

# Early Permanence and matching services in Adoption

Date: 13/09/2022

Report of: National Adoption Strategic Lead

Report to: Director of Children & Families

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

## Brief summary

This report seeks approval to award cooperation agreements or contracts to 18 regional adoption agencies and 3 charities in support of the development of early permanence and adoption matching services.

This follows a decision taken in May 2022 for Leeds to accept grant funding from the Department for Education and act as a Lead Authority to commission services supporting the National Adoption Strategy.

The agreements will retrospectively run for a period of up to three years from 01/09/2022 to 31/08/2025 and will be for values between £12,000 and £163,000 per year over the three-year period as detailed in appendix 1 of this report. The sum of all the agreements over the three-year period will be just over £3.6 million. Funding amounts for years two and three of the programme will be reviewed depending on performance in year one.

## Recommendations

- a) The Director of Children and Families is recommended to retrospectively approve the proposals in this report for the Council to award cooperation agreements to 18 Regional Adoption Agencies to support the development of early permanence and adoption matching services from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022 for a period of up to three years.
- b) The Director of Children and Families is recommended to retrospectively approve the direct award of contracts to 3 charities for the above work from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022 for a period of up to three years.

## What is this report about?

- 1 A decision was taken on 13/05/2022 to enter into an agreement and accept grant funding from the DfE on behalf of One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY). Grant funding would be managed by the National Strategic Lead on behalf of all Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) to undertake activity on a national and regional scale in support of the National Adoption Strategy, with Leeds City Council acting as the lead local authority.
- 2 DfE grant funding to improve the adoption system for vulnerable children and young people has been in place since 2019. The grant for 2022/23 – 2024/25 is for work supporting improvements in early permanence (up to £3m) and national matching of children and families (up to £5 m) over the three-year period.
- 3 An application process has been undertaken by the National Strategic Lead on behalf of all RAAs, with Leeds acting as the lead local authority. The activities and projects commissioned have been determined by the RAA Leaders' Group, with a focus on increasing the numbers of early permanence placements and improving the quality and timeliness of adopter and child matching activity.
- 4 Proposals were scored against priorities determined by RAA leaders and weighted against a scoring matrix with funding levels determined accordingly per year.
- 5 Whilst most of the successful applications were from RAAs, some were received from charitable organisations. The legal nature of the organisation has determined what type of agreement is entered into. As per appendix 1, 18 cooperation agreements and 3 directly awarded contracts will be awarded. All delivery proposals met the desired outcome of the projects and offers a unique delivery model bringing their expertise and market knowledge within the area they operate.
- 6 Please see appendix one for a list of successful applicants and the level of funding approved for each financial year. The total of all successful bids is below the maximum allocation from the DfE (up to £3m for early permanence and £5m for matching) the remaining funding will be used to fund other aspects of the programme including the external costs (yet to be established) of a research programme, an engagement programme involving adopters and birth parents, and staffing and infrastructure costs incurred by Leeds City Council. Further strategic planning to address further opportunities for development and innovation in years two and three of the programme is also taking place with RAAs. This work may result in proposals for further initiatives which may require funding.

## What impact will this proposal have?

- 7 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.

## How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

- 8 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.
- 9 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.

### What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: National awards across England

Have ward members been consulted?       Yes                       No

- 10 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.
- 11 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.
- 12 The Executive Member for Children, Families and Adult Social care has been consulted about this decision.

### What are the resource implications?

- 13 The funding awarded to each organisation totals just over £3.6 million over 3 years. Full details are listed in appendix 1.
- 14 This funding is additional revenue funding that is ring-fenced to deliver the outcomes specified in the DfE grant agreement. Issuing these agreements in this manner will not create additional financial pressure to Leeds City Council. Should the grants/contracts not be issued, Leeds City Council in consultation with the national Strategic Lead make other arrangements for the allocated amount with other activity or not claim this amount from the DfE (we are paid in arrears). Any underspend of funding over the three-year period would also not be claimed.
- 15 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.
- 16 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 project work will start on 1<sup>st</sup> September 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 additional costs to support other developments, such as a programme for the development of Centres of Excellence for Adoption Support. It will also fund the strategic leadership and management of the programme and cover hosting costs such as finance, commissioning and management delivered by Leeds CC.

- 17 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, matching and support of adopters at a regional and national level.

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

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

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

- 20 This is a significant operational decision as it is a direct consequence of the key decision to accept and distribute DfE grant funding taken on 13/05/2022 (reference D55203)
- 21 The 18 cooperation agreements fall within Clause 1.5.2 of the Council's Contracts Procedure Rules as it is an agreement with another public body co-operating to perform a public function 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 Contracts Procedure Rules or Public Contract Regulations 2015. The risk of challenge is minimal given that this relates to a Regulation 12(7) co-operation arrangement between public bodies and is exempt from the full procurement rules under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and Contracts Procedure Rules.
- 22 The 3 direct awards to charitable organisations are in line with Contract Procedure Rule 9.5:
- Where the relevant Chief Officer considers there is genuinely no competition such that only a particular organisation or provider can meet the Council's specific requirements (e.g. when commissioning a piece of art) a waiver of CPRs 9.1 and 9.2 need not be obtained.
- The National Adoption Strategic Lead is satisfied that the 3 charitable organisations (all sitting under the Coram umbrella) are market leaders in the improvement of adoption matching work as demonstrated in their bid applications.
- 23 In making their final decision, the Director of Children and Families should be satisfied that the course of action chosen represents best value and ensures the local authority meets its statutory obligations.

## **Options, timescales and measuring success**

### **What other options were considered?**

- 24 n/a

### **How will success be measured?**

- 25 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.

22 Funding for years two and three will be dependent on demonstrating adequate progress in preceding years.

**What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?**

23 It is hoped that the successful organisations will start the new project work on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022.

24 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**

- Appendix 1 - list of successful organisations & value

**Background papers**

- Equality, diversity, cohesion and integration (EDCI) screening

## Appendix 1 - Successful bidders and funding amounts

**Table 1 – Cooperation agreements - Matching Funding**

	AGENCY	ACCABLE BODY	COSTS		
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
1.	Adoption West	Adoption West (LATC)	67,500 * <sup>1</sup>	115,000	115,000
2.	Adoption East & West Midlands	Nottinghamshire	15,302	15,000	15,000
3.	Adopt Thames Valley	Oxfordshire	37,072	67,984	71,064
4.	Adoption Connects	Central Bedfordshire	28,176	54,352	54,352
5.	Adopt London (4 RAAs)	Havering	73,000	73,000	73,000
6.	Adoption Partnership South East	Kent	43,725	119,952	119,952
7.	OAWY & Adoption Matters	Leeds	78,576	162,860	
8.	Adopt Coast to Coast	Durham	41,250		
9.	North West	Bolton	55,380	73,500	

**Table 2 - Direct contract awards - Matching**

	Name	Funding 2022/23	Funding 2023/24	Funding 2024/25
1.	Be My Family (Coram) * <sup>2</sup>	31,000		
2.	Coram-i	12,000	31,500	41,500
3.	Coram Ambitious for Adoption Regional Adoption Agency (RAA)	42,203	69,784	101,677

	<b>Combined total - matching</b>	<b>525,184</b>	<b>782,932</b>	<b>591,545</b>
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\*<sup>1</sup> Up to this maximum value dependent upon research costs

\*<sup>2</sup> Extension of an existing contract

**Table 3 – Cooperation Agreements – Early Permanence Funding**

	AGENCY	ACCABLE BODY	COSTS		
			22-23	23-24	24-25
1	London RAAs x5	Southwark	31,000	130,000	130,000
2	Adoption South/PACT	Hampshire		108,915	112,023
3	Adoption Partnership South East	Kent	48,610	100,565	72,565
4	North West	Bolton	63,692	178,250	
5	North East	Stockton	121,000	60,500	121,000
6	Adopt East/Adoption Connects	Essex	21,000	83,890	83,890
7	Adoption Matters/Together 4 Adoption	Warrington	52,299	36,716	
8	OAWY	Leeds	63,350	108,612	
	<b>Total</b>		<b>400,951</b>	<b>807,448</b>	<b>519,478</b>

**Table 4 – TOTAL FUNDING AWARDED**

TOTAL – Matching	525,184	782,932	591,545
TOTAL – Early Permanence	400,951	807,448	519,478
TOTAL Matching and Early Permanence	£926,135	£1,590,380	£1,111,023
<b>TOTAL OVER THREE YEARS</b>	<b>£3,627,538</b>		

**Note: Funding year starts 01/09 to 31/08**