

WEST YORKSHIRE ADOPTION JOINT COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 7TH FEBRUARY, 2023

PRESENT Councillor F Venner (Leeds) – Chair
Councillor V Kendrick (Kirklees)
Councillor K Scott (Wakefield)

OFFICERS M Rawlings – One Adoption West Yorkshire
H Gray – Clerk

10 Appeals against refusal of inspection of documents

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspection of documents.

11 Exempt Information - Possible exclusion of the press and public

The agenda contained no exempt information.

12 Late Items

No late items of business were added to the agenda.

13 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

14 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Wilkinson (Calderdale) and Councillor M Isherwood (Wakefield). Councillor K Cooke (Wakefield) attended as a substitute.

15 Minutes of the previous meeting

The Chair requested an amendment to minute 8 One Adoption West Yorkshire Annual Report 2021/22 to read “The Chair reported on the support to Foster Carers given by the current Lord Mayor of Leeds during his career in Morley and the positive impact that this had – *Morley had a high number of Foster Carers for an outer city area*”.

RESOLVED – That subject to the correction outlined above, the minutes of the meeting held 2nd August 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

16 Matters Arising

Minute 8 One Adoption West Yorkshire Annual Report 2021/22

- Medical Delays – The delays and inconsistent cost associated with medicals undertaken by GPs remains a local and national issue, also impacting on Fostering Services. It was noted that this had been raised at regional level however the Integrated Care Board could not compel changes to GP requirements. Members agreed to continue to flag this an issue at both place and West Yorkshire Partnership level.
- Service restructure – The Joint Committee welcomed the report that the restructure had been implemented as planned on 1st January 2023 and had received positive feedback from staff.
- Member engagement – The Head of Service proposed that a “stay and play” setting was felt to be the most appropriate approach and would

liaise with Group Leaders to provide Members with details of place based activities in their localities.

17 **Head of Service Report**

The Head of One Adoption West Yorkshire submitted the half yearly Head of Service report presenting an overview of the developments and activity in the One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) service from 1st April to 30th September 2022.

The half yearly report provided the Joint Committee with an opportunity to monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy itself that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users' and that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

In presenting the report, the Head of Service outlined key issues and highlights from within OAWY for the April to September 2022 period, which included:

Use of Resources (Staffing) – The interim management arrangements remain in place and although there had been some staff turnover during the reporting period, recruitment to vacancies had been successful. Staff sickness levels also remain low.

Formal hybrid working had been implemented in September 2022 with staff encouraged to work in the office 3 days per month. Office space had been secured in Kirklees although this is understood to be temporary and the Bradford team had recently moved due to a building closure.

Recruitment to the vacant Consultant Clinical Psychologist lead had been completed in September 2022.

A key issue was identified with the funding for the Multi-Disciplinary Team and Health posts which had not yet been agreed following implementation of the new Integrated Care Board structure.

Child Placement - The Head of Service informed Members that during the reporting period a total of 103 children had a plan for adoption ratified. Of those, 86 children were from white British backgrounds and 17 children were from Ethnically Diverse backgrounds.

Adopter Recruitment – 45 adoptive households were approved during the reporting period, with 9 of those approved for sibling groups and 7 households open to an Early Permanence Placement.

Timeliness –

A1 Indicator - The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family for children in West Yorkshire is 524 days, the National Indicator target is 426 days.

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.

The number of children adopted from care in the reporting period is 75, with 12% of children leaving care through adoption, which is in line with the national average of 12%, but it was noted that within the region there were significant differences between Local Authorities.

Adoption Panels – These continue as remote meetings. Virtual meetings have increased the diversity in the background of Panel members and provided an opportunity to attract care leavers to the role. A review of whether 8 per month were still required would be undertaken due to associated costs.

Family Finding – The Service had secured national funding to focus on Early Permanence Placements as these placements have dropped in recent years. Work continues with the local Voluntary Adoption Agency Alliance focussing on the success of the 3-year contract with them to provide a minimum of 30 placements per year for OAWY children, which had achieved the objective during years 1 and 2.

Additionally, closer working relationships are developing with neighbouring RAAs including the establishment of a secure area on Link Maker for OAWY, One Adoption South Yorkshire and One Adoption North and Humber to share profiles of children and adopters before featuring them nationally with the aim of securing more local placements for children.

Funding had been secured to work with Adoption Matters to find families for those children who most difficult to find suitable families for.

Adoption Support - £1.6m had been awarded from the Adoption Support Fund to commission therapeutic work for families, children and young people in the period.

Disruptions - There were no adoption disruptions during this reporting period.

Business Support – A review of the business support structure, established in 2018, had been undertaken and a business support development project has begun to review each workstream. A consultation is currently underway to help identify additional work which could be brought under the business support umbrella which may result in an expansion of roles within the team. The review will also look to build in opportunities for further progression and identify a clear career pathway.

Quality Assurance - A Quality Assurance mechanism for panel work is used as a matter of course and 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%.
- 90.32% of Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) provided by local authority social workers were considered good or outstanding (1.61% outstanding, 88.71% good, 9.68% requiring improvement) which

presents a small reduction on last year figure of 95% and could be said to reflect the impact of staff turnover during the reporting period.

Budget – A balanced budget was predicted for the 2022/23 year and the budget proposals for 2023/24 were currently being considered by member Authority Finance officers.

In response to a query regarding implementation of a permanent management structure, the Joint Committee noted that Trade Unions were currently considering the proposal to make the interim Head of Service a permanent post, with the outcome expected by the end of February.

Members of the Joint Committee discussed the impact of staff turnover in the sector, however noted that in OAWY, this was not due to staff leaving to work for Agencies. The approach taken by Kirklees was noted as a good practice example of “growing our own”, staff retention and a manageable workload.

Members of the Joint Committee further discussed the adoption scorecards and noted that work had been undertaken to identify any areas of “drift”. There were delays for a variety of clear reasons such as where a family or sibling assessment is needed, but there were no identified instances of drift in joint audit work carried out with one Local Authority. The turnover of social work staff can have an impact, particularly in cases unable to progress because there is no Social Worker named to progress the adoption plan.

The Service was mindful of how timescales could be improved and had created Champion roles within Family Finding and Recruitment and Assessment teams to provide focus on specific areas within the Service. A Champion for Early Linking had been established to work with people who are going through the approval process to see if they can be linked with children at an early stage.

Responding to a query regarding children difficult to find families for, the Head of Service reported that ethnicity did not have a significant impact on finding families in West Yorkshire. It was noted that prospective adopters’ uncertainty about a child’s future development may have an impact as young children may not yet have a health plan or diagnosis in place. Additionally Foetal Alcohol Syndrome can be an issue that some are concerned about, and the Service did provide training on FASD. The Service also acknowledged that the current cost of living crisis may have an impact on families considering adopting more than one child; siblings often wait longer to be adopted together.

The Committee noted comments that prospective adopters may look to the future and have expectations – such as the children will grow to adulthood and leave their care – and may be concerned that an adopted child will have specific needs requiring their lifelong care. There was also some concern that adopters of young children who receive a health care plan or medical diagnosis after adoption may seek to end the adoption. In response the Head of Service provided reassurance that such instances were rare. Prospective

adopters received training and support which prepared them for all eventualities.

In respect of the delay to funding for the Multi-Disciplinary Team and Health posts, the Head of Service reported the OAWY Management Board was aware and the issue was currently being considered by the Commissioners. The Head of Service would attend a Commissioners meeting in March and outlined the issue as being the need to agree the funding already pledged for Year 3 and to agree to a request to cover a shortfall in health funding. The risks and likely reduction in service had been set out to the Commissioners should the funding not be agreed.

Additionally, the Joint Committee noted that member Local Authorities were currently considering their individual funding of OAWY. The representative for Kirklees highlighted that, when OAWY was established, the LA funding was calculated having regard to size of the Authority and number of adoptions, now that the number of adoptions in the Kirklees area was falling, the authority may wish to revisit the funding allocation.

RESOLVED –

- a) The Joint Committee received the half year report of One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY), as detailed in appendix A of the report, as required by the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2014, pursuant to the Care Standards Act 2000.
- b) The Joint Committee:
 - i. Noted the progress and outcomes of the agency
 - ii. Noted the assurance provided by the Head of Service that the agency is achieving good outcomes for children/service users
 - iii. Supported the progression of these arrangements

18 Date and Time of Next Meeting

RESOLVED -To note that the next meeting would be confirmed for August 2023 in due course.