

## **Award of cooperation agreements for Early Permanence Practice in Adoption projects**

Date: 15/12/2021

Report of: National Adoption Strategic Lead

Report to: Director of Children and Families

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

### **What is this report about?**

#### **Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions**

- This report seeks approval to award cooperation agreements to a number of local authorities as hosts of Regional Adoption Agencies to fund early permanence practice in adoption projects in support of the National Adoption Strategy.
- This proposal 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.

### **Recommendations**

- a) The Director of Children and Families is recommended to approve the award of cooperation agreements to a number of local authorities as hosts of Regional Adoption Agencies to fund early permanence practice in adoption projects in support of the National Adoption Strategy. The agreements shall start on 01/01/22 and expire on 30/06/22. The maximum total funding value is £400,000 but the value of individual agreements vary. The highest individual value will be circa £50,000 to £60,000.

## Why is the proposal being put forward?

- The [National Adoption Strategy](#) set by government sets out a bold vision to deliver excellence in adoption services across England. The aim is to ensure that best practice becomes the norm so that every adopted child and their family can access the services and support they need wherever they live and maximise children's outcomes in the short and long term. The aim is also for all children with a plan for adoption to be found permanent loving families as quickly as possible where they will be safe and secure; adopters are recruited from all communities so that we have a range of approved parents able and well prepared to meet the needs of children waiting to be adopted and that children and families get the support they need when they need it.
- The DfE has provided £500k in 2021/22 to improve Early Permanence arrangements in RAAs and to increase the number of children put forward for an Early Permanence placement. In support of this, the RAA Leaders Group would like to award cooperation agreements to local authorities as hosts of Regional Adoption Agencies to fund early permanence practice in adoption projects.
- Early Permanence is an umbrella term used when talking about certain types of adoption placements for babies or toddlers. The placements enable a child in care, usually under the age of two, to be placed with foster carers who are also approved adoptive parents who are ready and willing to adopt the child if the courts decide to award a placement order.
- Funding has been allocated following a competitive application process, where all RAAs were invited to submit applications for funding to deliver projects against identified priorities and outcomes.

## What impact will this proposal have?

### Wards Affected:

Have ward members been consulted?       Yes       No

- No individual wards in Leeds will be impacted by these proposals because the work will be delivered to support the National Adoption Strategy at a national and regional level.
- 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.

## What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- There are no particular legal or statutory requirements to undertake consultation as part of this decision. Consultation has taken place regularly at regional RAA meetings with the National Adoption Strategic Lead 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.
- PACS have been consulted regarding the most appropriate type of legal agreements.

## **What are the resource implications?**

- The maximum total value of these agreements is £400,000.
- Funding for these agreements is available from the national adoption early permanence grant of £500,000 from the DfE. Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) leaders have once again agreed to collectively pool the resources, working collaboratively to achieve better outcomes for children waiting for adoption. The DfE have approved OAWY to act as a central repository for the grant funds on behalf of all RAAs, with Leeds City Council holding the funds as host of OAWY.
- The Director of Children and Families approved the proposal for the Council to enter into an agreement and accept £2m grant funding from the DfE on behalf of OAWY on 25 June and call in ended 12 July. This includes the early permanence grant.
- Funding will be paid as one block payment in January 2022. The grant is a section 31 grant, which must be spent in 2021/22 but with outcomes continuing into 2022/23. The grant terms do not stipulate clawback. The National Project Team will monitor and review progress of work to ensure outcomes are achieved. Approval to make these payments in advance has been obtained from the Chief Finance Officer in order to comply with financial regulations.

## **What are the legal implications?**

- The maximum total value of these agreements is below £500,000 and we deem that this decision is significant operational.
- The decision to award these cooperation agreements falls within Clause 1.5.2 of the Contract Procedure Rules as it is a cooperation between public bodies and falls outside of the Public Contract Regulations 2015 pursuant to Regulation 12(7). Therefore, it is not a procurement for the purpose of the Contract Procedure Rules or Public Contract Regulations 2015.
- In making their final decision, the Director of Children and Families should be satisfied that the course of action chosen represents best value.

## **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

- The funding for this contract comes from the Department of Education and oversight, compliance and management of this budget is undertaken by the national adoption strategic lead. It is essential this funding is spent within this financial year and so the contract needs to be awarded rapidly. The bulk of the work will be undertaken by 31/3/22 and will need to be paid by 31/3/22 although the agreements will not expire until 30/06/22 to allow for all activity to be completed.
- The National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group recognises that it is good practice to provide planned contract monitoring and management for all contracts. This will assist the Steering Group in achieving value for money and ensuring that the funding is used to achieve the intended objectives of the DfE grant. Contract Management will be led by the National Project Team.

## Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

- 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.

## Options, timescales and measuring success

### a) What other options were considered?

- No other options were considered for this piece of work for the reasons detailed in this report. Opening up the opportunity for all RAAs to apply was considered the most fair and transparent way to allocate funding.

### b) How will success be measured?

- The performance of the service will be measured through regular liaison between the RAAs and the National Project Team, including quarterly meetings to review performance monitoring targets and measures and completion of work within agreed timescales.
- The funding programme will contribute to the following progress measures to be used by the DfE to evidence success: waiting times for children, particularly for children from ethnic minority groups, sibling groups, children over 5 years old and disabled children; number of children waiting over 18 months; number of Early Permanence placements being made; number of adopters dually approved as suitable for Early Permanence planning; National data is being used to improve information sharing and service delivery; and Ofsted inspection findings.

### c) What is the timetable for implementation?

- The intention is that the agreements will be awarded in December to start on 01/01/22.

## Appendices

- Equality Impact Screening Form.

## Background papers

- None.