

**Report of Head of Service One Adoption West Yorkshire**

**Report to Director of Children and Families**

**Date: June 2021**

**Subject: One Adoption West Yorkshire to enter into an agreement with and accept grant funding of £2m from the Department for Education (DfE)**



Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open 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**

**1. Main issues**

- The DfE has made available grant funding to undertake adoption recruitment activity on a national and regional scale, to further support the adoption regionalisation reforms that were introduced in 2017. This grant is intended to boost adopter recruitment across England and continue the successful recruitment strategies employed by Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) since this funding was first made available in 2019. It is also increased this year to support the development of a national team including a national adoption strategic leader and project team to improve the adoption system for vulnerable children and young people in the country.
- The Department for Education (DfE) and Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) leaders agreed collectively to pool the resources and deposit the funds into one RAA.
- One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) has agreed to act as a central repository for the grant funds on behalf of all RAAs. This is a key decision but we were not able to publish on the list of forthcoming key decisions for 28 days because the decision to make the funding available was not made formally by DfE until week commencing 14/06/21 and the decision will need to be implemented rapidly if it is to be spent in time.

## 2. **Best Council Plan Implications** (click [here](#) for the latest version of the Best Council Plan)

- This proposal provides strong support for the refreshed Children and Young Peoples Plan and the Council's ambition to be a Child Friendly City. The outcomes delivered through this grant funding will contribute to a number of the outcomes and priorities within the plan, including the outcome to ensure all young people are safe from harm and the priority to help children live in safe and supportive families.
- This proposal also supports the 2020-25 Best Council Plan priority to make Leeds a Child Friendly City where families are supported to give children the best start in life.
- The RAA steering group regarding recruitment activity will consider the environmental impact of their approach to service delivery. They will be asked to demonstrate how they will reduce their carbon footprint, including making best use of technology and sustainable transport in delivering the outcomes required for this grant funding.

## 3. **Resource Implications**

- The total value of grant funding to be received from the DfE is £2m. The activities will be determined by the RAA Leaders' Group but will support continued adopter recruitment strategies, involving some commissioning of services. £500k of the grant will be used to fund work relating to early permanence and an additional £500k will fund a national leader and project team.
- The grant will be managed by OAWY on behalf of all RAAs, with Leeds acting as the lead local authority.

## **Recommendations**

- a) It is recommended that the Director of Children and Families approves the proposals in this report for the Council to enter into an agreement and accept £2m grant funding from the DfE on behalf of OAWY, such grant funding to be managed by OAWY on behalf of all RAAs for the purpose of undertaking adoption recruitment activity on a national and regional scale, with the Council acting as the lead local authority.

### **1. Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 To request approval for One Adoption West Yorkshire to enter into an agreement with and accept grant funding of £2m from the DfE on behalf of all Regional Adoption Agencies and to work with other agencies to agree a mechanism for allocating the funds.

### **2. Background information**

- 2.1 The Government's regionalisation reforms were introduced in 2017 to reduce the large number of agencies providing adoption services and create 25-30 Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) to pool resources and provide:
  - More targeted and efficient recruitment of adopters

- Speedier matching with a larger more diverse pool of adopters
- An improved range of adoption support services and regulatory compliance

2.2 In the longer term RAAs are expected to provide

- Better outcomes for children and adopters
- Reduced practice and performance inconsistencies
- More effective strategic management of the service delivering efficiency savings
- A culture of excellence in adoption practice through strong partnerships with the Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA)

2.3 The recruitment of adopters nationally is declining and the gap between the number of children waiting (increasing) and approved adopters waiting (decreasing) is widening.

2.4 One Adoption West Yorkshire became the country's first Regional Adoption Agency when the regionalisation reforms were launched - bringing together all of the adoption services from Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield. Within its second year of operation the agency has already demonstrated that it is leading the way for newer regional agencies by winning two national awards.

2.5 In July 2019 the DfE made available grant funding of £645k to undertake adoption recruitment activity on a national and regional scale, to further support the adoption regionalisation reforms that were introduced in 2017.

2.6 The Department for Education (DfE) and Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) Adoption Recruitment Steering Group agreed collectively to pool the resources and deposit the funds into one RAA and deliver a national adopter recruitment campaign.

2.7 One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) acted as a central repository for the grant funds on behalf of all RAAs.

2.8 Following the success of the adopter recruitment campaign funded from the first grant, the DfE awarded a further £1m in 2020 to continue the adoption recruitment activity.

### **3. Main issues**

3.1 This grant is intended to further boost adopter recruitment across England and continue the successful recruitment strategies employed by RAAs since this funding was first made available.

3.2 The value of the grant is £2m and the RAA Leaders group will consider:

- a. how they can continue to work in partnership with voluntary sector organisations during the grant funding period; and
- b. the views of, and impact on, VAAs and LAs not yet in live RAAs.

3.3 The DfE and RAA leaders agreed collectively to pool the resources, working collaboratively to achieve better outcomes for children waiting for adoption.

3.4 The RAA leaders group are working together to further develop a national approach to raising awareness generally and addressing some regional priorities. The intention is to recruit a national leader and project team to lead the work.

3.5 OAWY has agreed to act as a central repository for the grant funds on behalf of all RAAs. If this decision is approved it will provide a mechanism to agree the drawing down of the funds over the following months.

#### **4. Corporate considerations**

##### **4.1 Consultation and engagement**

4.1.1 Consultation has taken place regularly at regional RAA meetings with the Head of Service for OAWY and representatives from the DfE and RAA leaders to explore options on how to best continue management of the grant to achieve positive outcomes for prospective adopters and children awaiting adoption.

4.1.2 The Executive Member for Children, Families and Adult Social care has been consulted about this decision and the Chair of the Children's Scrutiny Board.

##### **4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration**

4.2.1 An Equality Impact Assessment Screening document has been undertaken. This identifies there is a positive impact in respect of equality and diversity in that it will advance equality of opportunity for children that are looked after, particularly those most vulnerable i.e. those with special educational needs and disabilities; those from BME backgrounds and older children awaiting adoption.

##### **4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan**

4.3.1 This proposal provides strong support for the refreshed Children and Young Peoples Plan and the Council's ambition to be a Child Friendly City. The outcomes delivered through this grant funding will contribute to a number of the outcomes and priorities within the plan, including the outcome to ensure all young people are safe from harm and the priority to help children live in safe and supportive families.

4.3.2 This proposal also supports the 2020-25 Best Council Plan priority to make Leeds a Child Friendly City where families are supported to give children the best start in life.

##### Climate Emergency

4.3.3 The RAA board will consider the environmental impact of their approach to service delivery. They will be asked to demonstrate how they will reduce their carbon footprint, including making best use of technology and sustainable transport in delivering the outcomes required for this grant funded provision.

##### **4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money**

4.4.1 This funding is additional revenue funding that is ring fenced to deliver the outcomes specified in the DfE grant agreement.

4.4.2 The total value of grant funding to be received from the DfE is £2m. It is anticipated this funding will be made available in mid-April 2021. Broadly, £1m will be invested in the continued national adopter recruitment campaign, £500k will fund early permanence activity and a further £500k will fund the recruitment of a national leader and project team. The activities and projects to be commissioned will be determined by the RAA Leaders' Group.

- 4.4.3 The grant will be managed by OAWY on behalf of all RAAs, with Leeds acting as the lead local authority.
- 4.4.4 This pooled resource will provide best value for money across all RAAs as it will provide an opportunity to develop new and build on successful approaches to the recruitment of adopters at a regional and national level.

#### **4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in**

- 4.5.1 This is a key decision in line with delegated powers approved by Executive Board in May 2019. The decision will be recorded and published but we were not able to publish on the list of forthcoming key decisions for 28 days because the decision to make the funding available was not made formally by DfE until week commencing 14/6/21 and the decision will need to be implemented rapidly if it is to be spent in time. Therefore we are taking this decision under general exemption rule 2.5 of the constitution.

#### **4.6 Risk management**

- 4.6.1 There will be some additional pressure on the finance team and the administrative staff within OAWY regarding administering this fund, however any costs incurred will be reimbursed from the grant.
- 4.6.2 The outcomes will be monitored by the project team and reported back to the DfE
- 4.6.3 Leeds, as the lead local authority, will receive and manage the funding on behalf of all RAAs. There are no requirements to pay back the grant if the key aims are not met, although future funding arrangements will be unlikely to be agreed if the aims are not achieved.

### **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 This proposal forms a good basis for supporting our ambition to increase the number adopters recruited and thereby meet the Children and Families obsession to safely and appropriately reduce the number of children looked after.

### **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 It is recommended that the Director of Children and Families approves the proposals in this report for the Council to enter into an agreement and accept £2m grant funding from the DfE on behalf of OAWY, such grant funding to be managed by OAWY on behalf of all RAAs for the purpose of undertaking adoption recruitment activity on a national and regional scale, with the Council acting as the lead local authority.

### **7. Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

- 7.1 None.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.