

One Adoption West Yorkshire to enter into an agreement with and accept grant funding of £19.5m from the Department for Education (DfE)

Date: 26/04/2022

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 enter into an agreement and accept £19.5m grant funding from the DfE on behalf of OAWY, such grant funding to be managed by the National Strategic Lead project team and OAWY on behalf of all RAAs to undertake activity on a national and regional scale in support of the National Adoption Strategy, with the Council acting as the lead local authority.
- 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 proposals in this report for the Council to enter into an agreement and accept £19.5m grant funding from the DfE on behalf of OAWY, such grant funding to be managed by the National Strategic Lead and OAWY on behalf of all RAAs to undertake activity on a national and regional scale in support of the National Adoption Strategy, with the Council acting as the lead local authority.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

1. 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.
2. The aim is for all adoptive children 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.
3. 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

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 Agencies (VAA's)
4. The DfE has made available grant funding to improve the adoption system for vulnerable children and young people since 2019. The grant for 2022/23 – 2024/25 is intended for activity on a national and regional scale in support of the National Adoption Strategy. Funding includes grants to further boost adopter recruitment (£1.5m); support improvements in early permanence (3m); national matching of children and families (£5m); national commissioning of adoption support (£3.5m); and developing Centres of Excellence (£5m).
 5. This funding is available for a period of three years, 2022/23 to 2025/25 and will be made available by way of a Section 14 grant agreement.
 6. The Department for Education (DfE) and RAA leaders have again agreed collectively to pool the resources, with One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) acting as a central repository for the grant funds on behalf of all RAAs. As host of OAWY, Leeds City Council is the lead Local Authority for managing the grant budget and commissioning.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards Affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

7. 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.

8. 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?

9. 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.
10. 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.

What are the resource implications?

11. This funding is additional revenue funding that is ring fenced to deliver the outcomes specified in the DfE grant agreement.
12. The total value of grant funding to be received from the DfE is £19.5m for the period 2022/23 to 2024/25. It is anticipated this funding will be made available in April 2022. Funding will be made available in each of the financial years: £3m in 2022/23; £7.5m in 2023/24; and £9m in 2024/25. The grant includes costs for strategic leadership and for host costs such as finance, commissioning and management.
13. The grant will be managed by the National Strategic Lead and OAWY on behalf of all RAAs, with Leeds acting as the lead local authority. The activities and projects to be commissioned will be determined by the RAA Leaders' Group.
14. 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.

What are the legal implications?

15. 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 April 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.

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

16. There will be some additional pressure on the finance team and the administrative staff within OAWY regarding administering this fund, however staff will be employed to progress the work and any costs incurred will be reimbursed from the grant.
17. The outcomes will be monitored by the National Strategic Lead and project team and reported back to the DfE.

18. Leeds, as the lead local authority, will receive and manage the funding on behalf of all RAAs. The grant is a section 14 grant and will be claimed for quarterly in arrears.

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

- Inclusive Growth Health and Wellbeing Climate Emergency

19. 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.
20. 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

What other options were considered?

21. N/A

How will success be measured?

22. The RAA Leader's Group is responsible for ensuring projects and activities deliver the intended outcomes of the grant and that performance is robustly monitored against the priorities of the National Adoption Strategy.

What is the timetable for implementation?

23. It is anticipated this funding will be made available in April 2022. The RAA Leader's Group is responsible for ensuring the grant is managed effectively throughout the grant agreement period and within each financial year.

Appendices

24. Equality Impact Screening Form.

Background papers

25. None.