

Report of the Director of Children & Families

Report to Executive Board

Date: 26th June 2019

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 from April 2018 to March 2019.

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 from April 2018 to March 2019.

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 there are now 15 regional adoption agencies (RAA's) covering a third of all local authorities and another 15 scheduled to go live between April and June 2019.
- 2.3 There are a number of challenges in the adoption system nationally with a decline in adoption decisions for children (ADM), new placement orders granted, children placed for adoption and adoption orders granted. However, at the same time there has been an increase in the number of children waiting with a placement order and the number of children waiting with a placement order 18 months or more.
- 2.4 There has also been a national increase in the average length of time for children waiting with a placement order but not yet placed, between entering care and moving in with adoptive parents (National scorecard Indicator A1) and the local authority receiving a court authority to place and deciding on a match (National scorecard Indicator A2).
- 2.5 The recruitment of adopters nationally is also declining and the gap between the number of children waiting (increasing) and approved adopters waiting (decreasing) is widening. At the same time the government suspended the requirement for agencies to place their children and adopters on the National Adoption Register from the end of March 2018, pending a review to also consider the issues raised in the fostering stocktake about a national register for foster carers.
- 2.6 While it is still early days for regionalisation, a range of qualitative data is becoming available, from Ofsted inspections and the Inception and Scoping Report from Ecorys UK / the Hadley Centre. There are positive indications about improving recruitment, reducing delay and improvements in timeliness in some RAA's. The latter report found that there are signs of positive adopter feedback, and improved adopter recruitment. Linked to this, some RAAs have been able to improve the support for adopters.
- 2.7 The future of the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) remains uncertain and the Secretary of State announced in December 2018 £6m additional funding for the current year and an additional £6m for 2019-2020. The Government is aiming to work closely with the sector to consider long-term children's services funding as part of the 2019 Spending Review, when the government will set out its long-term spending approach.

3 Main issues

3.1 Use of Resources

3.1.1 Staffing

The staff group remains largely stable but there has been a changeover in the three service managers within the service with Mary Brudenell emigrating in November, replaced by Michelle Rawlings. One of our other service managers is on long term sick leave and we are in the process of recruiting to fill this post on a temporary basis. There have been some new managers recruited and there has been additional staff recruited in adoption support to meet the demands of the service.

Julia Pearmain, one of the independent adoption panel chairs, has reduced the number of panels she is able to chair and we have therefore recruited a new Panel Chair to provide more flexibility in covering the panels. Andy Stott is an experienced manager with local authorities in the North West and more latterly as the operational manager for Barnardo's across Yorkshire and Humber has joined us for this role.

3.1.2 Duty System

Following the rollout of Enterprise Voice technology a revised Duty system came into effect on 2nd July 2018. This means that duty is now rotated between the 3 main office bases in Bradford, Huddersfield and Leeds on a weekly basis. This has reduced the time staff spend travelling to Kernel House and there has been no adverse impact upon the ability to take calls and respond effectively. In fact, it has had a positive effect with staff feeling more positive about this approach with a growing feeling of connectivity across the bases.

3.1.3 Accommodation & service delivery

Following a review of the service last year work and taking feedback from staff we have progressed on moving from 5 office bases to 3 locations with touch down space in the other two offices. The staff from the recruitment and assessment team based in Wakefield moved along with other staff from Bradford in February 2019 from Sir Henry Mitchell House to the Margaret McMillan building. At this time formal agreement has not yet been reached about space at Huddersfield regarding staff moving from Halifax. The issue has been escalated to address barriers in this progressing.

Each of the local authorities retain a key service manager and a team manager who link in with the local authority and in family finding the role of the Advanced Practitioner is key in tracking and providing advice to the agency regarding children's planning as well as looking at practice improvement with local authorities. There are also key family finding staff that will maintain established links and build new relationships with teams. However, across the region workers will be deployed flexibly, collapsing boundaries where appropriate and required. OAWY has increased the management capacity from within existing resources to create additional teams in Recruitment and Assessment, Family Finding and Adoption Support. These teams are based

out of the Leeds office to reduce travel time, being closer to Wakefield than the Bradford office in the original set up and also reflecting the increased needs across this part of the region in children requiring adoption.

The increase in teams at Kernel House in Leeds is causing pressure on space and constructive discussions are underway with colleagues and asset management to address space for One Adoption and the looked after children's teams

3.1.5 Information Technology

The IT project team is continuing to work with the teams on developing business processes and integrating forms into the mosaic workflow as well as developing improved reporting from the system. The new adoption support workflow has been implemented to make recording easier and to improve reporting. A monthly reporting meeting is now in place to look at prioritising the development of reports for use within the service, good progress is being made.

The work regarding accessing the local authority systems from a portal on the Leeds laptop remains outstanding. A project manager remains in position to ensure that this work is driven forward and there has been a number of technical and resource led issues that have prevented this from being delivered in Bradford and Calderdale. These issues have been escalated within the local authorities in order for this work to be completed satisfactorily. Kirklees have implemented a new case recording system and we have trained the staff who need access to this system as well as exploring with them the quarterly returns and the portal technology is to be explored in due course. This effectively means that some staff are still using more than one device in these local areas, this is not an efficient use of time, however the matter is being addressed.

3.1.6 Budget

In June 2018 there was an increase in the inter agency fees nationally and this has had a significant impact on the 2018/19 budget for OAWY with a request for an increase in the funding from each local authority. The operational accountability of the regional agency is to the Management Board, comprising of senior officers delegated by each Director Children Services and the increase in budget was been agreed by the 5 LA's. The agency is overseen by a Joint Committee of councillors representing the 5 local authorities, who have knowledge of and responsibility for Children's Services. The Joint Committee exercises the corporate parenting role of the Participating Authorities in relation to the functions of One Adoption Agency for West Yorkshire and these issues were discussed and a way forward agreed with them. The final outturn of the budget is reported in section 4.4.

3.2 Partnership working

3.2.1 Operational leads meetings

The responsible officer for adoption in each local authority meets with OAWY senior team every three months and this is a helpful forum to discuss practice and performance issues. The joint commissioning of training across the region has been an issue as the take up has been mixed. There is a mismatch between what operational leads may consider as priorities and what each workforce development leads in each local area see as a priority. It is important that the context of each LA is considered in relation to their practice and it has been agreed that meetings will be held with workforce development leads to discuss the issues and identify a way forward.

Discussions were held regarding the changes in letterbox arrangements and these have moved forward as we streamline the systems supporting this work. A protocol regarding foster care adoptions has been agreed between One Adoption West Yorkshire and across the operational leads group that will improve the timeliness of progressing these.

3.2.2 Centre of Excellence Project

This department for education project aims to improve the positive outcomes for children and families through an evidence based multi- agency assessment of need and support, in partnership with children, adopters and others. The project is due to be completed in October 2019 and the multi disciplinary team are on track with completing the key objectives. They have implemented a Standardised Adoption Support Assessment Framework and the training for this is currently being rolled out across the region. The team are in the final stages of completing a multi-disciplinary model for adoption support in the region and this is due to be shared with key partners in June/July. The funding from the department for education is due to come to an end in October and discussions are underway regarding the sustainability of this approach given resource implications, given the positive benefits this model and approach provides for families across the region.

3.2.3 Early permanence Project

The department for education also fund this project run by the voluntary adoption agencies, Barnardos, Adoption Matters and Caritas Care in partnership with One Adoption. Placing children in an early permanence arrangement is growing and the professionals training which is run jointly with Barnardo's is going well with attendance from all Local Authority partners. The concurrency project is well underway with the first family being approved and another in assessment by Adoption Matters and Caritas Care.

3.2.4 Meetings with medical advisors

The medical advisors across the region meet with One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) staff twice a year. A medical advisor protocol has been implemented and this has been very helpful for all concerned and has been recognised as an exemplar for other RAA's. There are some issues in two local areas regarding medical advisor capacity and the resources available to

undertake medicals regarding children's health needs in a timely manner. This has led to some delays for children in progressing care plans and the matters have been discussed within each local authority, with commissioners in health and providers to seek improvements in this regard.

3.2.5 Virtual school heads (VSH)

In August 2018 Local Authorities received funding from the government to implement the new statutory duty and the OAWY management board agreed that the local authorities would top slice the grant by 10% to enable OAWY to work in partnership with the VSH in implementing new duty across the region. The education worker within OAWY, working as part of the centre of excellence work is ideally placed to work with staff in adoption support to build their knowledge and skill about issues around education that affect children and young people and to provide advice and support to adoptive families. The funding enables the education worker to undertake an agreed programme of work with the VSH's, beyond the timescales for the centre of excellence project. This is pioneering work and is seen as an example of good practice by the Department of Education.

3.2.9 Special Guardianship

In July 2018 the management board agreed to another initiative, overseen by One Adoption West Yorkshire, working in partnership with grandparents plus and the five local authorities to provide support to special guardians in the region. This is a project developing a model that has been successful in the North East working with kinship carers providing a strong focus on peer support as a sustainable and effective way to support kinship carers. Two project workers have been recruited and came into post on 1st October 2018 and work has been progressing with the team managers in the fostering services to ensure that all are aware of the service, referral process and to look at identifying appropriate groups/ families to work with. There are positive indications regarding the impact of this work and more information regarding impact and outcomes will be provided in due course.

3.3 **Performance Management**

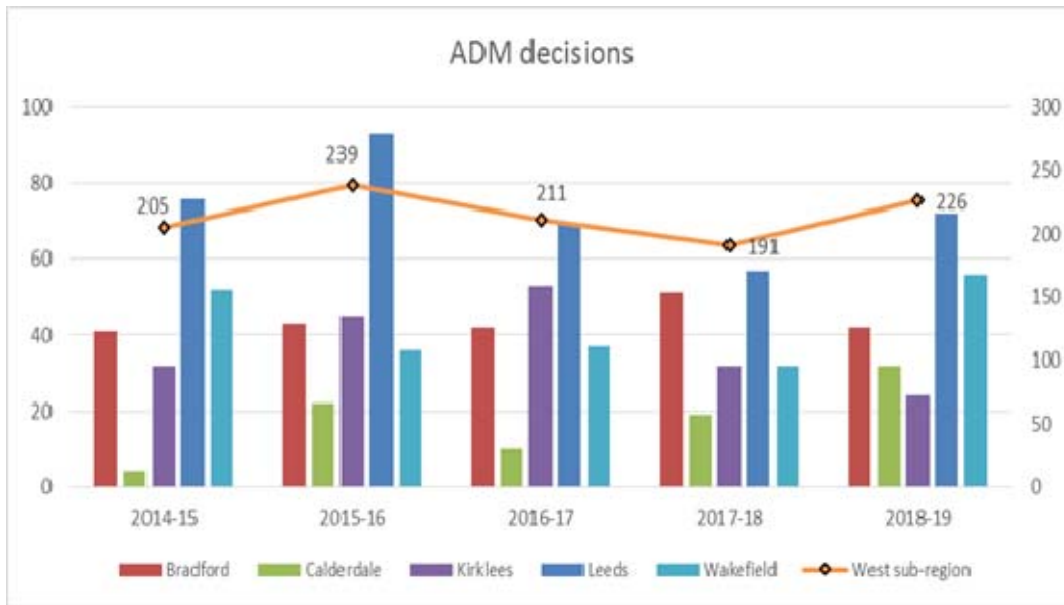
3.3.1 The agency provides quarterly reports to the management board. This data provided has developed over the last 2 years and is gathered to ensure that we are aware of how much work is undertaken, how well was it undertaken and if anyone is any better off.

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

3.3.2 The children with a plan for adoption during 2018/19

Between April 2018 and March 2019, 226 children had a plan for adoption ratified by the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities Agency Decision Makers. Of the 226 children with a plan for adoption, there were 118 female and 108 male children.

In total, this is a 18% increase on the last year's full year figure of 191 children from across the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities.



3.3.3 Ethnicity

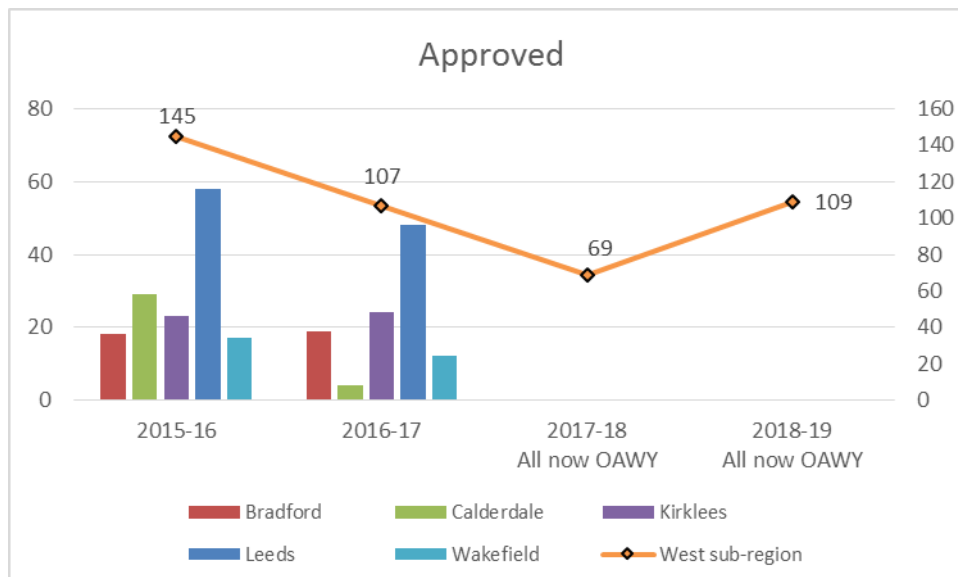
Of the 226 children with a plan for adoption ratified this year, 176 (78%) children were from white British backgrounds (including information not obtained) and 50 children (22%) were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, including children from eastern European, Gypsy Roma, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds.

3.3.4 Placement with Siblings

As a general principle, siblings will be placed together; however, due to the individual needs of children, this is not always appropriate and cannot always be achieved. It is essential that sibling assessments are carried out to ensure good quality decision making and support plans are evidence based if children are placed together or apart. The numbers of children requiring adoption in sibling groups during the year is 47 children (this includes those with a match and/ or placement). Of the 40 children placed from this cohort during the year 12 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 2019/20.

3.3.5 Adopter recruitment

109 adoptive households were approved during the year and you will note from the table below that this is an increase of 40 from year-end 2017-18. This takes us slightly above the numbers prior to regionalisation and is encouraging.



Within the 109 households, 206 individuals were approved throughout 2018/19. Of these 22 (11%) 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. We are undertaking some key focussed work to increase the diverse range of adopters over the next year. Households approved for sibling groups improved this year with 21 households approved for 2 children; 1 approved for a sibling group of 3 and 31 households open to an Early Permanence Placements. There is still more to do around recruiting adopters for sibling groups.

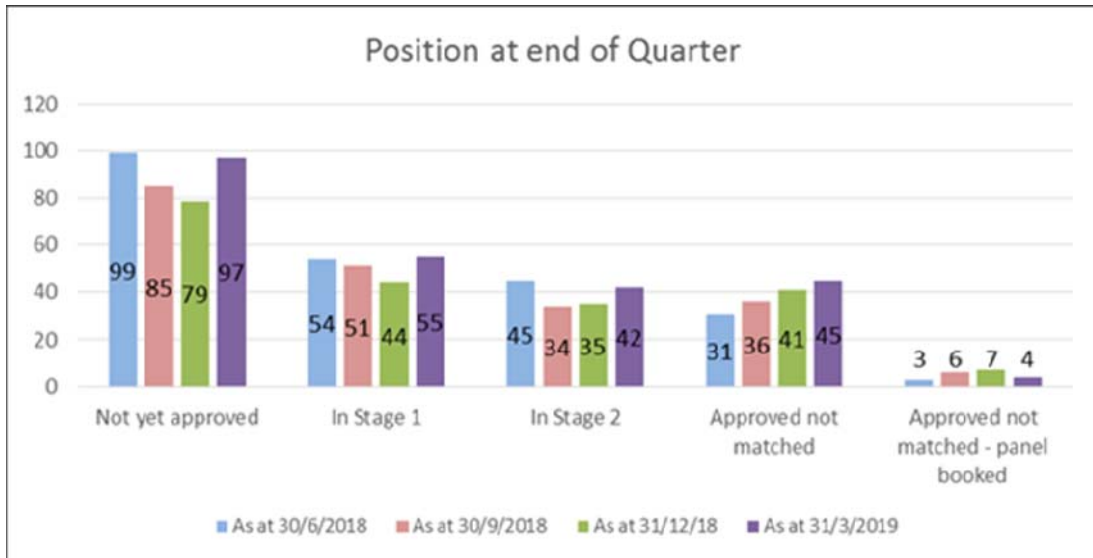
3.3.6 Children with an adoption plan

As of the end of March 2019 there are 202 children with a plan for adoption from the 5 west Yorkshire local authorities not currently placed and requiring adopters. 95 children out of the 202 are 0 - 2 years, 84 are between 2 and 4 years and 23 children are 5 years of age or older. 4 children have potential matches identified and 4 of these have a date booked at adoption panel for the match to be formally considered.

From the children waiting for a placement there are 99 girls and 103 boys, and 26% are children from BME backgrounds. There are 4 sibling groups of 2 and 4 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.

3.3.7 Adopters available

As of the end of March 2019, there are 45 approved adoptive households that have not officially been matched. 32 are available to consider placements (have no links) as 13 have a panel date booked for a match.

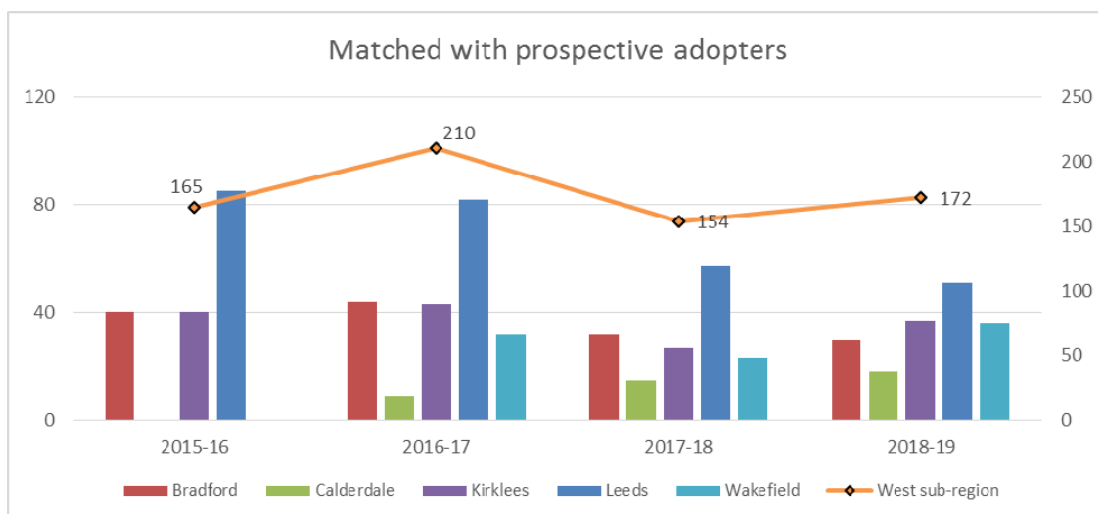


On the 31st March 2019 97 adopters are in the process of assessment (in stage 1 or 2) although these will take a number of months to become approved. There is a steady increase in those within the assessment process overall.

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

3.3.8 Children matched in the year for adoption

Between April 2018 and March 2019, 172 children from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities were matched with families at adoption panels; this is a 11% increase on the 154 children matched between April 2017 and March 2018 from across the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities.



From April 2018 to March 2019, 23% (40) of the children matched were from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.

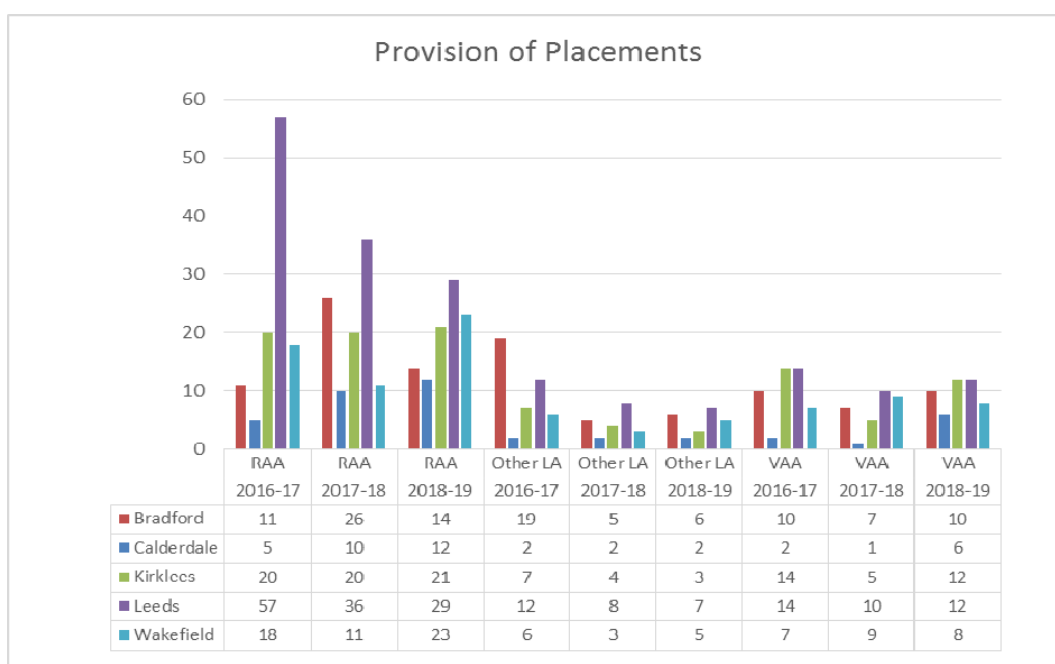
- 139 of the children matched were 0 to 2 years old;
- 23 children matched were 2 to 4 years old;
- 10 children were aged 5 years or older;
- 62 children were part of a sibling group (of the 172 matched);
- 55 children were placed who are part of a sibling group of which 19 were placed apart; as part of a plan due to their individual needs;
- 15 children were placed in early permanence placements during the year of which 4 have since been adopted. This is a very positive step in reducing the number of moves for children before they reach their permanent family.

3.3.9 Provision of Placements

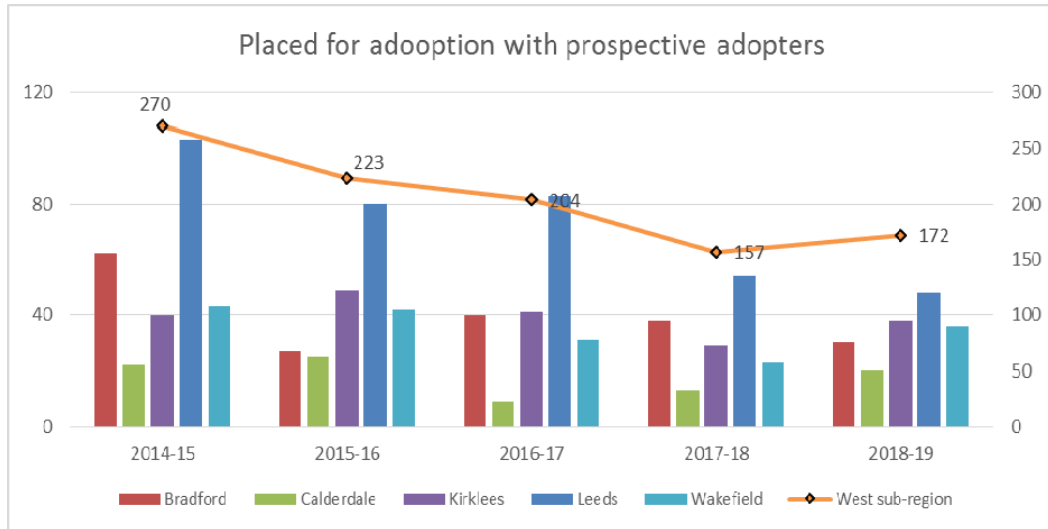
We placed 170 children this year. The percentage of placements provided in-house within the region has decreased this year, due to the lack of families in the process when the RAA went live so not as many available in the system as we approached the second half of the year.

- 99 children within RAA;
- 23 children with other local authorities LA's);
- 48 children with VAA.

The percentage this year was 59% in house and 41% interagency. Last year it was 66% in house and 34% interagency. It is clear from this table that the trends for LA's in the use of interagency placements has changed with some LA's decreasing the number of interagency placements made, although some LA's have also seen a decreasing number of children coming through for adoption so the picture is more complex than the figures suggest.



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.

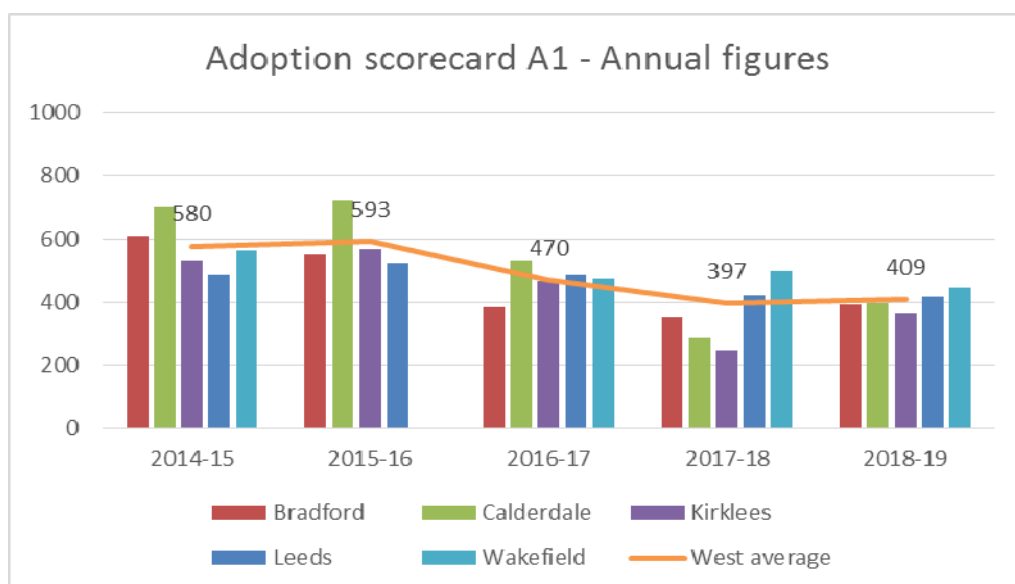


We can see from the data above that children in the region, including those children who often wait longer due to their individual needs, age or ethnicity or being part of a sibling group are being found families to meet their needs. The data below looks at how timely these placements are being made.

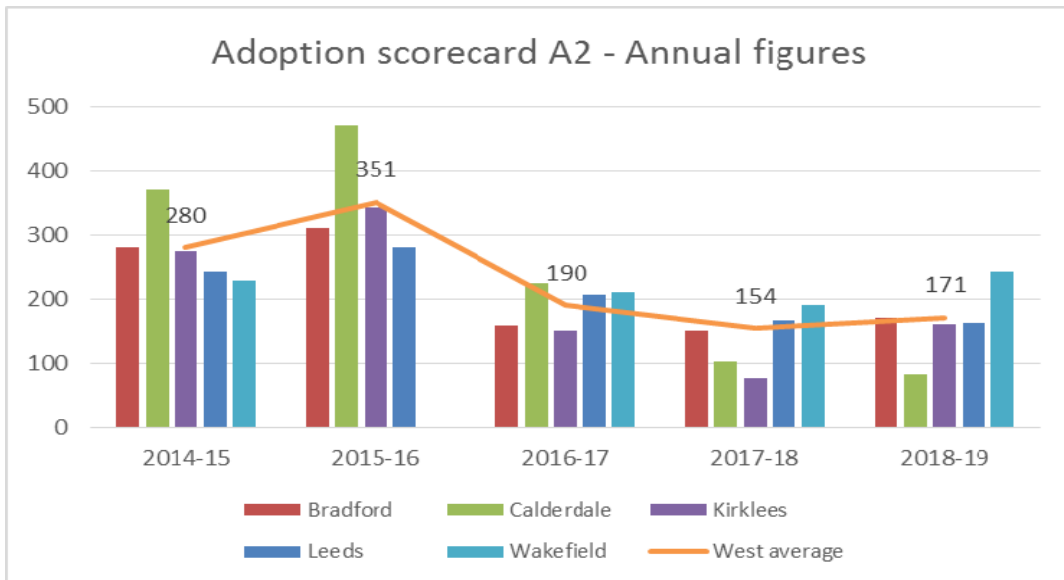
N.B. The chart shows 172 placed, however 2 children had their placement disrupted in the same period.

3.3.10 Adoption Scorecards

The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (indicator A1) for children in West Yorkshire is 409 days, the National Indicator target is 426 days and the England Average is 486). This is positive and remains stable.

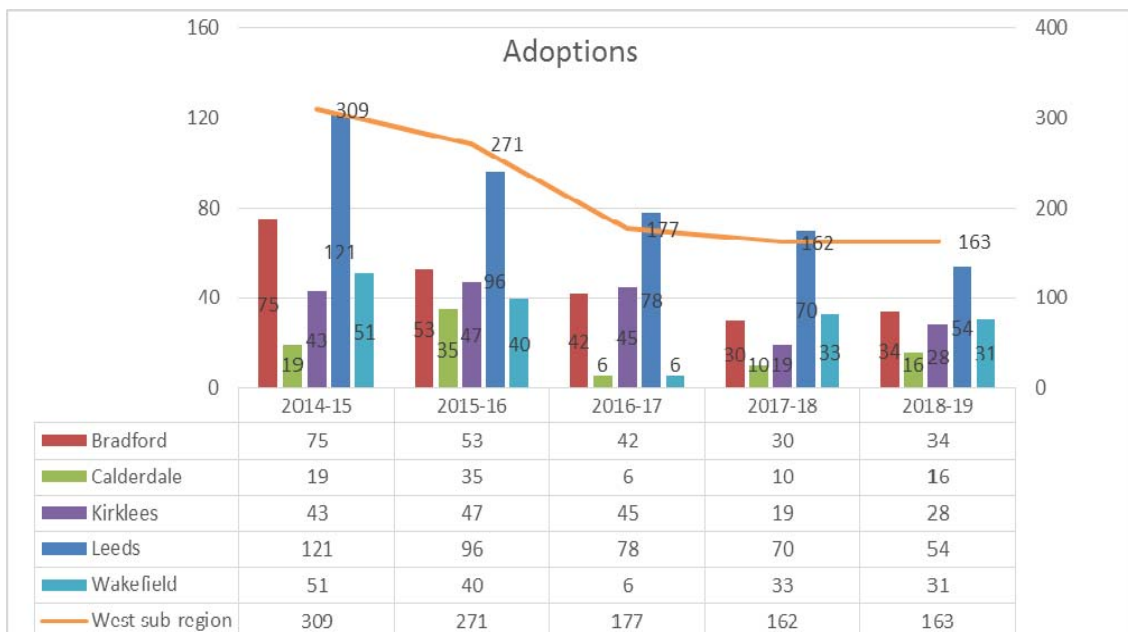


The average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (Indicator A2) for children in West Yorkshire is 171 days, gradually declining which is better for children in reducing delay the National indicator target is 121 days and the England average is 201. This is still above the national indicator and reflects an issue of a national decline in the number of adopters available as well as some LA's having less early permanence placements that can impact upon this overall figure.



3.3.11 Children adopted from care

The number of children who have been adopted has increased by 1 (163) with 14% of children leaving care being adopted. This is in line with the national average.



3.4 Practice, quality of provision and management oversight

3.4.1 Awards

In October 2018 One Adoption West Yorkshire was awarded a national award for Excellence in adoption practice. This was the first time a regional adoption agency has won a national award and this has aided with raising the profile of the agency and recognising good practice. In addition to this one of our adoptive families in the region also won the Adopter Champion of the year. They adopted four children and assist in the training of early permanence adopters in our region, highlighting the benefits of this approach for children.

In March 2019 One Adoption West Yorkshire also won the 2018 Local Government Chronicles Award. This award was for working across public to public partnerships. The judges said of the entry: "This partnership has taken an inclusive transformational approach to deliver a consistent high quality service. It has delivered a flagship service across a wide geographic area. It was the first of its kind and sets the standard for the rest of the country. It is shaped by the experience of its stakeholders."

3.4.2 Recruitment and Assessment

Over 2018/19 the One Adoption brand awareness has continued to grow steadily. This can be seen by the increase in people finding the One Adoption website 'organically' (not through paid advertising). This activity resulted in 507 households attending the information events in West Yorkshire which is an increase of 129 compared to 2017/18. More targeted advertising has seen the marketing cost per household attending an information event reduced from £256 in 2017/18 to £115 this year.

The preparation of adopters has continued to improve with adopters now having access to additional training via full day or twilight sessions in relation to early permanence, birth parent workshop, infant brain development and training for relatives or friends.

The 4 days of Preparation Training now incorporate the use of Virtual Reality technology. This has had a very positive impact upon prospective adopters stating: "*a very good experience; really powerful andt really helped with putting yourself in the child's shoes.*" There continues to be a commitment to ensure birth parents are actively involved in the preparation of adopters and the introduction of these workshops has really helped adoptive focus on the importance of working with birth parents to help adopted children develop a coherent sense of their identity.. One adopter stated: "*I realised that you do not take a child and then forget about the birth family. They may not be there in person but they will always be part of the child's life*".

Over the last year there has been a real focus on promoting the Adoption Support Core Offer early in the recruitment process and ensuring this becomes the norm for adoptive families, enabling families to access support with a therapeutic parenting approach to meet their children's needs.

3.4.3 Adoption Panels

The adoption panels across the region continue to work well and the number of independent panel chairs has increased from two to three with Andy Stott joining the team in September 2018. Communication between the Chairs and OAWY has improved with the Service Manager responsible for panels now making regular phone calls to the Chairs. Formal meetings are also undertaken between the Chairs and the agency. The adoption panels play an important role in providing feedback to the local authorities and the agency regarding practice and provide a half yearly report. This is discussed more in 3.4.16

3.4.4 Family Finding

The Family Finding teams have continued with the regional linking meeting to look at children and families in the assessment process and to refine the systems to support this work. The ceasing of the National adoption register in March 2019 by the government has meant that other resources have been accessed to make links with families nationwide and we are exploring links to pilot the use of collective matching with Coram I and Linkmaker. We have continued to develop the partnership with the voluntary agency alliance in the region and we are exploring ways of commissioning their placements that ensure that children are placed more locally.

The use of profiling events has been positive with 5 profiling events held in 2018/19. These have resulted in 16 matches to date for children in the region. Approved and stage 2 adopters from OAWY and other agencies across the North of England were invited. The success of these events and the positive feedback from those who attended has resulted in plans for further profiling events to be held in 2019/20. Comments include: *“The event was excellent - the family finders and all the staff were amazing;”* *“all extremely informative – really good to have a social worker with me to think about the children that may be right for us.”*

Bump into meetings have developed and they happen following the decision to proceed with the adoptive placement and before adoption panel. Prior to the child being given information about their new family, the foster carer and adopters arrange to meet in a park or another location familiar to the child. When asking approved adopters what went well at the bump into meeting they said: *“It was great to see the twins for the first time but it was also great to meet their foster carer who was fab; “ We could see boys playing care free, and see their personalities rather than just their pictures.”*

3.4.5 Adoption Support

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

The range and quality of adoption services open to all adopters across the region continues to develop and increase as gaps in provision have become

clearer. The peer mentoring is going from strength to strength and there are now 31 trained mentors who are providing support to 51 families. The feedback from those who have a peer mentor has been really positive: *“ Our mentor has been a life-line to us during this difficult process; “ helps me to feel I do a good job and that however challenging life is it's not insurmountable”; “It's so nice having someone who understands”;*

3 newsletters went out to all adoptive families across the region in June, October and January. These talk about all the activities going on across the region for families to access. Comments from adopters include *“ thank you for a fantastic and varied newsletter. I really enjoyed reading it, especially the articles and also the resources information. I appreciate all of the help and support we receive which is so much more valuable than anything we received as new adopters in 2015. Everything has moved at such a pace and I like to keep up to date.. thankyou”.*

One of the stay and play groups has been relaunched following consultation with parents. There have been a number of training programmes and workshops for parents including foundations for attachment programme with more than 20 families having accessed this since the start of the year. Feedback includes: *“Very thought provoking, made complete sense, made me better understand what was happening for my child”; “Greater understanding and new ways of parenting”.* Training for parent regarding non violence resistance to help manage child to parent violence and a safebase parenting programme for caring for teenagers has continued to be reviewed positively.

The new Adoption Support Fund portal on the Government website came into force at the beginning of July 2018 and this is much more user-friendly and along with our improved business support processes we have had a higher number of successful applications for therapeutic support for families. In total we have accessed £2.1 million to support 650 adopted children in West Yorkshire.

3.4.6 Disruptions

In the last year, 2 adoption placements have disrupted prior to the adoption order being made. Disruption is always 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 breakdowns are fully understood to inform future planning for the child and the adoptive parents as well as themes for learning for future practice.

3.4.7 Quality Assurance

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

- Views of Children and Families: The views and experiences of children & young adults;
- Performance Data: Any statistical data that helps us judge the quality and effectiveness of our professional practice;

- Practice Wisdom & Knowledge: The practice wisdom of those staff who work with children, young people and families, adoption panels and learning from disruptions;
- The findings of external and internal inspections, audits and evaluations of our practice.

A Quality Assurance (QA) mechanism for panel work is used as a matter of course and has found that the majority of prospective adopter reports (PARS) were of a good standard (81% 'good, 15% 'satisfactory' and 4% requiring improvement). This is an improvement on last years figure. The Child Permanence Reports provided by local authority social workers over half were considered good (53%, 19% 'satisfactory' and 28% requiring improvement). This is a slight decline since last year and OAWY are working with the 5 LA's to address this issues with training and development work, given the high turnover of staff in some some local authorities.

With regard to feedback from service users at adoption panel, 50 questionnaires were received from attendees at panel who rated the experience at panel out of a possible score of 10:

- 40 (80%) respondents rated the experience at 9 or higher;
- 6 (12%) respondents rated the experience at 8;
- 2 (4%) respondents rated the experience at 6;
- 1 (2%) respondent rated the experience at 3.

There has been some learning for panels and the agency about those circumstances at panel that have been difficult to ensure that we are fully aware of and can rectify issues as far as possible prior to panel.

There were 5 complaints made regarding the Adoption Service during the year. All complaints were resolved at stage one. 1 complaint was withdrawn, 1 was resolved, 1 was partially upheld, 1 was not upheld and 1 is ongoing, all relating to issues with adoption support. Each year we look at any themes arising from complaints to ensure that we can learn from these and feedback into practice improvement.

3.4.8 Voice and Influence of Children, Young People and Adopters

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

3.5. Continuous Professional and Service Development

3.5.1 Staff development and support

All of the staff receive regular monthly supervision and have an appraisal. 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.

The analysis of the staff survey last summer showed feedback that the top positive theme was relationships. Staff had cited strength in relationships not only with each other but also LAs, adopters, other agencies and families. The constructive themes that emerged for development were: communication – a sense of frustration that staff did not feel like they are informed of what was going on i.e. potential office moves and/ or that they have ‘no voice’; Travel/ location of offices – concerns over lost time, feeling of isolation and difficulty forming/ feeling like a team; Training – be it IT/ mosaic or social work practice training.

As a response to these issues a number of changes took place with regards to travel and accommodation, a review of communication across the agency with a new communication plan has been implemented and clinical supervision is provided for adoption support staff. We are underway with a skills gaps analysis in order to develop a workforce development strategy in the next year to ensure that we can continue to build a skilled workforce.

3.5.2 Training

During 2018/19 a range of training has been delivered across the teams. Here are some highlights:

- Restorative Practice- Action learning sets for managers
- Adoption Support Fund Assessment Tool – all social work staff;
- Adoption Support assessment framework – all social work staff
- Sibling assessments- family finders and LA social workers
- Contact and identity issues- social work staff
- Attachment Style Interview – all recruitment & assessment staff;
- Conflict Resolution – all team managers and advanced practitioners;
- Trauma Informed Training – delivered to all at a staff event in Oct;
- Virtual Reality – selected staff
- Management & leadership Level 3 & 5 apprenticeship – 3 x business support;

We are in the process of carrying out an skills gap analysis. This will inform the workforce development plan for the next two years to be in line with the service improvement plan. However, plans are already in place to provide training for adoption support workers with Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy & Non-Violent Resistance to work more effectively with families across the region.

3.5.3 Strategic issues and forward plans

OAWY’s plan on a page, Appendix 2, outlines the vision, mission, outcomes and priorities up to 2020/21. Activities linked to the delivery of the plan are tracked through the OAWY Service Improvement Plan.

4.0 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

There has been ongoing engagement with staff over the year. 2 staff events have been held and an annual on-line survey. Both the events and survey encourage involvement and the gathering staff views. Staff identified communications and the location of offices as areas for improvement. As a result a communication review was undertaken and a plan implemented as discussed in Section 3.1.5.

4.2 Equality and Diversity/ Cohesion and Integration

OAWY completed an equality Impact assessment last year and a clear action plan emerged from this to ensure that we are able to provide a comprehensive service to all communities. The actions are captured in the service improvement plan. This assessment can be found at Appendix 3.

4.3 Council Policies and Best Council Plan

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' and to the Child Friendly Leeds . 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 final outturn position for OAWY was an overall pressure of £858k, due to the pressures around the new payment arrangements (set up by the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA)) for Inter Agency placements and staffing capacity issues in the service around adoption support. Each local authority increased its contribution to meet this shortfall.

4.4.2 Within staffing there was a net position just under £13k under, due to the £225k DfE income stream for the Centre of Excellence Project.

4.4.3 Inter-Agency placements - changes that came into effect from 1st June 2018 are as follows: the fee rates increased for voluntary adoption agencies and the fees are required to be paid in full in the year of placement. This is a change to previous years where the fee would be split over two years (2/3rd's/1/3rd split). This double effect of increased fee and paying the voluntary agencies has significantly impacted on the financial position of OAWY which resulted of an overspend of £654k (£2,162k spend against budget of £1,508k).

4.4.4 Inter-Agency Income - a shortfall of £246k in 2018/19 due to less OAWY adopters available to be being matched with out of area children.

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.

4 Conclusions

5.1 The completion of the 2nd year as a regional adoption agency has seen the service move forward positively. OAWY has increased the numbers of adopters approved and has maintained the timeliness of children placed for adoption, in spite of a national picture of a decline in both these areas. The development of a range of adoption support services has been welcomed by adopters and the service continues to work with families to address gaps in provision. The staff in the agency are extremely committed and passionate about improving outcomes for children in the region and to being part of a developing a flagship adoption service that promotes and develops best practice.

5 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.

6 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.