

Report of the Director of Children & Families

Report to Executive Board

Date: 27th June 2018

Subject: One Adoption West Yorkshire Annual Report



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

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 and One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) formally opened. OAWY was the first Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) to open in the country.
2. This report provides a summary on the developments of the service since the opening on the 1st April 2017 to March 2018 and is the first annual report of the RAA.

Recommendations

1. That the Executive Board receive this annual report and continues to support the work of One adoption West Yorkshire to ensure our adopted children receive the best possible outcomes and support.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report sets out the developments within One Adoption West Yorkshire since April 2017.

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 government continues to drive forward with the structural reform programme regarding regionalising adoption and 141 authorities are either in a live RAA or working towards one. The government have noted the significant progress in cutting the time children waiting to be placed with their adoptive parents and this is a positive outcome for children. However, both the number of registrations of interest and approved adopters nationally, regionally and locally within the West Yorkshire area have fallen in recent years. This occurred at the same time as West Yorkshire planned a move to a regionalised arrangement and therefore has to be taken into account when looking at mismatch between the children requiring adoption and adopter sufficiency in the region since becoming a regional adoption agency.

3 Main issues

3.1 Use of Resources

Staffing

- 3.1.1 The senior leadership team and team managers came into position at the opening of the new agency and all the staff were Tupeed across to Leeds City Council from the 4 other local authorities. The majority of staff moved onto the Leeds City Council terms and conditions on the 1st December 2017.
- 3.1.2 Work has been undertaken with the senior leadership team, the management team and with all staff to establish the vision and values of One Adoption West Yorkshire “to be a flagship Adoption Agency that develops & promotes best practice, improving adoption standards nationally.” Ongoing development work continues with all staff regarding the importance of relationships as we build the One Adoption West Yorkshire identity with the teams, working in a culture of high support and high challenge.
- 3.1.3 During the first year of operation the agency started off with a high number of vacancies particularly across business support and some other key roles however the staffing structure is now fully in place. A number of staff have retired over the year and there is a high level of maternity leave and some long term sickness, with additional social work staff recruited in some key areas of the service to ensure that the needs of the service can be met.

- 3.1.4 Working across a wide geographical area has presented challenges for staff with office bases remaining in each local authority area. There has been a need for staff to come together for meetings to develop practice and to ensure that there is good communication between local authorities and the different parts of the service to provide a joined up approach. The amount of time taken travelling and the costs of mileage remain an issue and the service is exploring the alternative options regarding accommodation and structure of the organisation to enable a more efficient and effective use of resources as the service develops.
- 3.1.5 The use of Information Technology to support the staff and the service has been problematic in the first year due to a number of complex and technical reasons. However, these have improved with all staff now having use of a Leeds laptop and mobile phone. The difficulties for staff working across offices regarding connectivity has also improved although access to the other local authority systems remains an issue with work ongoing to progress access to these via a portal from the Leeds laptops. Staff are now able to print in their office locations.
- 3.1.6 The migration of casework data onto Mosaic and the Leeds networks is almost complete and this has been a time consuming and manual task. The target to move all records has largely been achieved with a small number of cases requiring documents uploading on to the system before closing down the local authority file. Once the work is migrated the requirement for access to the local authority systems will be read only and this will ease the burden for staff needing to use more than one system.
- 3.1.7 Mosaic has been developed to support the case recording of all of the work the agency undertake. The family finding workflow is in the early stages of implementation and work is being developed to support the letterbox work and improve reporting and management information over the next 9 months.

Duty System

- 3.1.8 A central duty system was implemented in July. This has been very effective and this service operates from 10am- 4pm each day (3.30pm on Friday). The majority of calls on duty relate to adoption support, enquiries from professionals about staff across the region and recruitment enquiries. There are qualified social workers, adoption advisors and business support staff operating duty with a team manager and service manager on a rota basis to ensure the service is effective.

Business Support

- 3.1.9 The business support functions of One Adoption West Yorkshire have now been agreed and progress has been made in setting up systems to support the work of the agency with key processes around the panel work, children's planning and children's tracking and administering the adoption support fund developing well. Business support is a key integrated part of the agency and aims to ensure an effective and efficient service can be provided.

Adoption Panel

- 3.1.10 Prior to OAWY there were 11 monthly panels held across the West Yorkshire and this has reduced to 7 per month. Despite initial difficulties in merging the panels the panel members have come together and worked well with an increasing number of members made up of adopted adults, adopters and birth parents. There are 9 medical advisers that sit as panel members with 2 independent chairs to provide consistency across the seven panels. The panel work is now electronic throughout the region creating efficiencies and data security in this area of work.
- 3.1.11 Six monthly meetings continue to be held between the agency and panel chairs with the aim of ensuring good communication regarding the development of the service. Panel chairs are encouraged to raise any issues as they arise and panel chairs also have the opportunity of an annual appraisal with the agency decision maker. Future details regarding the use of resources is addressed in section 4.4.

3.2 Partnership working

- 3.2.1 The links with the local authority are key in the development and delivery of services. The management board, made up of assistant directors of each local authority meet quarterly to oversee the work of the agency and the Joint Committee of elected members also meet regularly to receive reports and scrutinise the work of the agency.
- 3.2.2 An operational leads group was also set up in the first quarter of the year between the responsible officers in each Local Authority for adoption and the senior leadership team within OAWY. This is particularly to discuss the interface between the local authority and one adoption regarding children's planning and family finding and adoption support and provide peer support and challenge in developing good practice across the region.
- 3.2.3 There are close partnerships between team managers within OAWY and the local authority providing advice and support regarding adoption practice and care planning with workshops, briefings and surgeries for social workers in the region.
- 3.2.4 Discussions with health commissioners and providers in each local authority are ongoing regarding improving the quality of the written information provided by medical advisors. The development of quality standards are underway with the aim to achieve consistency of practice across the region. Work with CAMHS commissioners and providers in each area and the Adoption Support Fund continues to be developed to ensure that children in adoptive families are able to access effective support.
- 3.2.5 The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Support Agencies in the region have come together as a body working collectively in the region to develop and deliver services as an alliance. OAWY work closely with the Voluntary Agency Alliance (VAA) in order to identify placements for children and we also have links with Adoption Match (previously the Adoption Register)

and Link Maker to achieve a more effective regional view of all the children and families across the region. The Voluntary Adoption Alliance have been successful with receiving a practice improvement bid from the Department of Education (DfE) to develop early permanence placements across the Yorkshire & Humber region and to look at a fostering to permanence concurrency service within the West Yorkshire area. This will help us improve our ability to place children earlier for permanence.

- 3.2.6 Regular meetings with virtual heads across the region have continued and we are working in partnership to develop and support the new duties of the virtual school and designated teachers for children who cease to be looked after across the region in September.
- 3.2.7 The Yorkshire Adoption Agency provides expert inter-country services to all adopters on behalf of the Local Authority consortium agencies. This value for money contract saves OAWY time and money as inter-country work is very specialist, complex and time consuming.
- 3.2.8 We are working in partnership with colleagues across the wider Yorkshire and Humber region regarding the re-commissioning of independent adoption support services for birth parents, adoptive families and adopted adults, and young people with a view to a new contract being in place for October 2018.

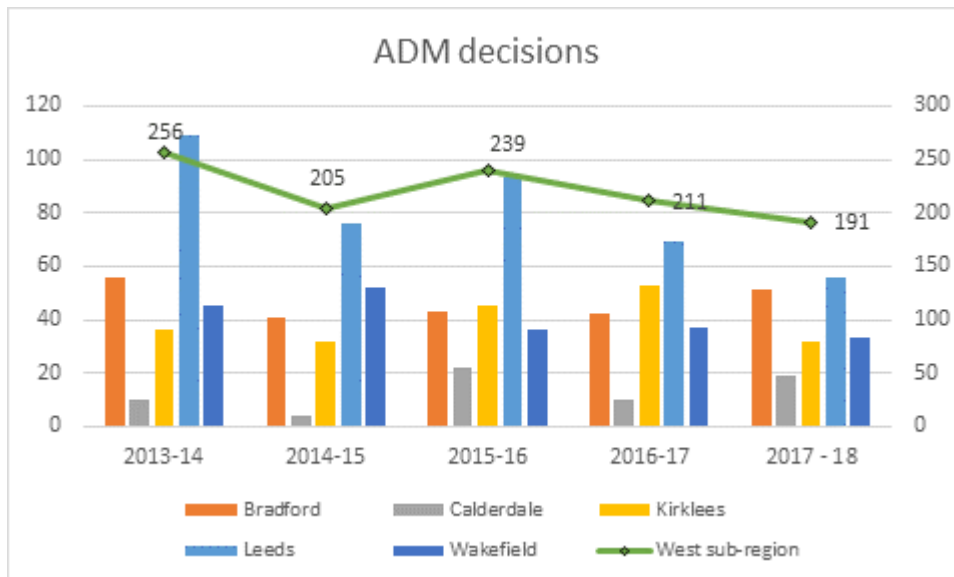
3.3 Performance Management

- 3.3.1 During the first quarter of the year the agency developed a practice improvement framework and provides quarterly reports to the management board. This data has developed over the year and range of data is gathered to ensure that performance is captured to ensure that we are aware of how much work is undertaken, how well was it undertaken and is anyone better off?

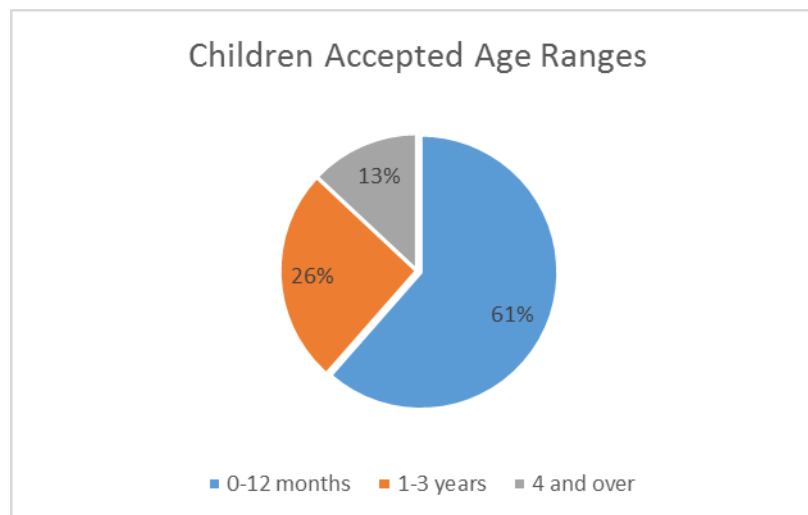
a) Sufficiency: Are enough of the right kind of adopters being recruited and approved to meet the needs of the children waiting:

The children with a plan for adoption during 2017/18

- 3.3.2 Between April 2017 and March 2018, 191 children had a plan for adoption ratified by the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities Agency Decision Makers. Of the 191 children with a plan for adoption, there were 79 female and 112 male children.
- 3.3.3 In total, this is a 9% decrease on the last year's full year figure of 211 children from across the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities. This picture is also reflected as a national level.



Age profile



Ethnicity

3.3.4 Of the 191 children with a plan for adoption this year, 124 (65%) children were from white British backgrounds and 67 children (35%) were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, including children from eastern European, Gypsy Roma, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds.

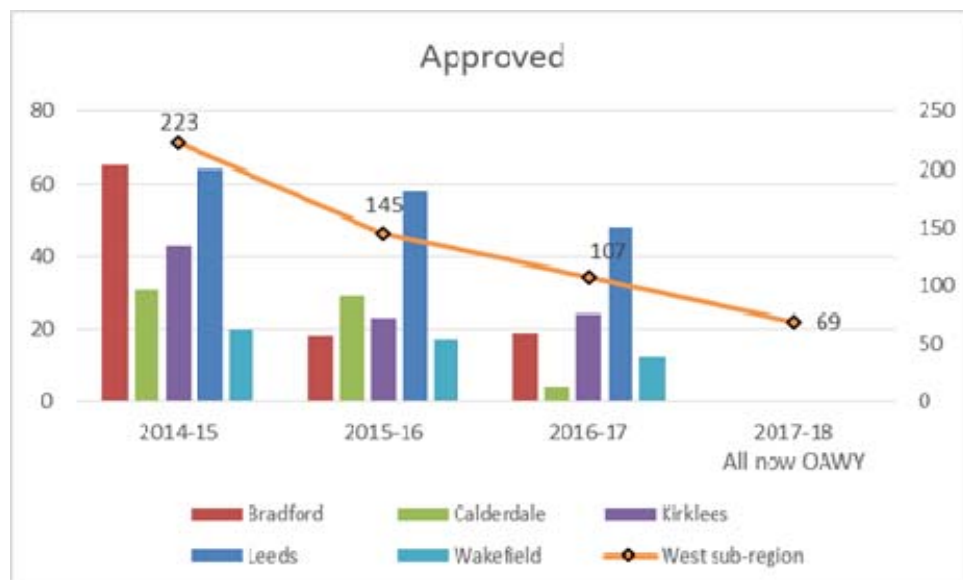
Placement with Siblings

3.3.5 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. The numbers of children requiring adoption in sibling groups during the year is 93 children (this includes those with a match and/ or placement). Of the 29 children placed from this cohort during the year

none of these were placed apart. A breakdown of the size of the sibling groups is not available as some LAs do not provide a unique reference number for this. This will be captured on Mosaic for 2018/19.

Adopter recruitment

3.3.6 69 adoptive households were approved during the year and you will note from the table below that the numbers of adopters has declined locally, regionally and nationally over the last four years and since 2014/15 there has been a 70% decrease in adopter approvals. This is a complex picture and is partly due to agencies responding to a reduction in the children with a plan for adoption during that period with agencies undertaking more targeted recruitment for specific children and sibling groups. It is likely that the last year this has also been exacerbated by staff vacancies leading up to regionalisation.



3.3.7 Although adopters are approved as suitable to adopt OAWY has the ability to capture the preferences of adopters in terms of age range, gender and number of children to be considered. However, this is not available for the full year of operation and will be provided as a summary for next year’s report.

3.3.8 Within the 69 households, 131 individuals were approved throughout 2017/18. Of these 11 (8%) 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 regard to ethnic identity as an overriding factor.

Children with an adoption plan, currently waiting

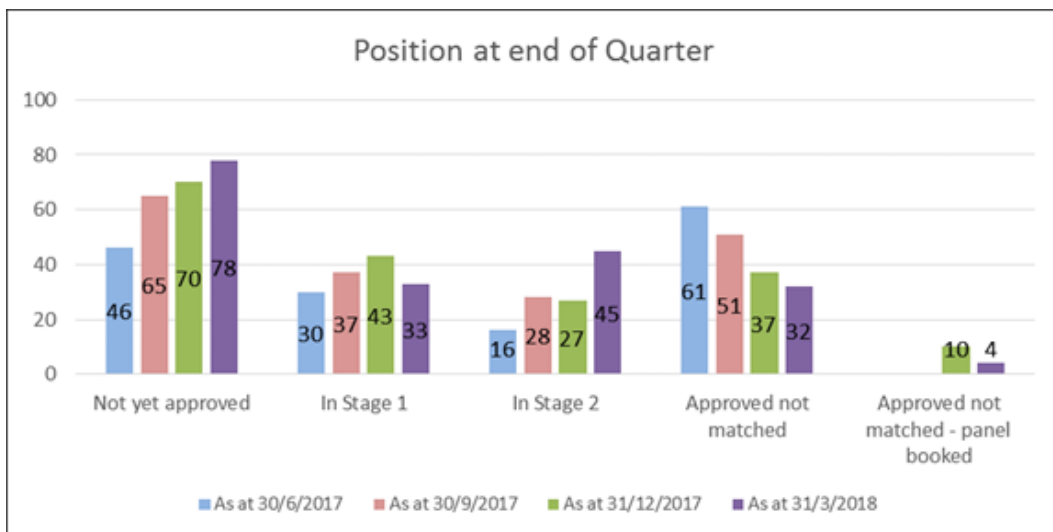
3.3.9 As of end of March 2018 there are 143 children with a plan for adoption from the 5 west Yorkshire local authorities not currently placed and requiring adopters.

3.3.10 38 children out of the 143 are 0-1yrs, 70 are between 1 and 4yrs and 35 children are over 4 years of age. 15 children have potential “matches” identified and 27 of these have a date booked at adoption panel for the “match” to be formally considered.

3.3.11 From the children waiting for a placement there are 66 girls and 77 boys, and 43 per cent are children from BME backgrounds. There are 22 sibling groups of 2 and 2 sibling groups of 3. The plans for these children are actively reviewed 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.

Adopters available

3.3.12 As of the end of March 2018, there are 32 approved adoptive households. 22 are available to consider placements, 4 have a panel date booked for a match and 6 are considering potential matches. There is a mismatch between the 100 children without a potential link and the number of prospective adopters available. The children’s minister highlighted this issue with local authorities and the plan with OAWY is to recruit 120 households in the coming year to meet the needs of many of the children requiring adoption.

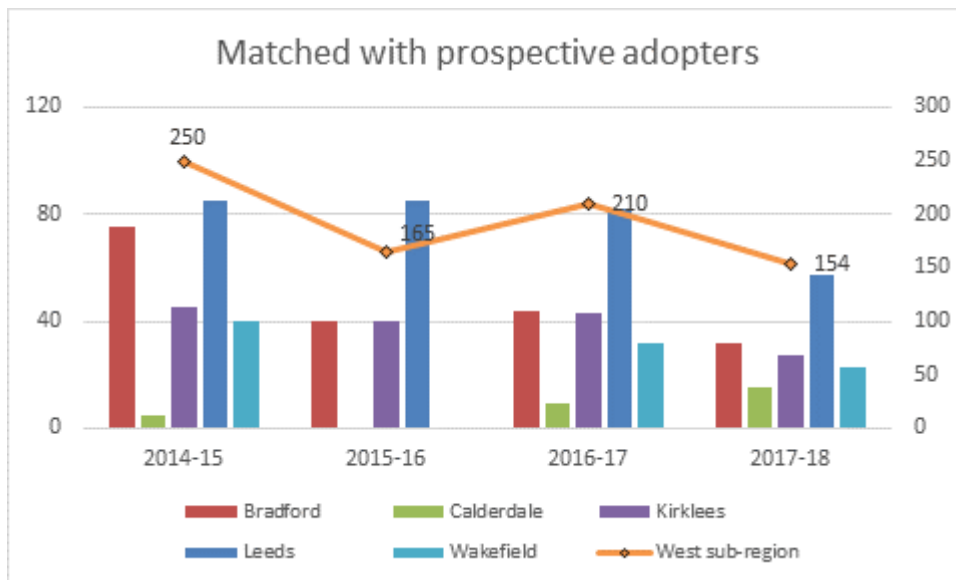


3.3.13 On the 31st March 2018 78 adopters are in the process of assessment although these will take a number of months to become approved. However, the signs are encouraging as the numbers are increasing each quarter as the brand becomes more familiar. Alongside the families we recruit within the region we also access approved adopters from other agencies and the search for prospective adopters regularly extends across the country using the National Adoption Register and at National Exchange days across the country. Family finding work is time consuming and social workers spend time travelling across the country to locate potential families once links have been made and to offer support post-placement. It is therefore important to continue to ensure that there are no delays in progressing the assessments of adopters who have applied to adopt with OAWY within the region and this will remain under close scrutiny.

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

Children matched in the year for adoption

3.3.14 Between April 2017 and March 2018, 154 children from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities were matched with families at adoption panels; this is a 27% decrease on the number of children matched between April 2016 and March 2017 from across the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities.



3.3.15 From April 2017 to March 2018, 25% of the children matched were from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. This is higher than the national average and can be seen as a positive for children from BME communities who often take longer to place for adoption.

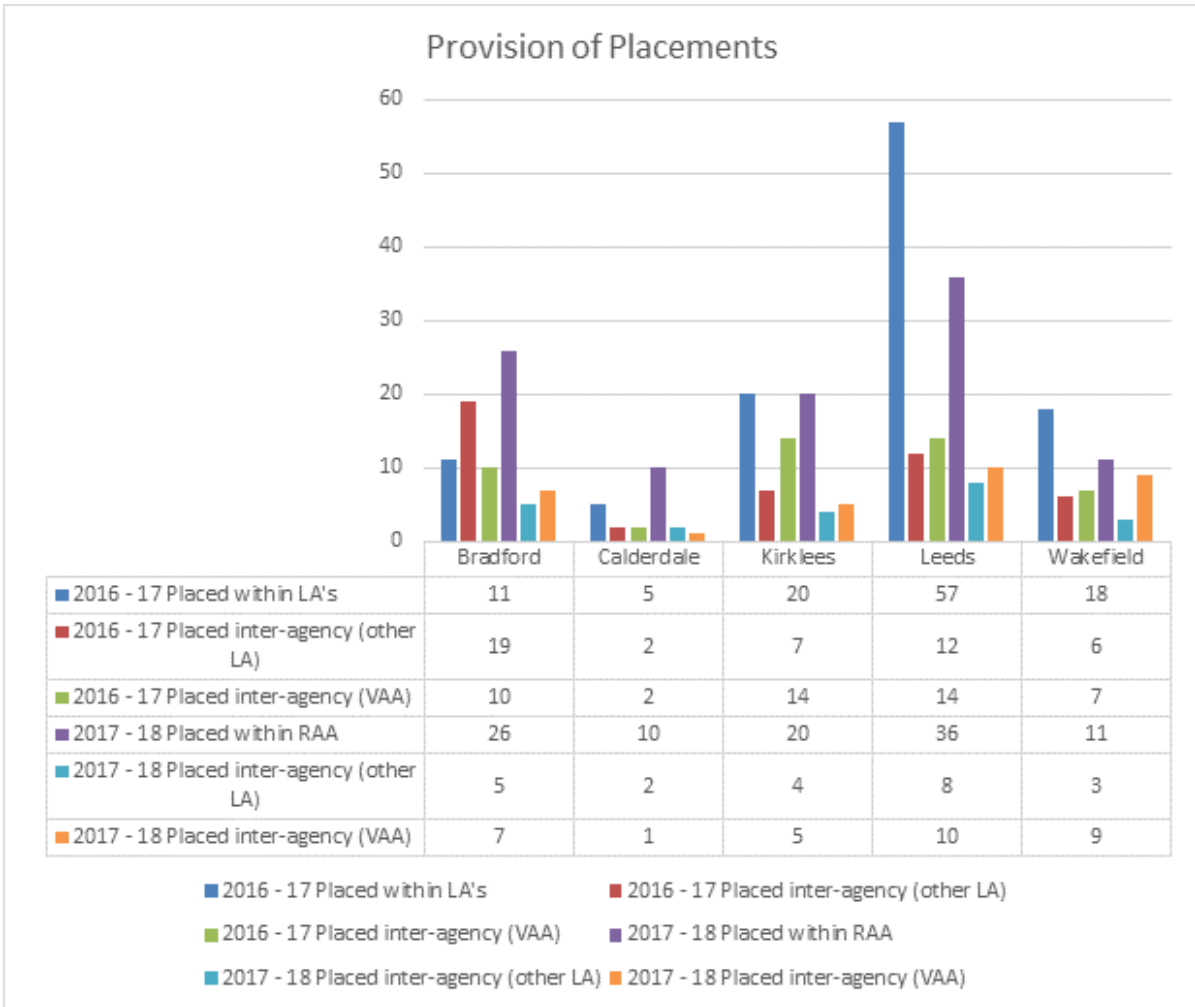
- 81 of the children matched were babies (up to 12 months);
- 60 children were of pre-school age (13 months to 4 years);
- 13 children were aged over 4 years;
- 42 children were part of a sibling group (of the 154 matched);
- 37 children were placed who are part of a sibling group of which 6 were placed apart; as part of a plan due to their individual needs;
- 24 children were placed in EPP of which 7 have since been adopted.

Provision of Placements

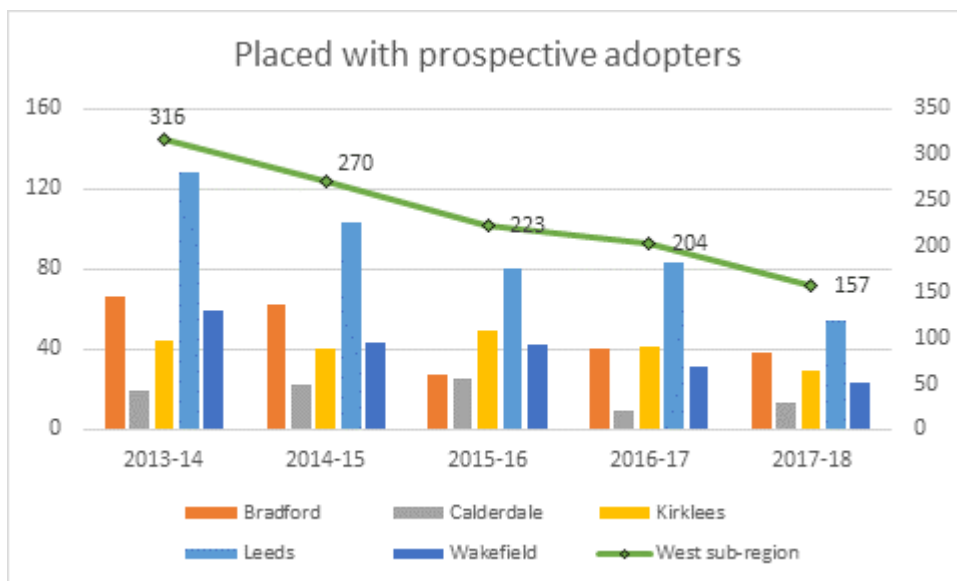
3.3.16 The number of placements provided in-house within the region has increased this year.

- 103 children within RAA;
- 22 children with other local authorities;
- 32 children with VAA.

The percentage this year was 66% in house and 34% interagency. Last year it was 54% in house and 46% interagency. This provides good evidence of the value in pooling adopters across a wide area to provide placements. It is likely with the sufficiency issue that there will be an increase in interagency placements in the next year.



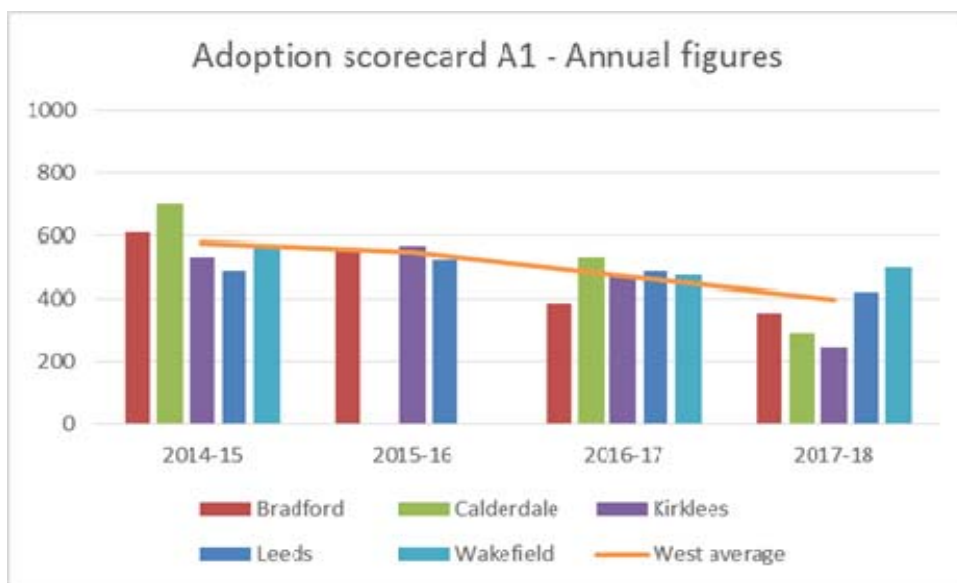
The following children were placed with adopters in the year. This is a slightly different figure from those matched as there is always a gap to allow time for preparation and introductions to the new family.



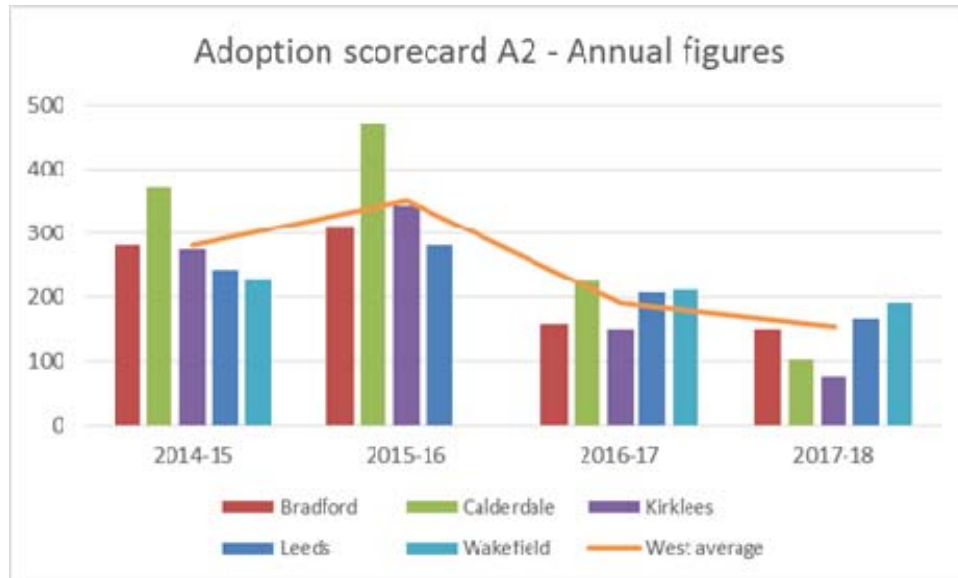
3.3.17 We can see from the data above that children in the region, including those children who often wait longer due to their individual needs, age or ethnicity or being part of a sibling group are being found families to meet their needs. Despite the falling numbers in the last few years. The data below looks at how timely these placements are being made.

Adoption Scorecards

3.3.18 The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (indicator A1) for children in West Yorkshire is 397 days, gradually declining which is better for children in reducing delay (National Indicator is 426 days) (England Average is 593).

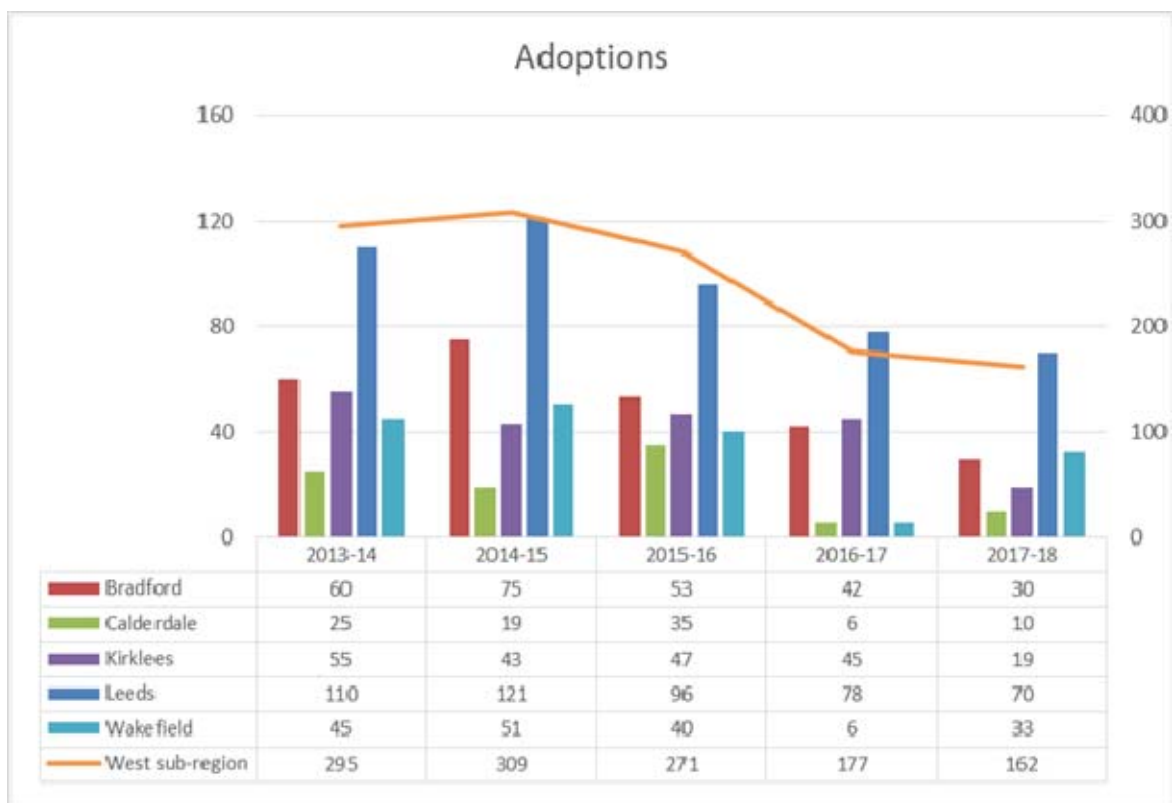


3.3.19 The average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (Indicator A2) for children in West Yorkshire is 154 days, gradually declining which is better for children in reducing delay (National indicator is 121 days) (England average is 223), This is still above the national indicator but it is important to note that a number of older children and sibling groups who generally wait longer have successfully been placed for adoption and it has been key to ensure that the preparation and planning required has taken place to ensure a positive match can be agreed.



Children adopted from care

3.3.20 Although the number of children who have been adopted has fallen 14% of children leaving care are adopted. This is in line with the national average.



3.4 Practice, quality of provision and management oversight

Recruitment and Assessment

3.4.1 The One Adoption brand and website was launched on the 1st April 2017. Adopter recruitment marketing has faced a challenging year as prior to

regionalisation a number of agencies had reduced their marketing and recruitment activity. Additionally the move to a regional approach meant launching a new brand into the market place and having to establish that brand at pace across the region. Despite these challenges over 175,000 people visited our website throughout the year, leading to over 750 people completing the online form requesting more information and 378 households attending 24 information events in West Yorkshire. The information meetings continue to be held in alternating venues across the West Yorkshire region with the aim of increasing accessibility for prospective adoptive families.

- 3.4.2 The 3 recruitment and assessment teams have made real progress in agreeing the practice across the service and we now have standardised information sessions & pre-approval training; a clear stage one process with all new applications; agreed criteria for recruitment of adopters, templates agreed for case work and a system for the allocation of assessments with booklets produced for adopters. Further twilight training sessions are being planned to expand the preparation for adopters regarding supporting children's identity needs regarding relationships with birth families and exploring more practical parenting regarding babies' brains and bonding.
- 3.4.3 A new Peer Mentoring scheme has been launched with our adoptive parents with 38 potential peer mentors identified and training due to take place in the coming months. The team have also signed up to a National Pilot Project, using Virtual Realty technology in adopter recruitment, training and assessment. Both these developments are in partnership with the Cornerstone Partnership, an organisation set up and delivered by adoptive parents.

Family Finding

- 3.4.4 The 3 family finding teams work closely with the local authority children's teams and identified a significant number of children requiring placements at the outset of the agency and a great deal of activity has been focussed on ensuring effective plans are in place for each child waiting for adoption.
- 3.4.5 One adoption attends the legal gateway meetings in each local authority and provides support to the agency decision making (ADM) process regarding adoption plans for children. This is to ensure that children are identified as early as possible for adoption in order to avoid delay in their care planning and to identify possible early placements of children where appropriate.
- 3.4.6 In November 2017 OAWY held the first Children's Profiling Event, inviting adoptive families from across the Yorkshire and Humberside and the North West to consider a selection of children awaiting adoption who were featured with high quality photos, DVDs and personalised displays. This was repeated in March and has been very successful in finding families for children. These are booked for the year ahead.
- 3.4.7 The use of Adoption Match and Linkmaker are embedded in practice. The Agency is continuing to look at maximising opportunities to find families for the

children coming through and are actively involved in the full range of activities including national exchange Days, Activity Days etc. to support this.

- 3.4.8 There are a significant group of children who wait longer for adoption because of the complexity of their needs and the Agency is exploring with local the VAA a more bespoke model of family finding to try to increase the opportunities for these children to find adoptive families. In addition, the team are exploring working with CoramBAAF to pilot their new tool aimed at making the most of families available through a “collective matching” approach.
- 3.4.9 A number of working groups are ongoing looking at further development of the Family Finding role and the development of the interface between OAWY and the 5 Local Authorities it works with to ensure greater consistency in practice but which acknowledges local differences.

Adoption Support

- a) **Adoption support:** Do children and families have timely access to high quality support services?
- 3.4.10 Adoption Support continues to remain an area of considerable growth and considerable need within the service. The Adoption Support Fund has increased expectations of adopters and consequently added a layer of complexity to the work undertaken by the team, including the administrative burden that the process brings.
- 3.4.11 The nature of support requested varies, but frequently includes requests from adoptive parents for advice on strategies for integrating children into families, managing challenging behaviour and support with telling difficult life story information, as well as requests for professional advice and help for children in school where early developmental trauma has led to difficulties. There have been 410 referrals for adoption support into the service this year, including new families and families who have previously received services.
- 3.4.12 OAWY is working to develop a core and consistent adoption support offer across the region ensuring that a range of services are available to everyone. These include a range of regional groups that have been expanded to support adopters, children and young people across the region, now available and accessible in all parts of west Yorkshire. These including stay and play groups, adopter support groups, family activity days and young people’s groups.
- 3.4.13 The OAWY’s newsletter lists all the groups and developments occurring in the West Yorkshire region including a rolling programme of workshops and training for adoptive parents. Topics such as brain based parenting, foetal alcohol syndrome, foundations for attachment, non-violent resistance, theraplay, Safe Base and ADOPT training meeting the needs of parents who have children with differing needs and are also available to all adopters in West Yorkshire improving the support to adopters.
- 3.4.14 At the end of March 2018 the OAWY had 701 open cases with a waiting list of 91 children requiring allocation for adoption support assessments. At the

opening of the agency there was a waiting list of 65 cases. This waiting list did reduce during the year but has increased again as the year has progressed resulting in adoptive families not accessing therapeutic support in a timely manner. We have a prioritisation system in place and are trialling a triage system offering an initial visit to see if this assists in addressing concerns at an early stage and signposting where appropriate. Staff numbers in two of the adoption support teams are high and staff across the service have high caseloads in this area of work. The ability of the managers to provide effective management oversight of the work is currently under review given the volume and complexity of the work.

Practice Improvement Grants

- 3.4.15 One Adoption West Yorkshire has received funding to pilot a regional adoption support fund. The Adoption Support Fund was set up in 2015 to reduce the gap between adoptive children needing therapeutic services and receiving them, ultimately to improve outcomes for young people and families. The aim of the pilot is to improve adoption support across an RAA by: regional commissioning of the ASF and engaging users in the development and testing of regionalised support services; test out how the ASF could be managed in a regionalised structure including how human and financial resources for adoption support will be deployed and to inform future national policy and delivery of ASF and share emerging practice with other Regional Adoption Agencies. From August 2017 One Adoption West Yorkshire received over £656,525.51 from the adoption support fund to support adoptive families in west Yorkshire. This work is ongoing.
- 3.4.16 One Adoption West Yorkshire also received funding from the DFE to develop a Centre of excellence for Adoption Support with a view to rolling this out across the wider Yorkshire & Humber region. The objectives of this are to look at a framework for assessment of support needs; to develop multi- disciplinary support for adoptive families and to develop a training and development programme for professionals in the sector. This work is developing and 3 sector specialists across health, education and social care are working with the service partners to shape and develop this work.

Disruptions

- 3.4.17 In the last year, 6 adoption placements have disrupted prior to the adoption order being made. Disruption is a cause for concern and OAWY is working closely with the local authorities to ensure that a full understanding of the issues leading to the breakdown are fully understood to inform future planning for the child and the adoptive parents as well as themes for learning for future practice.

3.4.18 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 people, adoptive parents, birth parents, adopted adults.
- Performance Data: Any statistical data that helps us judge the quality and effectiveness of our professional practice.
- Practice Wisdom and Knowledge: The practice wisdom of those staff who work with children young people and families, adoption panels & learning from disruptions.
- The findings of external and internal inspections, audits and evaluations of our practice.

3.4.19 The work to ensure this framework is fully established is well underway with further developments over the next year regarding case file audits, adoption support performance data and service user feedback mechanisms awaiting completion.

3.4.20 A Quality Assurance (QA) mechanism for panel work is used as a matter of course and all the feedback since June has been generally positive. The quality assurance process found that the majority of prospective adopter reports (PARS) were of a good standard (78% 'good, 15% 'satisfactory' and 7% requiring improvement) and with Child Permanence Reports provided by local authority social workers over half were considered good. (56%, 22% 'satisfactory' and 22% required improvement). OAWY are working with the 5 LA's to jointly commission training and development work regarding this area of practice.

3.4.21 With regard to feedback from service users at adoption panel, 26 questionnaires were received from attendees at panel who rated the experience at panel out of a possible score of 10:

- 21 (81%) respondents rated the experience at 9 or higher;
- 4 (15%) respondents rated the experience at 8;
- 1(4%) respondent rated the experience at 7.

3.4.22 There were 7 complaints made regarding the Adoption Service during the year. All complaints were resolved at stage one. 1 complaint was upheld, 3 were partially upheld, 2 were not upheld and in the case of 1 complaint we didn't receive a copy of the response. In addition, there were 3 representations: these are requests for information or complaints where they are outside the timeframe where we would accept a complaint.

Voice and Influence of Children, Young People and Adopters

3.4.23 Appendix 1 provides the Voice and Influence of Children, Young People and Adopters report card. This highlights the work undertaken to capture the views of service users to help develop and shape the service.

3.5 Continuous Professional and Service Development

Staff development and support

3.5.1 All of the staff receive regular monthly supervision and have an appraisal. In the first year this fell out of the cycle of the council's appraisal system due to new managers taking over line management responsibility and needing enough time before setting objectives with staff. This is an opportunity for staff to ensure that there is reflection regarding their work and addresses their own personal and professional development and practice.

Training

3.5.2 During the first year of operation all staff have had basic training in the IT systems being used. All recruitment staff have now been trained to use the Attachment Style Interview tool. It will take time to embed the learning from this into the assessment work undertaken but it will assist staff in being clear about how we effectively support adopters moving forward.

3.5.3 The service and team managers, advanced practitioners and senior business support managers have been involved in a programme of learning around developing their leadership role in the organisation within a restorative framework. This has assisted in developing relationships across the service and has given some practical strategies to ensure that managers are equipped for leading the teams through a period of considerable change.

3.5.4 There has been a range of training for all staff around parenting adopted children in terms of adopting a trauma informed approach regarding brain development and sensory integration. In addition there has been training around the adoption support fund and early permanence

3.5.6 Adoption panel training has been undertaken for all panel members across the region.

3.5.7 Each practice area has had development days to share good practice and consider new ways of working in the new arrangements. This will be part of our development as an agency with at least two development days planned in each discipline with business support staff to ensure that opportunities for reflection and involvement in service development are provided for staff.

- 3.5.8 A skills gap analysis is currently underway with staff to assist in developing a workforce development plan over the coming year.

Strategic issues and forward plans

- 3.5.9 The service has spent time considering the OAWY vision, mission, outcomes and priorities for the next 3 years and a plan on a page has been developed (see Appendix 2). This outlines the priorities within the plan and are tracked through the OAWY Service Improvement Plan.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 There has been ongoing engagement with staff over the year who transferred in to the agency as well as formal consultation with the trade unions regarding the changes. Consultation with adopters, birth parents and adopted young people is ongoing to inform the development of the service design and delivery of the agency.

4.2 Equality and Diversity/ Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 OAWY completed an equality Impact assessment this year and a clear action plan has emerged from this to ensure that we are able to provide a comprehensive service to all communities. The Equality & Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Impact assessment is attached as Appendix 3.

4.3 Council Policies and Best Council Plan

- 4.3.1 The activities in this report contribute to the Best Council Plan outcome for everyone in Leeds to have Safe, Strong Communities with specific priorities to 'keep people safe from harm' and 'support children to have the best start in life'. In addition, the supporting Children and Young People's Plan identifies Looked after Children as one of three priority 'obsessions'. The adoption service is integral to our plan to safely and appropriately reduce the numbers of Children Looked After through ensuring all our children are placed in a permanent family outside the care system as soon as possible.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 The Budget for One Adoption West Yorkshire is set by the 5 local authorities in line with the partnership agreement. The budget has been agreed for the coming year. The final overall outturn position for OAWY was a small underspend this first year. The overall staffing budget was slightly overspent although initially there were a high number of vacancies against the budgeted structure. However, due to increased demands in adoption support and the impact of the pay harmonisation these contributed to the financial pressure in this area of the budget. The interagency budget was slightly underspent this

year, even though 64 placements were paid for during the year. However, the income target in this area was not fully achieved. Efficiencies were made across the running costs elements of the budget around adoption panels and savings achieved through streamlining business processes which helped mitigate against the pressures in staffing.”

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information Call In

4.5.1 This report is subject to Call In.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 It is a regulatory requirement on the Local Authority that this report is prepared and presented to the Executive Board of the Council. The report is linked to the corporate risk on Safeguarding Children.

5 Conclusions

5.1 The Regionalisation of Adoption Services is part of a structural reform programme set out by the government. One Adoption West Yorkshire was the first regional agency in the country to be set up and has had the opportunity to help shape and develop adoption practice locally, regionally and nationally. The first year of operation has been challenging for all the staff and the scale and complexities of some of the practicalities of such a change cannot be underestimated. However, the commitment, dedication and motivation of the staff to ensure that children and families have remained their key priority has been impressive in such challenging circumstances. The performance of the service over the last year provides evidence that we have established a firm foundation on which to build a flagship adoption service.

6 Recommendations

6.1 That the Executive Board receives this report and continues to support the work of One Adoption West Yorkshire to ensure our adopted children receive the best possible support.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.