with a pilot project for Black Adopters in Birmingham and London. In April, a further national campaign around adopting brothers and sisters together was launched with a more targeted approach to seek adopters specifically for priority children.
- 2.4 The future of the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) 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 2022. The government are undertaking a review of the ASF and this will inform the future plans for the ASF. The next Spending Review will hopefully clarify the longer-term plans for the adoption support fund.

## 3 Main issues

### 3.1 Use of Resources

#### 3.1.1 Staffing

The last year has been unprecedented for everyone and the teams have adapted well and have found creative ways to ensure that families are supported and children's plans progressed as far as possible. All staff and managers have been supported throughout the year in a variety of different ways from formal wellbeing support meetings with regular check ins as well informal support and buddying arrangements. There has been a range of materials and tips for self-care in these difficult times and as a service we have advocated flexible working and this has been well received by the staff. It is fair to say that morale across the teams has fluctuated at different times over the last year and as a management team we have tried to be proactive in supporting staff whilst also being responsive to need.

- 3.1.2 Sickness levels have remained low however, there are a small number of staff experiencing long term health problems related to emotional and mental health. These issues impact upon the capacity within certain areas of the service which are discussed later in the report. Occupational health is involved in advising and supporting staff and managers in these circumstances.
- 3.1.3 Recruitment has taken place regarding social worker appointments and business support staff with a number of new staff starting work in lockdown. Staff are looking forward to getting out to meet others outside initially as things open up. We have just completed a staff survey regarding future working arrangements and this will need analysis and further consideration over the coming months.

#### 3.1.4 Duty System

The duty and advice service has been maintained with staff working this from home and as such we have continued to provide the same level of duty service as we were pre-COVID/ lockdown. The use of a collective check-in call at the start of each day between duty manager and duty workers, has meant work has been able to be prioritised and breaks for workers throughout the day agreed. This has enabled the workers to identify each other as the 'duty team' and they have been able to

keep in contact with each other throughout the day. The overarching view is that a better service has been offered to callers, without the distractions of the office environment.

3.1.5 At the beginning of August, a choice system was implemented when a member of the public calls the duty and advice line. They can choose option 1 if they are interested in becoming an adopter; option 2 if they have a letterbox or contact query; and option 3 for any other type of call. This has reduced the number of calls to option 3 (which is essentially the 'old' main duty and advice line) and ensures that callers are able to immediately speak with someone who can better respond to the nature of their call. It also means that we can better understand the amount and type of calls into the service. Latterly there have been some difficulties with staff capacity to respond to option 2 and so these calls have been temporarily diverted to option 3 due to staffing issues which will be discussed later in the report. The total number of calls to the duty and advice line for the year is 3893. This averages at 75 calls per week. During lockdown periods when schools have been mostly closed we experienced a lower number of calls to the line, but this has since picked up again, although it is noted the average weekly calls for 2019/20 was 98 with total for the year at 5119, so it is clear that the number of calls to the duty and advice line have been lower over the past year. There has, however, been a significant increase in callers interested in becoming adopters across the year.

### 3.1.6 Accommodation & service delivery

Staff are continuing working from home with one member of staff in each area collecting the post with some managers going in for the induction of new staff and some staff go into the office for wellbeing or practical reasons when they are unable to work from home. The managers have been meeting up with staff for 1-2-1's and teams are starting to meet up in person. There is currently no accommodation for staff in Kirklees or Calderdale areas due to refurbishment and other staff using the space respectively. Bradford relocated OAWY staff to another floor that has no network for the Leeds computers and this is currently been looked at to address this issue. The local authorities are trying to identify interim accommodation, pending a more permanent relocation. The completion of the letterbox work and access to files work has been challenging without an office base in these areas leading to a full service not being able to be provided. The letterbox post has been re-directed from Huddersfield office to Leeds creating some delays and staff needing to travel to Leeds to process the work.

3.1.7 There are a lot of benefits with regards to staff working from home and it is clear there are efficiencies in this way of working as we can see from the performance data later in the report. The need to come together for collaboration, peer support and team discussions are high on the priority, therefore a different way of working is likely to be needed moving forward. The impact of this on service delivery needs to be fully assessed and we are currently working with staff to understand which elements can continue virtually and what needs to be carried out face to face. The importance of relationships with families and colleagues is critical and this must be taken into consideration when planning future arrangements.

### 3.1.8 Information Technology

The Bradford, Calderdale and Wakefield portals have been working effectively for most of the year. This has been essential with all staff working from home. The Kirklees portal remains an issue and has not been prioritised for resolution over the last year. However, this needs to be a key priority for next year as staff working with Kirklees still must use two laptops and the information regarding care planning is not as easily accessed.

## 3.2 **Partnership working**

### 3.2.1 Operational leads meetings

Over the last year this group has continued to address interface issues and particularly focussing on the impact of coronavirus upon children's care planning and moving onto adoption. Discussions have also taken place around the implementation of aligning adoption and special guardianship payments and joint audit work has also been discussed and agreed.

### 3.2.2 Multidisciplinary Team

The inaugural year of the OAWY Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, which delayed the start of the full operational service. Leeds Community Healthcare was awarded the contract to provide the health element of the MDT service in early December 2020. The recruitment of the health staff was quickly commenced, and all positions were successfully recruited in early 2021. The full team is expected to be in positions in summer 2021 when the Speech & Language Therapist and the Clinical Psychologists start in their roles.

The annual report regarding the work of the MDT is discussed more fully in Appendix 1 of this report with an evaluation of the work over the year and the planning for the forthcoming year.

### 3.2.3 Agency Medical Advisors and GP's

Medical advisors have continued to work hard during the Covid 19 pandemic to ensure that they provide medical information for children in a timely way for their adoption plans to progress. Medical advisors have also continued to support adoption panels. Due to increased demand the number of adoption panels has now increased from 7 to 8 per month and commissioning discussions are under way with health in relation to providing medical advice for the additional panel on a consistent basis. The issue of GP's undertaking medical assessments of adopters has been a crucial issue this year with the focus of health staff towards managing the impact of Covid within the NHS. GP's largely have tried to work with the agency to

progress matters but inevitably there has been delays. There are a small number of GP's who have refused to carry out medicals regarding prospective adopters or who request large fees and in these cases issues have been escalated within the Clinical Commissioning Groups local.

#### 3.2.4 Virtual school heads (VSH)

The work across the region from our Education Lead alongside the five Virtual School Heads (VSH) continues to grow. The helpline is well used and accessed by adoptive parents, schools and other professionals offering advice and support as needed. This allows us to have a very current understanding of the difficulties faced by families and professionals, informing training needs, developing the services understanding of how best to support our families and to develop online tools as needed. We continue to work to increase the awareness of attachment and trauma in West Yorkshire schools and see this as such an important piece of work that it is now outlined within the Terms of Reference for the VSH meetings. We remain passionate in our delivery of Attachment and Trauma training to school staff and childcare provisions and by providing workshops to adopters in partnership with the service delivery teams. This is discussed more in the Appendix 1.

3.2.5 Grandparents plus continue to attend allowing further opportunities to share information and knowledge across the region regarding support for special guardians around education issues and the growth of referrals to Kinship has been helped given information provided to schools raising awareness about special guardianship arrangements.

#### 3.2.6 Special Guardianship

The two key areas for development over the last year across the region regarding Special Guardians has been the implementation of a regional support plan and the implementation of a regional approach regarding the financial support to SG's. The Special Guardianship (SG) Support Plan is being rolled out across West Yorkshire and is currently being used in all the local authorities (LA) for post order support and testing is underway for its use following initial assessment and during proceedings. The financial offer for Special Guardians is being implemented in each LA with some differences regarding post 18 support and additional benefits to mirror the fostering offers. Calderdale remain the only LA to have executive sign off on their offer. Leeds have an in principal agreement and are aiming to implement their offer by July 2021. Bradford is likely to be the last LA to implement their offer in April 2022 although in principal agrees to the proposals. Wakefield are considering this following financial and legal advice with a decision due in the next two months.

3.2.7 The Kinship (formerly Grandparents Plus) project is progressing well with the further support provided from the ASF Covid-19 funds. There are three project workers offering 1:1 Support to kinship carers in the region, alongside support groups and access to telephone advice. Their regional Facebook group is now moderated and had over 200 very active members. This allows us to connect with many special guardians in the region and hear their views. OAWY is also exploring the use of two casual Youth Workers to establish an advocacy group for young people on SGOs to develop the voice and influence of young people in these arrangements across the region. Training in Non-Violent Resistance for the kinship teams across the 5 LA's took place in January 2021. 23 support workers and managers undertook this training Two of these were the project workers from Kinship. There were four follow up practice sessions to help embed the model in practice and the participants can attend the OAWY practice sessions on an ongoing basis.

3.2.8 A therapeutic parenting programme designed for special guardians called 'Guiding Guardians' has been commissioned. The first program was in March and OAWY made a group application to the fund on behalf of the region. OAWY are working with the kinship manager's in the region to find ways to increase the use of the Adoption Support Fund, to provide much needed therapeutic support to special guardian families.

3.2.9 OAWY hosted a development day on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021 with senior leaders and practice managers from the 5 LAs, Kinship and two special guardians. The focus was on the vision for special guardianship support across the region, reaffirming current goals and considering future priorities. There is current discussion about where OAWY can add value to local services and the benefit of regional working to deliver or co-ordinate some services for special guardians such as a website/information pack, preparation, ASF applications, Family Time support etc. An options paper for considering the progression of this regional approach to developing services will be discussed with the management board in the next few months.

### 3.3 **Performance Management**

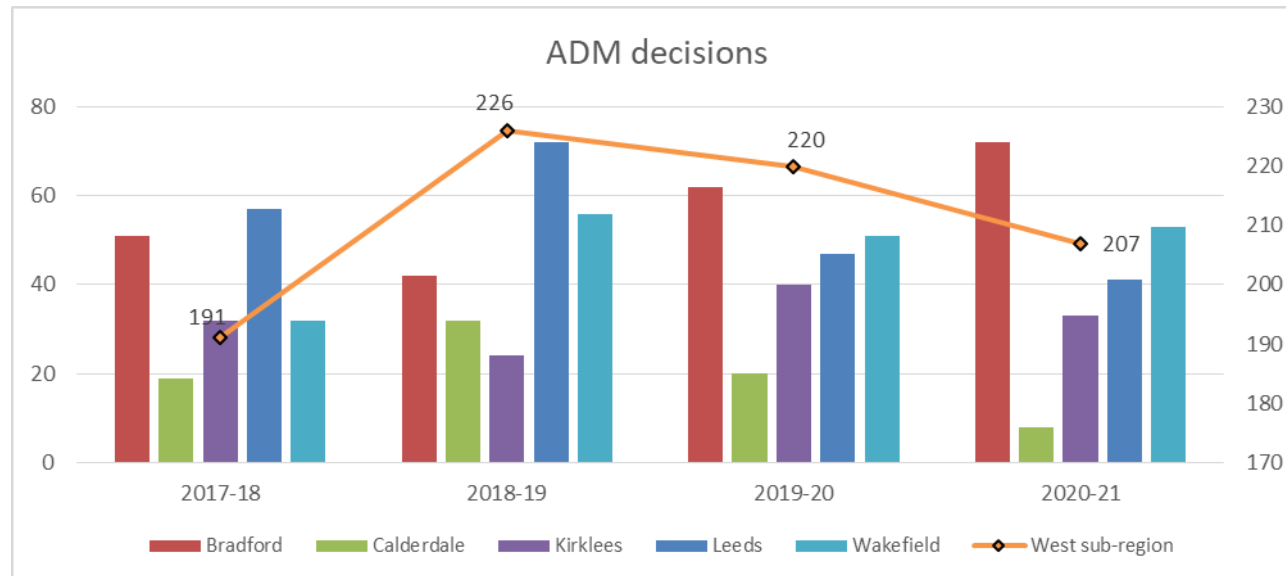
3.3.1 The agency provides quarterly reports to the management board. This data provided has developed over the last 4 years and is gathered to ensure that we are aware of how much work is undertaken, how well was it undertaken and if anyone is any better off.

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

#### 3.3.2 The children with a plan ratified for adoption during 2020/21

Between April 2020 and March 2021, 207 children had a plan for adoption ratified by the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities Agency Decision Makers. Of the 207 children with a plan for adoption, there were 99 female and 108 male children. In total,

this is a reduction from last year's full year figure of 220 children from across the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities and reflects the delays in the court arena caused by the pandemic. Adoption decisions across Bradford continue to rise and Wakefields number have remained high for the last three years. Conversely numbers in Calderdale, Kirklees and Leeds have reduced.



### 3.3.3 Ethnicity

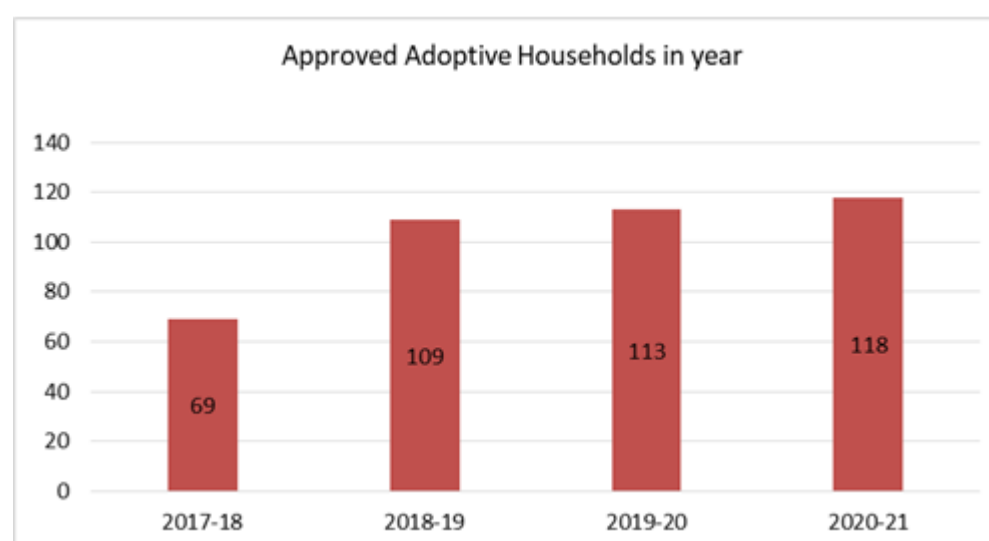
Of the 207 children with a plan for adoption ratified this year, 167 (81%) children were from white British backgrounds (including information not obtained) and 40 children (19%) were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, including children from eastern European, Gypsy Roma, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds.

### 3.3.4 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 and cannot always be achieved. It is essential that sibling assessments are carried out to ensure good quality decision making and support plans are evidence based if children are placed together or apart. Of the 91 individual siblings placed during the year, 35 individual children were placed apart, for which 32 the plan was to be placed apart.

### 3.3.5 Adopter recruitment

118 adoptive households were approved during the year and you will note from the table below that this is another increase compared to the previous three years.



3.3.6 Within the 118 households, 221 individuals were approved throughout 2020-21. Of these, 22 (10%) are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds (last year it was 10%). 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. Over the last year we commissioned an organisation called My Adoption Family to work with us in engaging with Black African and Black Caribbean communities in the region to help us increase the diverse range of adopters available. We undertook a webinar 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 adopters to come forward. The feedback from this discussion highlighted issues of trust regarding public services. Face to face engagement and building trust and credibility is key in increasing the recruitment of adopters within the Black communities and working with faith and community-based organisations is key moving forward. During the pandemic this development work has been hindered and with the court delays we now have a number of adopters from BAME communities who are waiting for a match.

3.3.7 Households approved for sibling groups has increased by 8 this year with 24 households approved for sibling groups, all 24 for 2 children; and 28 households open to an Early Permanence Placements ..this has reduced but has, nevertheless, exceeded the demands for these placements over the year. The implementation of a new training course has helped to shift thinking of those prospective adopters in being able to have the confidence to consider adopting brothers and sisters together.

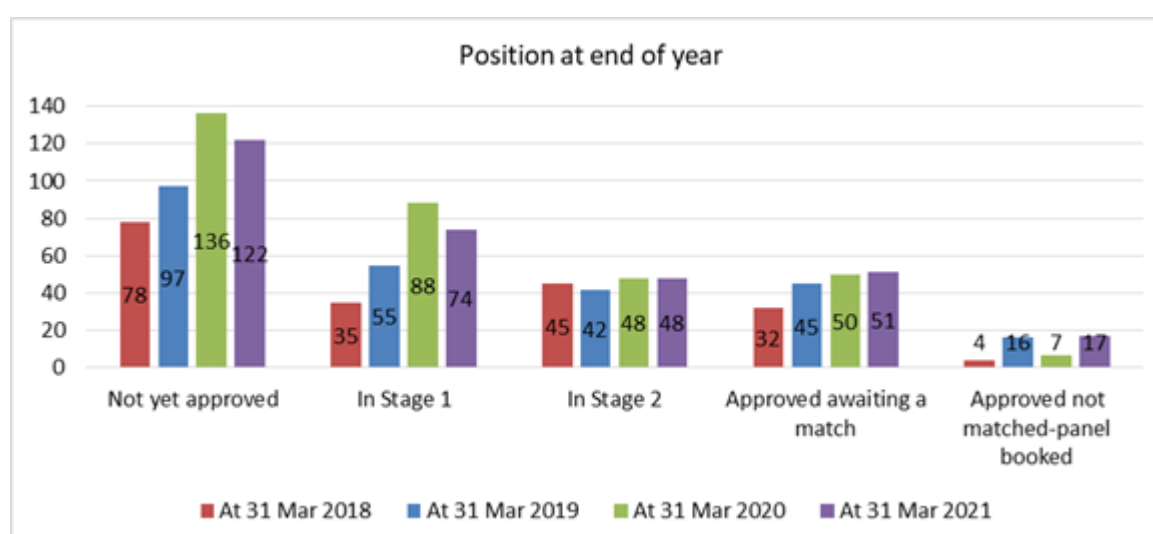
### 3.3.8 Children currently with an adoption plan

As of the end of March 2021 there are 137 children with a plan for adoption and have a placement order, from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities not currently placed and requiring adopters. 64 children out of the 137 are 0 - 2 years, 52 are between 2 and 4 years and 21 children are 5 years of age or older.

3.3.9 From the children waiting for a placement there are 66 girls and 71 boys, and 22% are children from BME backgrounds (including children from eastern European, Gypsy Roma, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds). 65 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.

### 3.3.10 Adopters available

As of the end of March 2021, there are 51 approved adoptive households that have not been matched and 34 are in the process of looking and are in discussions about considering placements and 17 have a panel date booked.



3.3.11 On the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 122 adopters are in the process of assessment (in stage 1 or 2) although these will take a number of months to become approved. This is a positive picture as the number of adopters approved is healthier than previously and allows for placement choice for some children. However, a more nuanced approach to recruitment and approval is required to ensure that we have adopters who can meet the needs of children with a plan for adoption and particularly the children we know who wait longer. This will be discussed later in the report.

**B) Timeliness:** Are children being matched and placed without delay including those children who wait longer?

### 3.3.12 Children matched in the year for adoption

Between April 2020 and March 2021, 183 children from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities were matched with families at adoption panels; this is an increase compared to the previous three years from across the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities and is really positive given the pandemic. From April 2020 to March 2021, 23% (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.

- 138 of the children matched were 0 to 2 years old.
- 30 children matched were 2 to 4 years old.
- 15 children were aged 5 years or older.
- 88 children were part of a sibling group (of the 183 matched).
- 81 children (of the 183 matched) were placed who are part of a sibling group of which 33 were placed apart, 31 had a plan to place apart due to their individual needs.
- 19 children (of the 183 matched) had been previously placed in early permanence placements (11 during the year) of which 6 of these 19 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.

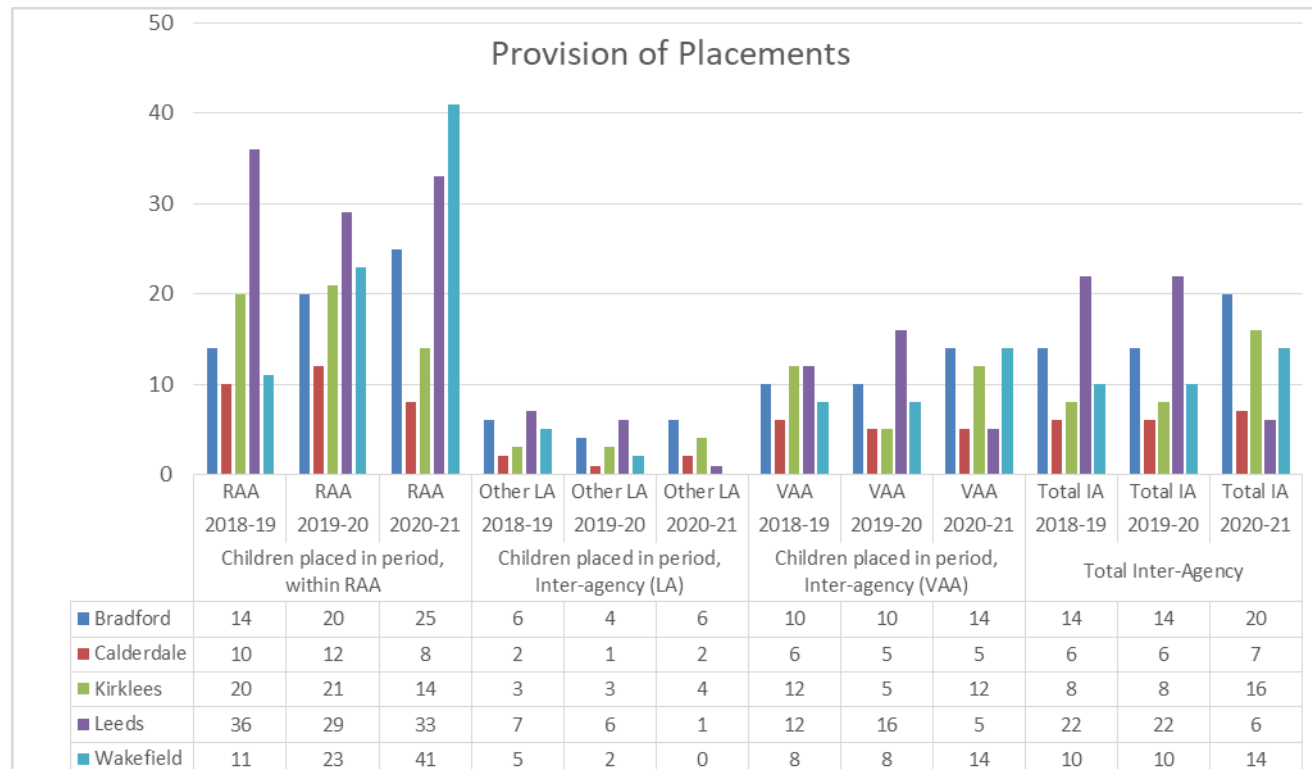
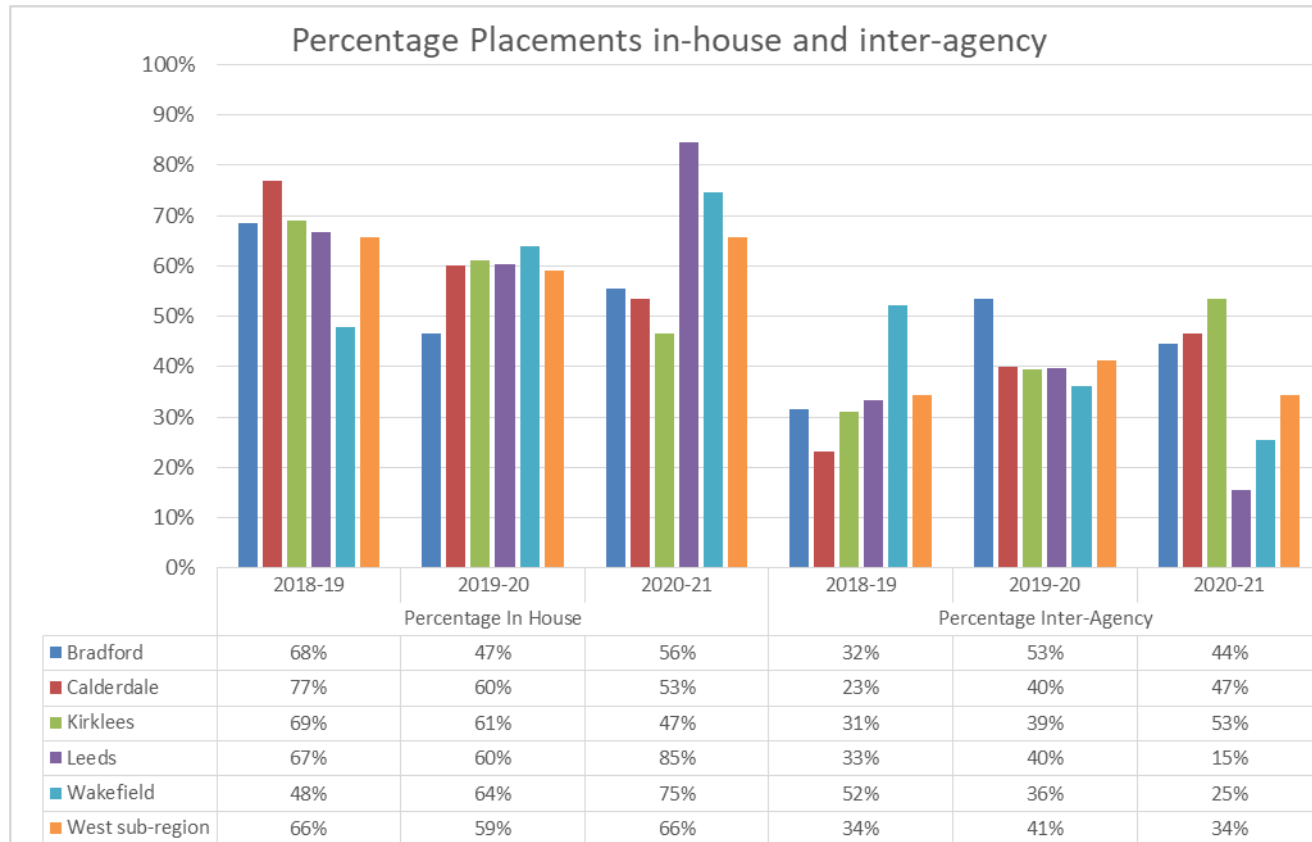
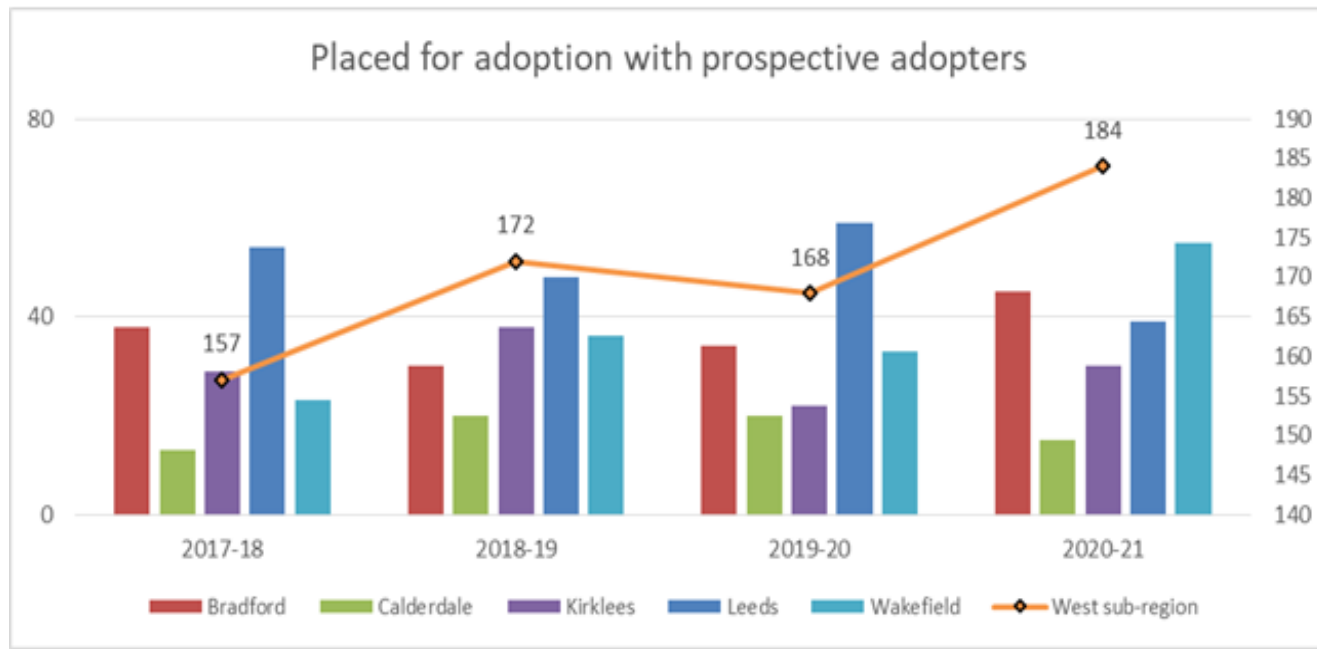
### 3.3.13 Provision of Placements

184 children were placed this year. The percentage of placements provided in-house within the region has increased significantly this year.

121 children within OAWY.

- 13 children with other local authorities or other Regional agencies.
- 50 children with Voluntary Adoption Agencies

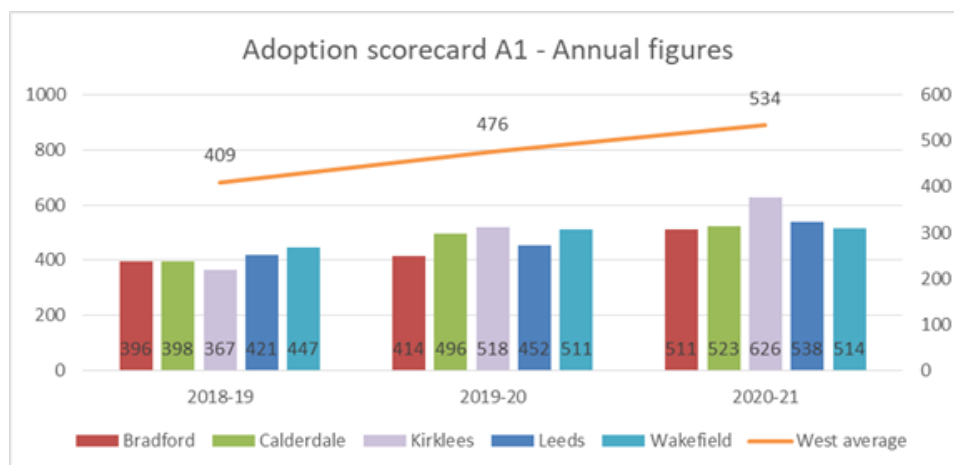
The percentage this year was 66% in house and 34% interagency. Last year it was 59% in house and 41% interagency and is a positive picture.



### 3.3.14 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 534 days, the National Indicator target is 426 days.

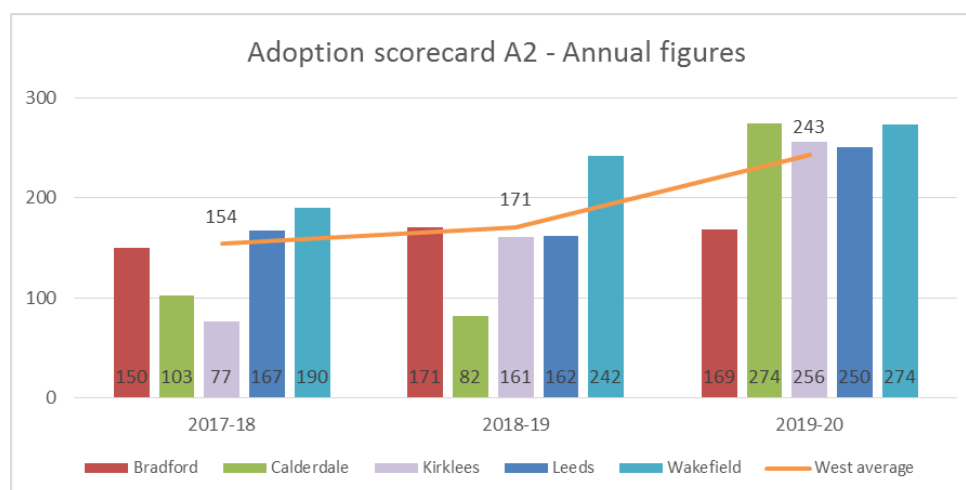


- 39 of the 157 children adopted entered care more than 3 years ago.
- 94 of the 157 children adopted were hard to place children.
- 70 of the 157 children adopted took more than 500 days between entering care and being placed,
- Of the 70 children that took more than 500 days 45 of the 70 were hard to place children with 20 having 2 or more characteristics

3.3.15 These figures relate to the time children entered care and were then adopted in the year. It is clear that some of the children being older and with more complex needs has resulted in adoption taking longer to achieve and there are positives that adoption has been achieved for some of these children who would otherwise remain in care. Some children entered care and there were delays in the court processes and plans that did not come to fruition with family members. It is important to look at the individual local authorities and situations 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.

### 3.3.16 A2 indicator

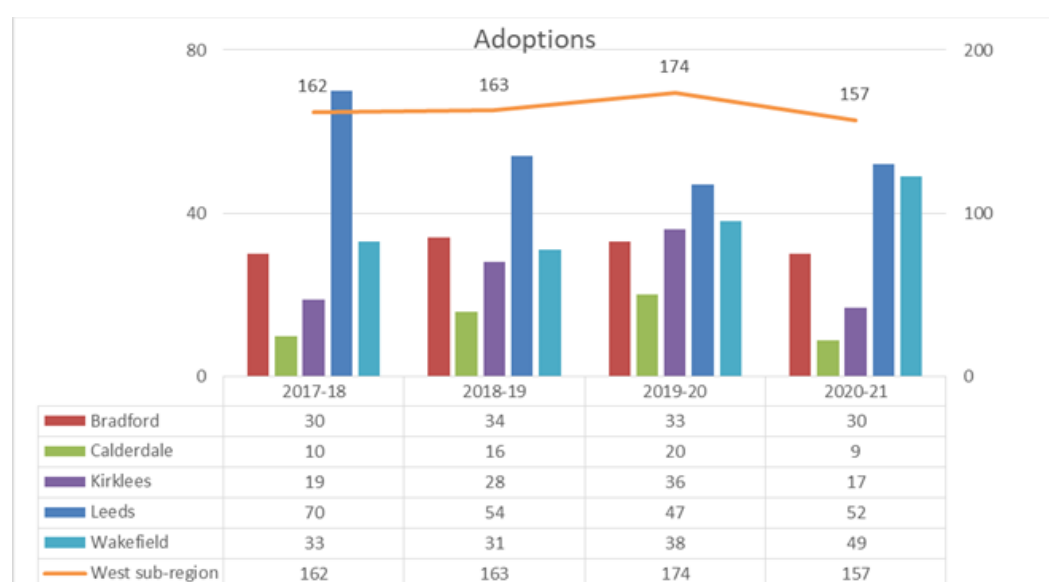
The average time for those children adopted in the period, between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (Indicator A2) for children in West Yorkshire has increased to 259 days, the National indicator target is 121 days. 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. However, as discussed in the above paragraph the cohort of these children adopted is important to note and the fact that children have secured permanence and an adoptive family is positive for each of these individual children.



### 3.3.17 Children adopted from care

The number of children who have been formally adopted has decreased by 17 (157) with 12% of children leaving care being adopted across the region. The National average is 12%. This is reduced due to the pandemic and delay in the family courts hearing adoption cases.





### 3.4 Practice, quality of provision and management oversight

#### 3.4.1 Recruitment and Assessment

The first half of the year saw an increase in enquiries to adopt and with a backlog caused by the pandemic this presented real challenges for the recruitment teams. The number of people entering the adoption process slowed during Quarters 3 and 4 of the year as a result of the decision to temporarily decline applications from those seeking to adopt a child under two years of age unless they were interested in adopting children from a Black African/Caribbean or mixed heritage background or siblings or children with a disability of complex health issues. This provided much needed respite to the Recruitment and Assessment teams to progress applicants in the assessment process from the beginning of 2020/21. The number of sessional assessment workers was increased to help with the capacity to progress assessments in a timelier way and there are currently no adopters waiting to be allocated an assessing social worker for their stage two assessment.

3.4.2 Two additional social workers have been recruited and are due to join the Recruitment and Assessment teams in the coming month to add further capacity. Despite the ongoing challenges relating to staff sickness and the impact of Covid 19, 118 households were approved to adopt in 2020/21, an increase of five households from the previous year. The feedback from adopters during the pandemic regarding their experience has, overall, being very positive. This is some feedback from one adopter:

*“We have always felt that K. has always been in our corner even in the most difficult of times. This sometimes meant advising us what we needed to hear rather than what we wanted to hear! She has always offered emotional and practical support whilst being her calm and measured self....We did not always initially understand the reasons why K was so thorough, but as the process progressed this always became clear and we quickly realised it was best to follow her advice! She left no stone unturned and her preparation for the panel reviews meant we felt confident on both occasions.”*

3.4.3 Online training and preparation for prospective adopters has continued to develop and now includes:

- Preparation Training (3 days via webinar)
- Building Relationships (E-learning)
- Early Permanence (Half day webinar)
- Adopting Siblings (Half day webinar)
- Experienced Parents (Half day webinar)
- Foster Carers Adopting (One day webinar)
- Connected by Adoption (Half day webinar)

3.4.4 Further training is now in development to offer additional support to adoptive parents in relation to preparing to become parents and in relation to issues around contact and identity. We have engaged the support of a number of adopted adults, alongside adoptive parents to develop and co-facilitate elements of the training. We remain in regular contact with PAC-UK, who provide support to birth parents, and will revisit their involvement in the preparation of adopters when they feel able to facilitate this.

3.4.5 Following a review of Stage One data and extensive consultation with staff, from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 the Recruitment and Assessment service was re-structured with two managers overseeing all adoption advisors and families in stage one of the adoption process. The implementation of this change has resulted in some line manager change for staff, but this has been kept to a minimum. It is hoped that the re-structure will provide greater consistency in the experience of prospective adopters and in decision making early in their adoption journey. The business support to the recruitment and assessment work is key in moving adopters through the process ensuring that checks and training are progressed from stage 1 to stage 2 of the process.

3.4.6 We are now taking steps to increase the number of adopter enquiries again through our marketing strategy for priority children in particular, and through increasing the possible number of attendees at online information events, which take place twice per month.

### 3.4.7 Adoption Panels

Adoption panel is working online via Zoom and is operating well although capacity continues to be a challenge and we meet regularly review agendas to ensure that items can be progressed. We have moved from 7 to 8 panels per month to increase capacity and continue to hold two panels per month specifically for approvals as this allows us to add an additional case. The panel chairs provide a biannual report for the adoption agency and this feedback is discussed with the local authority adoption leads and decision makers regularly. The business support teams are central to the effective running of panels and the feedback regarding the quality of the organisation of these and minutes are very positive.

See 3.4.31 for quality assurance data relating to adoption panels.

### 3.4.8 Family Finding

With 184 children being placed for adoption during the year the family finding teams have worked creatively to undertake family finding and achieve matches for children within the constraints of a challenging and the increase in the number of children being placed for adoption is reflective of this work. The number of children placed for adoption is the highest number of children placed since the regionalisation of adoption services within West Yorkshire.

3.4.9 There have been additional pressures on all the teams in family finding, the complexities of transitions during the pandemic have remained challenging throughout the year with the differing restrictions in place during the year, this has meant an increase in the work required to ensure effective planning including individual risk assessments being carried out to ensure transitions can be undertaken safely as well as a higher level of support needed for both adopters and foster carers. The University of East Anglia Moving to Adoption model has been utilised where possible to support transitions and has particularly supported the getting to know you phased of introductions.

3.4.10 There has been an increase in the number of children placed within the West Yorkshire region during 2020/21, which has increased from 61.5% (during 2019/20) of children placed to 64.7% of children, children placed in the wider Yorkshire and Humber region has also increased from 8.9% in 2019/20 to 11.4% in 2020/21. The number of placements outside of Yorkshire has fallen from 29.6% during 2019/20 to 23.9% in 2020/21.

3.4.11 This is largely due to an increase in the availability of in-house families and the fact that OAWY commissioned the Voluntary Adoption Alliance within the region to provide families more locally for priority children. This contract commenced at the end of May 2020 with the aim of 30 families being provided within an 80-mile radius, in fact, 34 children were placed by the end of the year. A project lead has worked with OAWY to enhance the knowledge regarding the needs of children requiring external placements through the contract. We have also established external linking meetings where children are profiled to partner agencies under the contract and work continues to ensure placements are utilised and working relationships continue to be developed.

3.4.12 Feedback from families have been positive regarding the work of the family finders includes this quote:

*“The adoption process has not always been easy as single adopter however C is a fantastic asset to your organisation! Over the last 6 months his professionalism, efficiency and conscientious approach ensured our match continued to progress swiftly during the difficulties we encountered.”*

3.4.13 Social workers from the local authorities also welcome the support of the family finders:

*“It’s my first Early Permanence case and L has really taken the time to explain everything to me which I really appreciate. It was also clear that she had really taken the time to read the case files in detail before the linking meeting and she has done an amazing job with the EPP paperwork”.*

3.4.14 Profiling events have been delivered virtually during the year with five events taking place, the initial event engaged adopters approved by OAWY and the subsequent events have also included adopters from the Voluntary Adoption Alliance and local regional adoption agencies (RAA's) and LA's. These events take a great deal of organisation and the business support staff are key in ensuring the booking system works well and that the technology is working well to manage such big events. 55 children have been profiled at the events, including 8 sets of siblings (2 children in sibling group), 166 adoptive families have attended the events, with 27 children receiving expressions of interest. 3 children have subsequently matched with adopters, with 2 now being placed for adoption and one who was in the introduction process at the end of the year, in addition 1 child was linked with adopters at the end of the year (matched at the start of 2021/22) and there are 2 linking visits scheduled from the latest profiling event.

3.4.15 OAWY is utilising Link Maker to profile children to OAWY approved families as well as being able to use the system to profile children to a wider reach of adopters, including targeted profiling to adopters through the contract with the Voluntary Adoption Alliance and nationally where needed. During the year we have reviewed our approach to internal linking meetings and have made these more practitioner led with both family finding and adoption social workers profiling the children and families they

are family finding for, this change continues to be under review to ensure we are able to achieve timely matches for children. Alongside utilising Link Maker, networks between teams and profiling events we have a number of family finding methodologies to support children being matched with adoptive families.

#### 3.4.16 Adoption Support

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

The teams adapted very quickly to the pandemic and their first concern was the wellbeing of families they support and ensured that families were aware quickly about support available. The teams have continued to work with families via virtual means and undertake risk-assessed home visits where it is considered to be necessary from a well-being point of view, in addition to those where there is a risk of breakdown or potential safeguarding concerns. As part of the virtual contact with families we have been able to continue to complete Adoption Support Assessments and reviews as well as keeping in touch calls. As we anticipated we saw an increased number of calls to the duty and advice line since the schools re-opened in September with key themes from parents relating to difficulties their children were experiencing with the transitions from school to home-schooling (and vice versa); we have been able to support parents to seek ongoing places in school for those children who needed the consistency and predictability of going to school through the lockdowns. Some feedback from adopters about the work undertaken by OAWY staff in the last year include:

- *Thank you for always being there for us. You are amazing and always have the right things to say. Also thank you for your letter that you wrote to for his high school. Really appreciated.*
- *I just need to say Thank you, from the bottom of my heart. When we were in crisis you listened and more importantly you acted. You have saved this family*
- *Once again...many thanks for your engagement, kindness and understanding yesterday. I appreciate all that you have sent to me today (from a caller to duty and advice)*

3.4.17 Applications to the Adoption Support Fund have continued unabated throughout the year. Some of the therapy provided to children, young people and families has been able to be delivered by providers via virtual means and where this hasn't been an appropriate method, therapy has paused by agreement and the therapist has had a minimum contact to keep in touch and maintain relationships. Some providers have been able latterly to explore with families safe means for therapy to be delivered face to face again. This year we have successfully accessed £1,995,729 of adoption support funding for families via 534 applications to the ASF. Because funding to the ASF was only agreed for 1 year there has been a high-intensity of activity since February 2020 with workers reviewing support plans and applying to the ASF in order that there is no break in therapy from the old financial year to the new – since 1<sup>st</sup> February to end March there were 237 applications made for therapy to take place in 2021/22. The administrative burden of the ASF is a constant issue and the business support team manage the applications and the invoicing arrangements professionally and are extremely effective and efficient in overseeing this work.

3.4.18 The Adoption Support Fund COVID packages proved popular with families, in particular workshops in relation to Child to Parent Violence, support to adopted teens, Adoption UK webinars and support groups and the offer of EMDR sessions to parents. It is estimated that through these additional packages we were able to provide support to over 2,500 families.

3.4.19 The NVR (Non-violent Resistance) programme has been adapted as a virtual model and is being delivered from April '21. A new programme 'Talking Teens' has also been able to be delivered successfully online in February/March with further programmes due to be delivered later in the year. Brain based parenting webinars and FASD webinars are really popular. Stay and Play support groups have moved to be run outdoors with smaller groups attending when restrictions have allowed that to happen. The single adopters' group has resumed, with a mixture of outdoors meet-ups and online support and the general adopter support group has started back up – now a regional online support group, meeting monthly via Zoom. There are further plans for a support group for Dads and one for those involved in Trans-racial adoption to be established during the next year. Other groups and parenting programmes have had to be paused because they work best on a face-to-face basis.

3.4.20 Access to records work had virtually ceased at the start of the lockdown and the archivist but with a revised protocol with the local authorities being agreed, some work has been able to be undertaken although this involves electronic records only at this stage. The Letterbox service has been impacted over the last year. The work has had to focus upon electronic exchanges where possible. One Adoption West Yorkshire has been involved in early discussions around the development and piloting of an App specifically to aid contact between Adoptive and First (aka birth) families. It is hoped we will be able to pilot this with a small number of families towards the end of this year.

#### 3.4.21 Commissioned Contracts: Adoption UK and PAC/UK

##### Adoption UK: Peer Mentoring

There are currently 24 active peer mentors supporting 57 families across the region via the 1:1 support service. Furthermore, there are 6 families who are accessing the enhanced peer mentor support package.

Here are some comments from those accessing the mentoring service:

- Mentee – *“To normalize in some way what feels so alien at times and at my lowest points to bring some hope and strong sense that this too will pass. Hearing about the mentors’ journey, empathy and hearing something familiar at such a strange time was reassuring.”*
- Mentor – *“It just gives the personal side to the adoption process, because from day one you meet professionals and I think it brings adopted children to life.”*
- Social Worker – *“I don’t live the experience of adoptive life every day. I can talk about it anecdotally...but peer mentoring has really helped support and complement what we do as it gives adopters whether in assessment or post placement a very real perspective about the emotional impact but also the practical things.”*

#### 3.4.22 Adoption UK: Adopter Engagement

The Adopter Engagement provision has been active in One Adoption West Yorkshire in the following work:

- Q&A Prep Training x2
- Sibling Training co delivered
- Sibling Webinar
- Experienced adopter planning meeting
- Experienced adopter webinar

3.4.23 In addition Facebook groups run by Adopter Engagement coordinators across the whole of the Yorkshire and Humber region have reported the following activity:

- Adopter Voice Facebook group 732 Members. Facebook Early years and Primary school group 226 members. Facebook Secondary and Further Education group 124 members.
- Themes on Facebook have been around children’s behaviour responses, Mother’s Day difficulties and anxiety increase amongst children, particularly teenagers. Also, parents’ understanding of different kinds of therapies on offer and the adoption support fund.

#### 3.4.24 PAC-UK: adults work

PAC-UK have dealt with 472 calls to their advice line and worked with 184 service users (existing and new) across the year. These services are provided for all adults affected by adoption but most of the work is undertaken with birth parents and adopted adults.

#### 3.4.25 PAC-UK: Adoptees service

71 young people from West Yorkshire have been involved in Adoptees during the year. Additionally, 6 of the members of the Adoptees Youth Council are from West Yorkshire. Activities over the past year have been mostly online activities and a chat forum, which has been a new service introduced to offer support since the introduction of the Covid restrictions.

#### 3.4.26 Non-Agency Adoption

One Adoption West Yorkshire undertakes non-agency adoption on behalf of Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield councils, Bradford and Leeds councils undertake their own. Due to the pandemic this work was temporarily suspended due to priorities within the service and the court process. There were a number of urgent matters to progress as directed by the court and these were completed. This work has now fully resumed.

3.4.27 Over the last 12 months there were a total of 10 enquiries received for non-agency adoption. 40% of enquiries were from families living in Wakefield, 10% were from families living in Calderdale and 50% were from families living in Kirklees.

3.4.28 Over the past 12 months there were 12 non-agency adoption orders granted, 33% were for families from Calderdale, 25% were for families from Wakefield and 42% were for families from Kirklees.

#### 3.4.29 Disruptions

There were 2 disruptions of adoption placements (preadoption order) during 2020/21 which relate to 1 placement (the 2 children were part of a sibling group) with in house adopters. This is a decrease from last year of 7 disruptions. The children’s ages at disruption were 1 and 2 years of age, their placement disrupted shortly after placement (6 days for one of the children and 2 days for the second child). A disruption review has been commissioned to analyse the circumstances of the disruption. Given the circumstances of the lockdown and availability of support services I would have expected higher rates of disruption given the stresses of lockdown. This reflects the hard work and support provided by staff across the region to supporting children moving in with their new family.

#### 3.4.30 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.

3.4.31 A Quality Assurance mechanism for panel work is used as a matter of course and has found that 93% of prospective adopter reports were of a good or outstanding standard (14% outstanding, 79% good, 1% requiring improvement and 6% not recorded) this is an improvement on last year's figure of 82%.

3.4.32 In relation to Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) provided by local authority social workers 85% were considered good or outstanding (2% outstanding, 83% good, 11% requiring improvement and 3% not recorded) this is an improvement on last year figure of 57%. OAWY continue to work with the 5 local authorities to raise the quality of CPRs and support them with training and development work. More detailed feedback is provided for each local authority.

3.4.33 There has been 42 responses to the panel survey in 2020/21. Attendees were asked to rate their overall experience of attending adoption panel, the responses were:

- Very good – 33 (78.57%).
- Good – 7 (16.67%).
- Neither good nor poor - 1 (2.38%).
- Very poor – 1 (2.38%).

3.4.34 Between 01 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 the Customer Relations Service logged twelve complaints for One Adoption West Yorkshire. Three customers complained wishing to challenge an assessment, two complained about a breakdown in the adoption process and one customer complained about both of these areas. Three people complained about a lack of post-adoption support. Issues relating to letterbox contact, disagreement with placement and sexual orientation discrimination each received one complaint respectively.

3.4.35 No complaints were logged at stage two which is extremely positive. The customer relations team's experience of working with OAWY is that stage one investigating officers are proactive in making phone/ face to face contact with complainants and very rarely exceed the corporate or statutory response timescales. Where this is unavoidable the team liaise well with customer relations so that customer expectations are managed. This approach is positive and an understanding of any themes arising from complainants is regularly discussed at the senior leadership team to see if there is any learning from these in making changes for improvement.

#### 3.4.36 Case File Audits

55 audits were completed across the service during 2020/21 by Service & Team managers. The result of each audit is recorded as either excellent, good, satisfactory or requires improvement. Any actions identified from the audits are fed-back to the worker to support improvement. Of the 55 audits:

- 4 (7.27%) were excellent.
- 32 (58.18%) were good.
- 16 (29.09%) were satisfactory.
- 3 (5.45%) required improvement.

3.4.37 An independent auditor was appointed to undertake specific audit work across the recruitment & assessment teams to ensure the quality of the casework, decision making and management oversight was safe and appropriate. 32 files were audited between September and October 2020. Of the 32 audits:

- Excellent – 5 (15%).
- Good – 10 (31%).
- Satisfactory – 13 (40%).
- Requires improvement – 4 (12%).

An action plan was developed as part of this audit and the majority of points raised have been addressed.

3.4.38 Joint audits were completed across the region, 27 in total, between a OAWY Service Manager and an LA lead during 2020/21. OAWY recorded the result of each audit as either excellent, good, satisfactory or requires improvement. Of the 27 audits:

- Excellent – 6 (22.22%).
- Good – 11 (40.74%).
- Satisfactory – 9 (33.33%).

- Requires improvement – 1 (3.7%).

This joint audit work is work in progress and will be further developed over the coming year to look at themes emerging from these for both agencies.

### 3.4.39 Voice and Influence of Children, Young People and Adopters

Appendix 2 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.

## 3.5 **Continuous Professional and Service Development**

### 3.5.1 Staff development and support

Staff development during the year has been challenging with the focus with staff on self-care and emotional wellbeing for themselves and the families they are working with. A staff event was held in June and featured guest speaker Lisa Cherry. The focus was relationships, trauma and adversarial growth. A second event was held in November and the focus was Black Lives Matter with staff hearing from those with lived experience and given time to consider how we can improve our practice as well as support staff regarding these issues.

### 3.5.2 Training

No training was commissioned during 200/21 due to Covid. However, here are details of what was delivered:

- Adoption Support have had 2 whole-service get togethers in the past year; the first was a social to reconnect people but the second focussed on contact (the pilot of the App and letterbox policy).
- Family Finding and Recruitment & Assessment - to enable connectivity between family finding and adoption teams within OAWY virtual joint practice forums have been established focus on joint areas of practice with the opportunity to network. There have been a number of forums over the year which have focussed on transitions in adoption during the pandemic, adoption disruptions, adoption support provision and contact in adoption.
- HOME-assessment Training: During this reporting period the Multidisciplinary Team continued to deliver Assessment Framework training, by supporting OAWY social work teams in conducting HOME assessments. 15 support / training sessions were delivered during this year. The HOME is a core instrument in the assessment framework and focuses on how a child's day to day experiences are relevant to different aspects of their developmental needs. The instrument traditionally uses interview and observation to explore the key themes during a one-hour home visit to the family. Throughout the interview and visit the interaction between the child and main caregiver is carefully observed. At the beginning of the pandemic an on-line version of the method was developed; using videophones and tablets the team worked with OAWY social workers and carers to create "virtual home visits", which meant that the vital assessments were not delayed during the pandemic;
- School Training: 15 sessions of trauma and attachment training were delivered to schools across the WY region. These training sessions were delivered using on-line platforms and aim to increase school staff's understanding of the impact of trauma and early adversity on child's behaviour and their development.
- The education specialist created and developed an on-line video to help with lock-down and home schooling. In addition, on-line videos were created and published on One Adoption You-Tube Channel to provide information about FASD aimed at schools and returning to school for parents. In August a webinar for 50 parents with school age children provided guidance on returning to school. The feedback from the parents was very positive; the participants appreciated the content of the session and the fact that it was hosted on-line, which made it easier for a larger number of parents to participate.
- FASD and Brain based parenting webinars delivered to over 500 staff and adopters and special guardians

### 3.5.3 Strategic issues and forward plans

OAWY's 3 Year plan on a page, Appendix 3, outlines the vision, mission, outcomes, and priorities up to 2024. Activities linked to the delivery of the plan are tracked through the OAWY Service Improvement Plan.

## **Corporate Considerations**

### 4.1 **Consultation and Engagement**

There has been ongoing engagement with staff over the year. 2 all staff events have been held, one in June and one in November which covered relationships, trauma and adversarial growth and Black Live Matters respectively. Quarterly newsletters are in place to keep staff updated as well as email bulletins if needed. Ongoing engagement with adopters,

young people through adoptees 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 was reviewed and updated February 2021 and can be found as Appendix 4. Actions from this are fed into the annual service improvement plan and tracked throughout the year.

#### **4.3 Resources and value for money**

4.3.1 The final 2020/21 outturn position for OAWY was an underspend of £16.6k. The main pressure on the 2020/21 budget was a £292k shortfall of Inter Agency income but this was offset by Staffing savings of £159k, additional income of £104k and Inter Agency expenditure savings of £55k. A further point to note is that a total of £1.95m of expenditure was attributed to the ASF and this was offset by corresponding ASF income received in year.

### **5. Conclusions**

5.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has brought many challenges for the service and the staff have worked tirelessly to ensure that families have been supported and plans for children moved on. The discussions regarding a hybrid approach to working from home and the office and will need to continue given the impact of the pandemic and particularly given some of the positive changes that have been made to improve service delivery. The consultation with staff, partners and service users will be important to shape and develop this as we move forward. The performance this last year has been really positive and it is clear that the staff in the agency are extremely committed, passionate and well motivated in their work and they are all focussed about improving outcomes for children in the region.