



One Adoption West Yorkshire Half-Yearly Report 2022/23

November 2022

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report sets out the developments within One Adoption West Yorkshire from April 2022 to September 2022.

2 Background information

- 2.1 Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield adoption functions as specified in the partnership agreement were delegated on the 1st of April 2017 to Leeds City Council and 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. The government continues to support the RAA's and is funding a small national team to develop and improve services and support 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 continue to be more adopters available than children with an adoption plan. However, there is a mismatch between the needs of the children requiring adoption and the adopters willing to consider these priority children. Nationally there has been a fall in the numbers of children with an adoption plan over the last three years. However, this is not being replicated in the West Yorkshire region, with numbers overall remaining broadly consistent.
- 2.4 The future of the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) has now been confirmed until 2025, along with funding for the National Adoption Strategic Group. Sarah Johal, National Adoption Strategic Lead, continues to bring together RAA Leaders from across the country to focus on developing and improving adoption practice in relation to adopter recruitment, matching children with adopters and the provision of adoption support services.

3 Main issues

3.1 Use of Resources

3.1.1 Staffing

There are currently several interim appointments within the management and senior management team of One Adoption West Yorkshire with Michelle Rawlings (Head of Agency), Rhian Beynon (Service Delivery Manager with a Recruitment and Assessment Lead) and Nicola Steele (Service Manager with a Family Finding Lead) all being in temporary posts. Permanent recruitment to posts is being explored as the impact of uncertainty is acknowledged.

- 3.1.2 There have continued to be some staff changes in the first half of the year as some experienced staff have moved on to new roles or reduced hours for a better work-life balance. This has caused pressures at different times in parts of the service, particularly Business Support and Recruitment and Assessment. However, we continue to be successful in recruiting to vacancies.

- 3.1.3 Morale for staff has continued to fluctuate, with this being impacted by both work pressures and external factors. Leadership check ins have continued for staff to communicate directly with the Head of Agency regarding queries or concerns. We have also compiled a survey for staff, the outcome of which will be included in the Annual Agency Report.

- 3.1.4 Sickness levels have remained low in comparison to children's social care.

3.1.5 Duty System

The duty and advice service has continued to run on a remote basis, with duty managers overseeing a daily check in each morning where tasks are able to be allocated and workers keeping in touch with one another throughout the day via MS Teams messaging. Since Skype was abolished and the phone system moved to MS Teams, we have unfortunately been unable to report on the number of callers to each of the 3 phone line options. This has been raised with Leeds Council who are sourcing an alternative method of reporting; it is integral that we have this to appropriately resource the advice line from January 2023 when the new Early Advice and Support service goes 'live'.

- 3.1.6 The 'choice' system for callers has continued to be in place, line 2 option (letterbox) was suspended for part of last year but has been up and running again since May 2022.

3.1.7 Accommodation & service delivery

One Adoption has adopted a hybrid approach with staff working from both home and office bases. Workspace is available in three partner local authorities (Bradford, Kirklees and Leeds) enabling teams to work together. Touchdown space is available in Calderdale and Wakefield. Due to the reduction of workspace available at each base, a desk booking system has been put in place which ensures that workers can have a workspace when travelling into an office. In most areas current workspaces are temporary with exploration ongoing in relation to future office use.

3.1.8 The hybrid working arrangements were implemented in September 2022 and will be reviewed in March 2023, six months after implementation.

3.2 **Partnership working**

3.2.1 Operational Leads Meetings

Over the first half of the year this group has continued to meet to discuss children's care planning in relation to adoption and the interface between the West Yorkshire Children's Services teams and One Adoption West Yorkshire. Discussions have taken place regarding ASF Match Funding arrangements, Early Permanence, Post Adoption Contact, Matching and Children relinquished for adoption.

3.2.2 Multidisciplinary Team

In September 2022 the Consultant Clinical Psychologist joined the team and works alongside MDT Team Manager to continue to develop and lead the MDT. In October the Occupational Therapist and BUSS lead retired. As this post was a secondment, there are no plans to recruit for this post. The MDT has worked hard over the last few months, alongside the BUSS lead, the MDT occupational therapists, OAWY managers and social workers to put robust plans in place to ensure the sustainability of the BUSS groups and specialist work within OAWY.

3.2.3 One of the key areas of development since April 2022, was to embed the MDT within OAWY to ensure that the MDT service is an accessible resource to both OAWY staff and children and families across West Yorkshire.

3.2.4 Significant strategic changes have been implemented, such as the triage system, referral pathways and electronic recording system. These have allowed MDT to work seamlessly with OAWY. The triage system and clear referral pathway offers an MDT screening opportunity so not all cases have to come through for a full MDT consultation or generic drop in but can be allocated to the relevant disciplines for a more streamlined service. The changes have also meant that urgent cases where there is a possibility of breakdown can be allocated support from MDT in a timely manner.

3.2.5 The new electronic recording system established in April has meant that there is more cohesion, working together and sharing of information across One Adoption.

3.2.6 The MDT have rolled out the use of Lead Professionals. These are now allocated on complex cases where there are lots of MDT professionals involved, to be the point of contact or for complex transitions where staff may need an MDT worker alongside them. This has been beneficial in developing working relationships between OAWY and MDT as well as learning opportunities for staff.

3.2.7 The MDT have supported the parent and dyadic groups, and this has progressed; the MDT are now the centre for the adoption support core offer of parent and dyadic groups, with all referrals coming through to the MDT. This was to ensure that the core offer was regional, and that MDT could support and supervise the staff running the groups to ensure the clinical oversight. There is now clear annual plan for internal adoption support and training.

3.2.8 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 and to offer support to our adoption panels. We have continued to run 8 panels per month and have had medical advice for all or panels, despite pressure in some areas. Leeds have experienced some challenge with a medical advisor on long term sick leave. They have successfully recruited a new advisor who has now observed some panels and is ready to offer medical advice.

3.2.9 There has been some challenge around GP capacity for undertaking medical assessments of adopters this year, with a few surgeries refusing to do adopter medicals, which they class as private work. It is a concern that under unprecedented pressures, more GPs may take this position. OAWY have requested a steer from the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, pointing out that adoption and fostering medicals are necessary to maintain sufficient safe placements for vulnerable children and are a statutory requirement. We continue to face some challenges from a small number of GP's who have refused to carry out medicals without payment up front. In these cases, issues have been escalated within the Clinical Commissioning Groups locally.

3.2.10 Virtual school heads (VSH)

Our Education Lead is continuing to build relationships with the virtual schools and has made plans to visit each Virtual School. They have delivered FASD Training to the Wakefield Virtual School and they continue to deliver training to schools across the region around Attachment Trauma and Education. The termly meetings continue to be well attended and also include representatives from the Kinship Organisation and Adoption UK.

3.2.11 The Education Advice line continues to be well used by parents and professionals alike. It is noticeable that parents of children with additional needs are struggling to find appropriate schools and that more EHCPs are being requested. Going forward additional webinars are planned to address themes consistently arising.

3.2.12 Special Guardianship Regional Work

The implementation of the financial support policy remains stalled due to issues around the waiving of the means test for non-agency SGOs where the carer is in receipt of means tested benefits. Policy and legal advice indicate that the means test cannot be waived where children were not previously looked after, and Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit must be deducted unless the child was previously looked after. Local Authorities will need to complete calculations to gauge the amount of child element in Universal Credit in these cases. We are awaiting further advice from Counsel before finalising and implementing the Leeds policy. This will be used as a template within the other 3 local authorities.

3.2.13 The Kinship (formerly Grandparents Plus) project is progressing well, and the contract is in place until March 2024. There remain three project workers offering 1:1 Support to kinship carers in the region, alongside support groups and access to telephone advice. There has been a total of 34 support groups held in the region in the first half of the year with 176 attendees. The regional Facebook group have 314 members, an increase of over 20% since April with 134 posts and 624 comments. 15 families have accessed peer support through the 'Someone Like Me' service and £1939 in grants have been applied for and provided to special guardians in West Yorkshire. Kinship organised a beach day in South Shields in August and 25 carers and 35 children from West Yorkshire attended. Special guardians have particularly valued project worker support around school issues and have benefitted from Kinship's connections with the virtual schools.

- *"I was getting nowhere until my project worker got involved. No one would listen to me. We have regular contact and I feel much better when we have a chat".*
- *"I felt that no one wanted to help him, and now I feel he has a chance to come away from school with something to look forward to".*

3.3 Performance Management

(See Appendix 1 Highlight Report 2022-23 Apr to Sept for further breakdown of this year's figures).

3.3.1 The agency provides quarterly reports to Local Authority Partners and the Management Board. The data provided has developed over the last 5 years and is gathered to ensure that we are aware of how much work is undertaken, how well it was 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 2022/23

Between April 2022 and September 2022, 103 children had a plan for adoption ratified by the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities Agency Decision Makers. Of the 103 children with a plan for adoption, there were 50 female and 53 male children.

3.3.3 Ethnicity

Of the 103 children with a plan for adoption ratified in the first 6 months of this year, 86 (84%) children were from white British backgrounds (including information not obtained) and 17 children (16%) were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, including children from Eastern European, 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 35 individual siblings placed during the first 6 months of 2022-23, 11 individual children were placed apart from siblings, which was the assessed plan for all 11 children.

3.3.5 Adopter recruitment

45 adoptive households were approved during the first half of the year, this is a slight decrease compared to the previous two years.

3.3.6 Within the 45 households, 84 individuals were approved. Of these, 16 (19%) are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds. 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 families of the same ethnicity, but rather a family who can meet their holistic needs. We continue to work with the national recruitment campaign, and it's work on recruiting adopters who can reflect the heritage of all our children.

3.3.7 9 households were approved for sibling groups, all 9 for 2 children. The Adopting Siblings training has helped to shift thinking of those prospective adopters in being able to have the confidence to consider adopting brothers and sisters together. 7 households approved were open to an Early Permanence Placement.

3.3.8 Children currently with an adoption plan

As of the end of September 2022 there are 128 children with a plan for adoption, and have a Placement Order, from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities not currently placed and requiring adopters. 82 children out of the 128 are 0 - 2 years, 24 are between 2 and 4 years and 22 children are 5 years of age or older.

3.3.9 From the children waiting for a placement there are 61 girls and 67 boys, and 17% are children from BME backgrounds (including children from eastern European, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds). 57 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 special needs or complexity.

3.3.10 Adopters available

As of the end of September 2022, there are 50 approved adoptive households that have not been matched, 16 of which have a potential match with a panel date booked.

3.3.11 On the 30th of September 2022, 135 adopters are in the process of assessment (in stage 1 or 2, or on hold pre-approval) although these will take several months to become approved.

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 2022 and September 2022, 78 children from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities were matched with families at adoption panels. 23% (18) 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.

- 52 of the children matched were 0 to 2 years old.
- 17 children matched were 2 to 4 years old.

- 9 children were aged 5 years or older.
- 28 children were part of a sibling group (of the 78 matched).
- 24(of the 78 matched) were placed and are part of a sibling group of which 8were placed apart, the plan for those 8 children was to be placed apart due to their individual needs.
- 2 children (of the 78 matched) had been previously placed in early permanence placements (1 placed EPP during the 6 months); 0 of these 2 children have been adopted in the year.

3.3.13 Provision of Placements

82 children were placed in the first 6 months of this year. The percentage of placements provided in-house within the region has remained stable so far this year with 72% in house and 28% interagency (2021/22 73% in house and 27% interagency).

- 59 children within OAWY.
- 7 children with other local authorities or other Regional Adoption Agencies.
- 16 children with Voluntary Adoption Agencies

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 524 days, the National Indicator target is 426 days.

During the first 6 months of 2022-23 75 children were adopted:

- 9 of the 75 children adopted entered care more than 3 years ago.
- 43 of the 75 children adopted were hard to place children.
- 30 of the 75 children adopted took more than 500 days between entering care and being placed.
- Of the 30 children that took more than 500 days 22 of the 30 were hard to place children with 7 having 2 or more characteristics.

3.3.15 **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 is 229 days, the National indicator target is 121 days. This is above the national indicator and reflects an issue of a disconnect between the matching criteria 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 securing permanence for these children through an adoptive family is positive.

3.3.16 Children adopted from care

The number of children who have been formally adopted in the first six months of 2022-23 is 75 with 12% of children leaving care being adopted across the region, this is in line with the National Average, which is also 12%.

3.4 Practice, quality of provision and management oversight

3.4.1 Recruitment and Assessment

We have approved 45 adoptive families over the first half of this year and matched 46 families with children, all of these being children from the West Yorkshire region. At the end of September there were 40 households in Stage 2, which is higher than last year's average (34). We also have 85 families in stage 1, which is significantly higher than last year's average of 67. Despite staff turnover, at the end of September we have no families waiting for assessment and families are allocated at the point they are ready to commence Stage Two. We have continued to use sessional workers to support capacity in the service and ensure timeliness. We are increasing our online marketing activity to encourage enquiries from people able to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption.

3.4.2 Feedback from S and G, adopters:

- *"Thank you for everything over the last 15 months. Words cannot express what a difference you have made to both our experience through the process, guiding and supporting us, and to our lives as a family."*

3.4.3 Our training offer has continued to develop. The preparation training has returned to face-to-face delivery which gives our families a richer experience and more opportunity to ask questions. 72 households attended the preparing to adopt training in the first half of 2022/23, 26 households have attended our Adopting Siblings training, 62 have attended our Connected by Adoption training, 31 have attended Early Permanence training, 13 have attended our Experienced Adopter training, and 6 have attended our Foster Carer Adopting training. Some feedback from the Preparing to Adopt training:

- *"The training was great, really informative with practical application".*
- *"[My prospective adopter] said it was the best training she has ever done. They felt it was so comprehensive and particularly referred to the power and benefits of the VR, identity and thinking ahead to teenagers and contact. They were, as are many applicants, wary of contact before the training, however, now feel really passionate about it."*
- *"We really enjoyed the style of the training, it was very mixed, not just death by PowerPoint! Enjoyed the group work, VR videos, and hearing about experiences of [the speakers] and yourselves as social workers"*

3.4.4 We have delivered the Birth Parent workshop 3 times to 21 households in the first half of 2022/23. We have commissioned Adoption UK to provide all our new adopters with access to the Adopter Passport, where they can access many resources, webinars and videos and complete modules on different areas of adoption. We have also delivered Brain Based Parenting online to many of our stage 2 adopters:

3.4.5 Feedback from the Birth Parent Workshop:

- *"Just wanted to say thank you for the training session yesterday. It's really made us realise how important ongoing contact is for the children and the birth parents. It's so important for us to hear their stories and I'm grateful that they were willing to share."*

3.4.6 Feedback from Brain Based Parenting

- *"Thank you for tonight's session, it was really informative, and we learnt a lot during the session!"*
- *"Really insightful and very useful. I have had great support from one adoption already. I'm halfway through an assessment."*
- *"That was really interesting and insightful. Really helpful."*

3.4.7 The stage 1 team continues to work well with a focus on improving the adopter experience from the front door. We will shortly be restructuring the team, with the social workers moving out, freeing up the managers to focus on development of the stage 1 process and the advisor role. They will also manage our sessional staff, bringing more consistency and developing the support offer for them. We are now fully staffed with adoption advisors after losing several advisors due to study, maternity and new opportunities. This means we have been able to free up social workers from the advisor tasks, giving them more time to undertake assessments.

3.4.8 Our timescales for making initial contact with families is beginning to improve. The average time households spend in stage 1 remains higher than we would like. Delays in arranging or being offered medical appointments is a strong theme in relation to reasons for delay in completing stage 1.

3.4.9 We continue to take steps to increase the number of adopter enquiries through our marketing strategy for priority children, and through increasing the possible number of attendees at online information events, which take place twice per month. We

have used social media to promote the needs of sibling groups, older children, children with additional needs, children with BAME heritage and children requiring early permanence. A key priority for us is recruiting families who can provide a home for siblings. We continue to have high numbers of sibling groups across the region to place for adoption and are working alongside family finding and adoption support to explore ways in which to increase the number of sibling adopters. In early July we held a focus group where experienced sibling adopters shared their experiences and advised on how we can attract and support families to consider taking more than one child. The feedback is being considered as part of our sibling strategy. We continue to support the national recruitment campaign and it's work on recruiting adopters for siblings. Another priority is to increase the numbers of adopters from Black Caribbean and Black African communities. We have delivered outdoor media to appeal to these communities in areas of West Yorkshire with high numbers of this demographic.

3.4.10 There is a continuing need to increase Early Permanence placements in the region. The number of households approved for EP exceeds the number of children identified in the same period to be placed via Early Permanence. However, we have still had to place children externally due to not having families that could meet their needs in the timescales. Numbers of children identified for EPP remain low across the region. The Early Permanence project lead is exploring how to develop Early Permanence in West Yorkshire.

3.4.11 Advertising and marketing

Over the next six months we are continuing a consistently high level of marketing output, with a combination of paid and free campaigns across our social and digital channels. General brand awareness campaigns to attract top-of-the-funnel audiences will be interspersed with more focused campaigns to help recruit more adopters for sibling groups, children of Black and mixed-Black heritage and older children. We are delivering a targeted outdoor media campaign to reach Black Caribbean and Black African communities throughout October, and a sibling campaign throughout December. We will continue to promote our information events but will have greater focus on our adoption support offer and what makes our offer unique. Social and digital channels will continue to be the key platforms used however we some out-of-home and/or radio campaigns will also be used.

3.4.12 We will roll out a suite of mobile-only landing pages on the website, to improve the overall user experience for people who find our website through a search engine. These pages are designed to respond to specific search terms used and will offer a more focused response to individual queries. The improved speed and relevance to search terms will help our Google Ads perform better, which will in turn mean better value for money.

3.4.13 We are in the early stages of developing a series of podcasts on a variety of topics and a promotional film about our adoption support core offer. This will provide additional rich content for the website and social media.

3.4.14 Adoption Panels

Panels are still being run virtually via zoom and this continues to operate well. We hold 8 panels per month and monitor this closely against predicted capacity needs. We are currently reviewing whether 8 panels are needed. There is more than sufficient panel capacity, with many of our panels this summer running with fewer items or being cancelled. However, finding panel space for approvals and matches is often difficult with concerns about delay. We are working with our social workers to ensure items which are moved or removed are actioned as early as possible so we can use the space for another item, and that paperwork is prepared as early as possible, so items can be brought forward where needed.

We now have four established Panel Chairs and this increase in panel chair capacity has been helpful in managing and covering leave. 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. We continue to have a Panel Advisor in post and the consistency and scrutiny she provides has contributed to the smooth running of our panels and an improvement in the quality of paperwork being presented to panel due to the feedback she provides to workers. Quoracy has been a challenge in recent months whilst our panel members have been taking much needed holidays. We have been fortunate that our staff team have been able to step in to cover. 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. We have experienced challenges with business support to panels through staff turnover and sickness, however the team have pulled together well, and panels have continued to run smoothly.

3.4.15 Panel Members access their paperwork and join panels either via iPads or their own equipment with SharePoint/secure email providing a secure platform for panel members to read their paperwork. This has helped us with improving diversity of our panels with panel members being able to join from other areas of the country. We continue to recruit panel members, with a focus on improving representation from men and BAME communities. We have had some challenges with medical advisor cover following retirement. A new Leeds medical advisor is now in post and undertaking panel work. Appraisals of panel members are ongoing. The feedback from adopters about their panel experience has been very positive, as has the social worker feedback.

3.4.16 Family Finding

103 children have received a should be placed for adoption decision so far this year, this is up on the first 6 months of 2021/22, where there were 97 children. The number of children regionally leaving care through adoption has increased this year. 75 children have been adopted which is an increase of 17 children when compared with the first 6 months of last year.

3.4.17 One of the additional financial challenges we are currently experiencing is the support fees for those children placed externally for more than 12 months. Adoption agencies charge a monthly fee once a child has been placed with their adopters for 12 months and no adoption order has been granted. We have faced a period of delay in the courts progressing adoption order applications which has impacted on the number of children being placed for adoption for over 12 months and not yet adopted. It is very difficult to predict what these costs will be each year but we are monitoring the progress of these placements in a monthly tracking meeting.

3.4.18 We have recently had a joint development day with the local Voluntary Adoption Agency Alliance with a focus on the 3-year contract we have with them to provide a minimum of 30 placements per year for OAWY children. We are currently in our third and final year of the contract and so far, this year we have matched 11 children and have 4 children currently placed under an EPP arrangement. This contract has achieved the objectives of a minimum of 30 placements in Year 1 and 2 and we are on track to achieve 30 placements in Year 3. As this contract has entered its final year, analysis is being completed regarding whether the contract has met the aims and objectives and if a future contract is to be commissioned, what the contract needs to include to ensure it benefits OAWY children, in particular children who are likely to wait longer for adoption.

3.4.19 Alongside this contract we are building closer working relationships with our neighbouring RAAs. We are progressing plans to develop a secure area on Link Maker for One Adoption West Yorkshire, One Adoption South Yorkshire and One Adoption North and Humber to share profiles of children and adopters before featuring them nationally with the ethos of securing more local placements for children.

3.4.20 We have had some internal movement of staff, with social workers moving into the family finding service to cover maternity leave and a vacant position. Two of our adoption advisors have moved on to promotions and are now Adoption Support Workers and we have welcomed 3 new family finding adoption advisors. From the 1st of November we are moving all the family finding advisors to be under the same team manager to form a small family finding advisor team. This is a move welcomed by the advisors as they see the benefit of this change for their own professional development and the development of the service.

3.4.21 We have hosted 3 joint practice forums for Recruitment and Assessment and Family Finding social workers this year which have focused on: Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor Systems (BUSS), getting contact off to a better start and relinquished children. These forums have been well attended by workers and have received positive feedback. The relinquished children process has recently been updated and shared with the Operational Leads for each Local Authority.

3.4.22 Family finders continue to receive positive feedback from local authority social workers in respect of the work they are undertaking:

- *Just wanted to say thank you so much for all your help with CL. You have been really great and so supportive! You are brilliant at your job*
- *As you know today is my final day, I felt it was important to share my compliments about my work with you in the adoption team over the past 18 months. I want to say a huge thank you for all your support with the children we have worked with together which includes, xx, xx, xx and xx. I think it has been a great example of multi-agency working for these children with some great long-term outcomes, although I know there are some still to come.*
- *From beginning to the end you have always been on hand to answer my questions and offer support in whatever way you can. I have never felt that any question is too silly to come you with! Your approach is so flexible and supportive and there have been times that you have certainly made my role easier to execute. Throughout you have gone above and beyond to ensure that all these children have had the right support and been part of some really key decision making for them, using your own knowledge which at the time was invaluable.*
- *We have worked some very complex situations and you have always been able to communicate the most complex of things in a way that can be understood. You engage in some really reflective conversations which has helped me think about the decisions I needed to make for these children. Your communication in general throughout our time together has been excellent. Your knowledge about adoption and trauma is exceptional. Working alongside you certainly upskilled me, not only in the practical paperwork sense, with the CPR'S, but also with the research and learning you have taught me. I have most certainly been able to improve my practice and approach not only with adoption cases, but with all the children I work with. I do really hope I can use my learning now to help others.*
- *Thank you so much for everything you have done to help these children and be part of their care planning. I most certainly could not have done it without you.*

3.4.23 When working in partnership with other adoption agencies family finders have received positive feedback:

- *I just wanted to say that last week at the VAA partnership meeting with OAWY we were shown the profile of S and S and the new update to their profile is really lovely. It has amazing pictures which really bring out their cheeky, bright, playful side and the descriptions are beautiful. You've really done an excellent job.*
- *I've had some really positive feedback about Family Finders this week from the team - xx with regards placement of G and also potential placement for E. xx has gone above and beyond his role across both these 2 cases. His general approach to working together in such a positive way makes him a pleasure to work with.*

- *Please can we pass on huge compliments to the family finder for x and x on how well they have prepared and worked with the children to prepare them for adoption and keeping the adopters up to date on this too. Please see below for the wonderful comments from the children themselves. This is a lovely demonstration of good partnership working and of the use of the Moving to Adoption model.*
- *xx the children wanted me to pass the message on to you, xx, 'I am so happy please say thank you to xx'.*
- *Give xx a big hug and 'biggggggg' thank you for helping to find my growing up family", I feel so excited.*

3.4.24 Over the weekend of the 8th April 2022 the Family Finding service hosted our first virtual profiling event of 2022/23. 16 children were profiled at the event consisting of 4 sibling groups of 2 children and 8 individual children. 74 expressions of interest were received in 8 of the profiles. For one of the sibling groups of 2 children they have now been matched and placed with a family who expressed interest in them at this event. For a single child he is now living with his adopters who expressed interest in him at the event. For another single child the match is proceeding to panel soon.

3.4.25 Over the weekend of the 16th September 2022 the Family Finding service hosted our second virtual profiling event of 2022/23. 24 children were profiled at the event consisting of 2 sibling groups of 3 children, 4 sibling groups of 2 children and 10 individual children. 61 expressions of interest were received for 12 of the profiles. 1 linking visit for a sibling group of 3 has taken place and the match is progressing to panel. 1 linking visit for a sibling group of 2 has taken place and is progressing to matching panel. One linking visit for a single child has taken place with a One Adoption West Yorkshire family and is progressing to panel. There are several other links still been explored which may progress to a linking visit. We had 222 adopters register for this event and 40 workers.

3.4.26 From the two profiling events that have taken place so far this year at least 3 matches from each event have progressed/ or are progressing to panel. This is a fantastic achievement as the children who are featured at these events are children who are likely to wait longer for an adoptive family.

3.4.27 We continue to evaluate these events and we consistently receive positive feedback from adopters who attend these events:

- *The videos were wonderful and a great insight into the child/children.*
- *I thought this was a great idea and as adopters at the end of stage 2 it was really helpful to get a feel of what the process is like. It was great to be able to access the information at any point over the weekend as well.*
- *I found as a single adopter this was heaps better for me than a large attendee profiling event.*
- *I particularly liked the fact it lasted over a weekend so families can view the profiles, consider them and then view again before expressing an interest in any children.*
- *These are an excellent addition to UK wide family finding, thank you for offering this service!*
- *Looking forward to the next one.*

3.4.28 OAWY hosted our first Pan-regional fun day on the 14th of May. 17 children and 21 adoptive households attended. Children from One Adoption West Yorkshire and One Adoption North and Humber attended the day. Adopters were invited from across the Yorkshire region. 13 expressions of interest were made in relation to 11 children. At the last review meeting in July, from these expressions of interest 2 sibling groups of 2 children's match was progressing to panel and 2 sibling groups of 2 children had a linking visit arranged with adopters. A sibling group of 3 who attended the fun day had a tentative link with a One Adoption West Yorkshire family who also attended and by doing so this consolidated the link which has now progressed to matching panel. Feedback from this event was sought from adopters including asking them if the event had changed their thinking regarding their matching criteria, some of the feedback included:

- *We are considering siblings now up to age 3/4.*
- *I think I would take an older child now.*

3.4.29 Adopters overall thoughts on the day included:

- *It was the first event that we'd attended and we really enjoyed it. It was great to be able to see children 'in real life' and get to interact with them and play with them. It was also a great opportunity to speak to foster carers, social workers and other prospective adopters who are in the same situation as ourselves.*
- *It was a valuable and unique experience.*

3.4.30 Some of the feedback received from adopters commented that the room felt a little cramped and there were too many adults, although it had a variety of play areas for children. We have factored this feedback in for our next event and have identified a bigger venue to enable the fun day to include more adopters and children and to give more space for everyone attending. We have planned our next pan-regional fun day for the 15th of October 2022. The fun day will be funded by the national adoption team and is our second funded fun day of 2022/23.

3.4.31 On the 16th of September 2022 OAWY attended our first exchange day in Manchester since before Covid 19. This was a nationally funded event where several expressions of interest were made in OAWY children. None of these interests have progressed to a match, however the event allowed for networking and building connections with other adoption agencies.

3.4.32 Adoption Support

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

The teams are now working to a more hybrid model of working; some time in the office with their teams and undertaking in person visits or groupwork, whilst also working from home for parts of the working week. As a service we have been developing a new model of Adoption Support which will be rolled out from January 2023; this includes having a dedicated 'front door' for Adoption Support, including a triage service to respond more quickly where families need it. Additional elements include use of 'virtual workers' for families where the sole intervention is ASF-funded therapy that requires review and evaluation. During the second part of this year, we will be working on moving workers around internally, so they are in the appropriate roles for when the new model begins operation. Earlier in the year we appointed to a specific post in relation to contact matters; the appointed worker has now been in post since May and is establishing the role fully. Most of the work is focussing on the renegotiating of contact arrangements that have either faltered or are no longer meeting the needs of either the child or family. There will be fuller performance data provided as part of the Annual Report.

3.4.33 Some feedback from adopters about the work undertaken by OAWY staff in the last 6 months include:

- *I know how busy you are so just wanted to say thank you so much for your support. Some adoption Social Workers just don't get it but you've really understood. It's not ended up how any of us wanted it to but your support along the way has been indispensable. Many thanks once again, D.*
- *Just also to say I used your new contact worker a couple of weeks ago and met my son's birth parents again She was super helpful and really efficient in sorting some things out for us that we hadn't been able to sort for some time.*
- *Interesting for us both to do it I think but wanted to let you know I'd had a really positive experience with the service.*
- *From the outset of submitting a form to the adoption support team for an assessment, we were very impressed at the speed at which you got in contact with us.... Once again we felt very supported and listened to.*
- *... is an amazing colleague – always gives a listening ear and a provides useful advice/ support. She has gone above and beyond... and basically going the extra mile in every way possible.*

3.4.34 We have continued to make full use of the Adoption Support Fund to commission therapeutic work for families, children and young people. So far this year we have had 432 applications to the fund approved resulting in £1,644,838.91 being awarded. Of this £21,263.58 was generated income where we had provided services in-house and were able to charge for these from the ASF. Local authorities in the region agreed to a total of £12,073.20 match funding for therapy for 2 separate children.

3.4.35 Our Stay and Play groups continue to run across the region. The Bradford 'Tweens' group continues to run, and plans remain for a roll out of 'Tweens' and Teens provision in the other areas with Leeds/Wakefield next to launch their group in Autumn.

3.4.36 Our 4 adopter support groups continue to run online per month: Adopter Chat (general support group), Single Adopters, All Dads Group and TRECS (trans-racial/ethnic/cultural adopter group). Each of these are now established and form part of our comprehensive core offer of support groups to adoptive parents. In addition to this there have been some smaller in person, localised groups and events; there is a newly established local support group in the Kirklees area (set up at the expressed request of parents) and additionally outdoor meet ups are becoming more established across the 5 LA areas, where we are finding that parents and children are appreciating being able to have opportunities to connect with other adoptive families and workers.

3.4.37 We have continued to offer a programme of evening workshops for families on topics ranging from: Brain Based Parenting, FASD, Education and Early Years workshops and 'Contact and Identity'. We have relaunched the Therapeutic Playgroup, BUSS and Foundations for Attachment programmes. NVR has been offered to a small number of families on a 1:1 basis, but plans are in place for a group programme in the new year, along with a relaunch of the 'Persevering Parents' programme.

3.4.38 We have continued to offer attendance at all our online events to families who live beyond the confines of West Yorkshire and recognise these now as part of our core offer of support to families outside the region who have adopted a child/ren from West Yorkshire.

3.4.39 Access to records work continues to be requested across the region. We continue to have a dedicated Business Support Officer to deal with these requests; the worker has had the processes she has put in place around this work recognised recently and asked to present to a national webinar as part of National Adoption week.

3.4.40 In total, we received 206 requests for access to records in the last 6 months – averaging 34.3 requests per month. Requests are mostly received from adopted adults, birth family members, adoption support agencies, social workers and other professionals.

3.4.41 Commissioned Contracts: Adoption UK and PAC/UK

Adoption UK: Peer Mentoring

There are currently 20 active peer mentors supporting 79 families across the region. 44 via WhatsApp groups and 35 via 1:1 support.

	Bradford	Calderdale	Kirklees	Leeds	Wakefield	Total
1-1 Support	7	2	4	14	8	35
WhatsApp	11	4	4	18	7	44
Total	18	6	8	32	15	79

3.4.42 Here are some comments from those accessing the mentoring service:

- *Having someone to talk to who understands the challenges I was dealing with, and who was able to offer some practical advice where appropriate, gave me encouragement knowing how hard it can be, and to be able to laugh about situations after the event with no judgement.*
- *Just being able to talk to another single adopter, who has been there and got the t-shirt, made all the difference. I never felt judged*
- *I feel stronger mentally and able to cope with my family situation.*

3.4.43 Adoption UK: Transition Service

There are 11 Active Transition Parent Partners who are supporting 22 families, 8 from OAWY and 14 from OANY.

3.4.44 Here are some comments from those accessing the transition service:

- *This has been the best adoption service we have used - better than any training course*
- *I would like to thank you for the support you have given me. I know we have only had 2 sessions so far, but it has given me the confidence, tools and drive to move forward and stop procrastinating.*
- *Mum was again very thankful and said on more than one occasion that they would have disrupted had she not been matched with TPP.*

3.4.45 Adoption UK: EPP Service (Launched June 2022)

There are 2 Active EPP Parent Partners. The take up of the 1-1 element of this service has been relatively slow so far, supporting 2 families both from South Yorkshire and have just had a referral from North Yorkshire. There are 6 weekly EPP information sessions for prospective adopters considering EPP where they have an opportunity to hear the EPP Journey from EPP Parent Partners and volunteers who have adopted via EPP and can ask any questions. 3 of these sessions have been held so far with 17 families attending, 12 from West Yorkshire.

3.4.46 Here is a comment from those accessing the EPP service:

- *It was amazing to hear your stories! Such individual stories but so interesting and informative.....we can't wait for the joys and challenges the next stage of our family takes!!*

3.4.47 Adoption UK: Adopter Engagement

There are 3 Adoption Engagement Coordinators, one to each of the 3 RAAs. The Adopter Engagement provision has been active in One Adoption West Yorkshire in the following work:

- Prep training
- Sibling training
- Pre-matching training
- Experienced parent training
- Experienced adopter training
- EPP training.

3.4.48 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, 948 members
- Early years and primary school, Facebook group, 288 members
- Secondary and further education, Facebook group, 153 members
- EPP, Facebook group, 56 members.

3.4.49 PAC-UK: adults work

PAC-UK have dealt with 243 calls to their advice line and worked with 157 service users (existing and new) across the six months. These services are provided for all adults affected by adoption but most of the work is undertaken with birth parents and adopted adults. A total of 313 appointments were offered across the half-year to service users.

3.4.50 PAC-UK: Adopteens service

80 young people from West Yorkshire have been involved in Adopteens during the first half of the year, including 3 new members from the region. In-person events have been held across the Yorkshire and Humber region which have been attended by Adopteens from the West Yorkshire region.

3.4.51 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. From April 2022 to September 2022, we have received 6 Notifications of Intention to Adopt (NOIs).

3.4.52 Over the last 6 months there were a total of 55 briefing session registrations received for non-agency adoption; 22 of those attended. 9% (2) of the attendees were from families living in Calderdale, 59% (13) were from families living in Kirklees and 32% (7) were from families living in Wakefield.

3.4.53 Over the past 6 months there were 12 non-agency adoption orders granted, 33% (4) were for families from Calderdale, 33% (4) were for families from Kirklees and 33% (4) were for families from Wakefield.

3.4.54 Disruptions

There are no children who have experienced an adoption disruption in the first half of this year.

3.4.55 Business Support

The current business support structure was established in 2018. Since that time the work of One Adoption West Yorkshire has changed significantly; all service areas have grown and other service areas have had development projects looking at service delivery and structure, which have resulted in positive changes. There are also several projects taking place across the service with funding from the national team to support specific areas of work as well as new workstreams such as communications and marketing support, training and events co-ordination, pan-regional family finding work, and additional work around MDT and ASF. As business support is integral to the work of the agency a business support development project has begun which will focus on:

- The work business support currently undertakes
- Exploring work which could be brought under the business support umbrella
- The business support structure
- Identifying additional needs

3.4.56 Each workstream is being reviewed and a consultation is currently underway to help identify additional work which could be brought under the business support umbrella. This may see an expansion of roles within the business support team and will also look to build in opportunities for further progression and identify a clear career pathway.

3.4.57 Quality Assurance

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

- Views of Children and Families, including the views and experiences of children & young adults.
- Performance Data: statistical data that helps us judge the quality and effectiveness of our professional practice.
- Practice Wisdom & Knowledge: 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.

3.4.58 OAWY's PIF was updated in Q2 and can be found as Appendix 2.

3.4.59 A Quality Assurance mechanism for panel work is used as a matter of course and has found that 98% of prospective adopter reports were of a good or outstanding standard (1% outstanding, 97% good, 2% requiring improvement) this is an improvement on last year's figure of 93%.

3.4.60 In relation to Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) provided by local authority social workers 90.32% were considered good or outstanding (1.61% outstanding, 88.71% good, 9.68% requiring improvement) this is small reduction on last year figure of 95%. 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.

3.4.61 There have been 26 responses to the panel survey in the first 6 months of 2022/23. Attendees were asked to rate their overall experience of attending adoption panel, the responses were:

- Very good – 19 (73.08%).
- Good – 5 (19.23%).
- Neither good nor poor - 2 (7.69%).

3.4.62 Between 01 April 2022 and 30th September 2022, the customer relations service logged 4 stage one complaints for One Adoption West Yorkshire. Of the 4 complaints 2 were locally resolved or withdrawn following swift intervention from the teams and none of the complaints were escalated to stage 2. There were a further 2 representations (an informal expression of dissatisfaction or request for service) which were quickly resolved before being escalated to a stage 1 complaint. The reasons for dissatisfaction from the formal complaints were as follows:

Type of complaint	No.	Update
Disagrees with Arrangements (Contact)	1	Partially upheld – efforts are being made to find adopted child and share important news, agreement to ask adopters about letterbox contact. Agreement that a specific worker will not contact complainant again.
Staff Attitude / Conduct (Customer Service)	1	Locally resolved – Team Manager made contact to discuss difficult experiences and offer learning to workers on how to approach these difficult conversations
Post adoption support (Adoption)	1	Partially Upheld - Only letterbox complaint relates directly to OAWY - efforts have repeatedly been made to engage birth mother, but sadly she has not engaged. Will continue to try.
Breakdown in process (Adoption)	1	Withdrawn – Met with couple to explain differences between Kirklees as the LA for the child, and OAWY who had responsibility for approving prospective adopters - no complaint identified for OAWY

3.4.63 Joint Audits – 10 joint audits, between a OAWY service manager and LA lead, were completed across the region. OAWY record the result of each audit as either excellent, good, satisfactory or requires improvement. Of the 10 audits:

- Excellent – 1 (10%)
- Good – 4 (40%).
- Satisfactory – 2 (20%)
- Rating not yet provided – 3 (30%)

3.4.64 Compliance Audits - Compliance audits are system generated reports that identify missing and/ or incorrectly entered data. Anomalies identified are forwarded to the worker and/ or team manager for investigation with support provided by the performance team. The aim is to reduce the number of anomalies and the time taken to resolve them.

3.4.65 Thematic audits – 2 thematic audits have been carried out during the first half of 2022/23 to look at specific areas of practice.

3.4.66 The first audit looked at enquirers leaving the process pre-stage one 2021-22. A total of 80 files were audited. All were families who left the adoption process following an initial home visit request being made, prior to a registration of interest being submitted. Of the audits completed:

- 45 were not recommended
- 35 withdrew

No themes were identified in the reasons people are not recommended or withdraw from the process. An improvement was evident in the consistency of manager decisions, case records completed by adoption advisors and the customer experience.

3.4.67 The second audit looked at adopters with children placed not adopted over 200 days. A total of 26 case files were audited. The audit identified the following impacting on timeliness in adoptions:

- Delays with courts hearing dates.
- Adoption application (A58) and Annex A being submitted separately
- In some cases, timescale from placement to CLA review decision slow

3.4.68 Interactive audits

A new interactive audit process is being piloted this October and November. The findings of the pilot will be reviewed in December with a view to the new process going live in Q3.

3.4.69 Voice and Influence of Children, Young People and Adopters

Appendix 3 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 Training

The agency is in the process of capturing all key training qualifications that each member of staff has on the Performance and Learning system. Once complete this will provide greater oversight of the skills within the agency and allow a targeted training plan to be developed.

3.5.2 Role specific learning, which allows OAWY staff to shadow colleagues to gain an insight into their role, has been introduced. So far 12 staff have been paired with a colleague, feedback from those involved will be sought in Q3/4.

3.5.3 A cohort of 24 OAWY staff are registered to attend DDP Level 2 training in November.

3.5.4 The agency continues to work towards achieving the Cultural Cohesion Quality Mark.

3.5.5 Strategic issues and forward plans

OAWY's 3-year plan (Appendix 4) outlines the vision, mission, outcomes, and priorities up to 2024. Activities linked to the delivery of the 3-year plan are tracked through the OAWY Service Improvement Plan.

Corporate Considerations

4.1 **Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 There has been ongoing engagement with staff in the first half of the year. An all-staff event was held in June which provided service area development updates, a run through of our strategic plans as well as hearing from adopted people discussing their own adoptee experiences. A second all-staff event will be held in November.

4.1.2 Quarterly newsletters are in place to keep staff updated as well as email bulletins if needed. Ongoing engagement with adopters, young people through Adopteens, adopted adults and birth parents is an integral part to co-develop and co-deliver the services provided for children and families in the region.

4.1.3 The annual staff survey will be emailed to all staff in October.

4.2 **Equality and Diversity/ Cohesion and Integration**

4.2.1 The OAWY Equality Impact assessment was reviewed and updated March 2022 and can be found at Appendix 5. 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 overall forecasted position at Month 6 is a slight underspend of £2k, main pressures are the underachievement of income on the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) and Inter Agency where the respective targets of £225k and £162k are unlikely to be achieved. Underspend on staffing due to delays in recruitment and other minor savings/additional income should help mitigate most of this pressure. The overspend from 21/22 which was £9.3k was taken from OAWY's Earmarked Reserve, which now stands at £39.2k and this could be used to offset any potential overspends this year if needed.

5. **Conclusions**

5.1 We continue to have a high number of children in West Yorkshire with an adoption plan. One Adoption West Yorkshire staff are committed to recruiting a diverse range of adopters who can meet the needs of the children waiting. We have an ongoing challenge

in sufficiency due to the numbers of children exceeding the number of families. However, this does not deter us from having a plan of adoption for children for whom this is the most appropriate permanence plan. We take a proactive and creative approach to adopter recruitment, using adopters from other agencies where needed. We recognise the timeliness of adoptions are not in line with government targets. This is impacted by a number of factors, which we regularly analyse. It is important to acknowledge that we achieve adoption for high numbers of children who typically wait longer for adoption, and this is something to be celebrated. Our support offer to children and their families continues to grow and is complemented by our multidisciplinary team. All the work we do is influenced by feedback from key stakeholders.