

WEST YORKSHIRE ADOPTION JOINT COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 15TH FEBRUARY, 2022

Present: Councillor F Venner (Leeds) – Chair

Councillors: S Courtney (Calderdale MBC), D Firth (Kirklees MBC) and C Thirkill (City of Bradford MDC)

In Attendance: M Rawlings (ODWY) and J Grieve (LCC)

12 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents

13 EXEMPT INFORMATION - POSSIBLE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items identified where it was considered necessary to exclude the press or public.

14 LATE ITEMS

There were no late items of business identified.

15 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests made at the meeting.

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Isherwood (Wakefield MDC) and V Kendrick (Kirklees MBC)

17 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23rd September 2021 were submitted for comment/ approval.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23rd September 2021 were accepted as a true and correct record.

18 Matters Arising from the Minutes

Referring to the Head of Service Report (Minute No.9 referred) – The Chair asked if all issues around staff accommodation had been resolved.

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Tuesday, 2nd August, 2022

In responding the Interim Head of Service said offices in Leeds, Bradford and Wakefield were operational and staffed. Accommodation issues at Calderdale had recently been resolved. However, office accommodation in Kirklees continued to be an issue, as yet no office space had been identified.

The Chair said it was important that the lack of accommodation in Kirklees was addressed.

It was agreed that Councillor D Firth would raise the issue with the appropriate Members/ officers in Kirklees.

19 Head of Service Report

The Director of Children's Services submitted a report which provided an overview on the developments and activity within the One Adoption West Yorkshire Agency (the Regional Adoption Agency) from 1st April 2021 to 30th September 2021.

Referring to the Half Yearly report, the Interim Head of Service highlighted the following issues:

- Staffing & HR
- Accommodation
- Budget
- Duty and Advice Service
- Partnership Working
- Multidisciplinary Team
- Special Guardianship Regional Work
- The Kinship (formerly Grandparents Plus)
- Performance Management
- Recruitment and Assessment
- Adoption Panels
- Family Finding
- Feedback from Families
- Adoption Support
- Compliance Audits

With reference to the budget, Members noted the overall forecasted position at Month 6 was an overspend of £22k, with an anticipated year end overspend of £46k. Questioned about the overall budget for the service, Members were informed the service had a budget of £8.1m

Referring to Family Finding, Members asked; on average, how long could it take for a child to be placed.

In responding the Interim Head of Service said that for a child with no additional needs the process could be fairly quick. For a child with additional needs or from a sibling group the process was more complicated and the

timescale for placement could be significantly longer. There are fewer potential adopters to adopt sibling groups. It was suggested the adoption of sibling groups was a national problem, but the agency was pro-active in Family Finding, looking beyond the West Yorkshire area for potential adopters.

Referring to medical assessments, Members asked if there were any delays in the length of time taken to carry out medical assessments.

Members were informed that generally, the process was working well, there was a number of individual practices which were problematic, but discussions were ongoing to address general concerns. It was reported that work was currently taking place to develop a standard protocol which would seek to clarify the process for all parties.

Commenting on the Adoption Support Fund, Members noted that demand was outstripping supply.

The Interim Head of Service said we continued to make full use of the Adoption Support Fund to commission therapeutic work for families, children and young people. Increasingly more of the therapy appointments are taking place face to face as it is recognised this model works the best for the most part. It was reported that so far this year the service had 532 applications to the fund approved resulting in over £1.7m being awarded. Of this £41,570 was generated income where we had provided services in-house and were able to charge for these from the ASF.

Looking to the future, Members requested to know, what were the possible major challenges in the next 12 months.

The Interim Head of Service said staff wellbeing was always a challenge, but good mechanisms for supporting staff had now been established. It was reported that the court process was working well, there were no significant delays in considering adoption order applications, however, there were still some delays in court processes in relation to adoption plans being agreed for children with lengthy assessments of parents and extended family members at times. On the issue of Adoption Plans, it was suggested that there was likely to be an increase in children with Adoption Plans coming forward in the next 6 months.

The Chair thanked the Interim Head of Service for her report commenting that it was informative and positive.

RESOLVED –

- (i) To receive the half year report for One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY), as set out in appendix A of the submitted report
- (ii) To note the progress and outcomes of the agency

(iii) To accept the assurances provided by the Interim Head of Service that the agency is achieving good outcomes for children/service users

(iv) To support the progression of these arrangements

20 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED - To note that the next meeting will take place on Tuesday, 2nd August 2022 at 10.00am in the Civic Hall, Leeds.