

Approval to award Grant Agreements for the development of Centres of Excellence for Adoption Support.

Date: 21 March 2023

Report of: Commissioning Programme Manager

Report to: The 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 7 grant agreements to Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) in support of the development of Centres of Excellence for Adoption Support.

This follows a decision taken in May 2022 for the Council 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 run for a period of up to two years from 01/04/2023 to 31/03/2025 and will be for values between £243,000 and £956,000 per year as detailed in Appendix 2 of this report. The sum of all the agreements over the two-year period will be just under £4 million.

Recommendations

The Director of Children & Families is recommended to:

- a) Approve the proposals in this report for the Council to award 7 grant agreements to the Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA), as detailed in Appendix 2, to support the development of Centres of Excellence for Adoption Support from 1st April 2023 for a period of two years until 31 March 2025 at a total value of £3,896,201.

What is this report about?

- 1 A decision was taken on 13 May 2022 to enter into an agreement and accept grant funding from the Department for Education (DfE). Grant funding would be managed by the National Strategic Lead 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.
- 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 includes the development of Centres of Excellence for Adoption Support.
- 3 An application process has been undertaken by the National Strategic Lead on behalf of all RAAs, with the Council acting as the lead local authority. The activities and projects commissioned have been determined by the RAA Leaders' Group, with a focus on the exploration, creation, and development of a support system, which are delivered, and sustainably funded, in partnerships between the adoption agency, health and education sector and the local authorities.
- 4 Proposals were scored against priorities determined by RAA leaders and weighted against a scoring matrix with funding levels determined accordingly per year.
- 5 As per Appendix 2, 7 grant agreements will be awarded. All delivery proposals met the desired outcome of the projects and offer a unique delivery model bringing their expertise and market knowledge within the area they operate.
- 6 Please see Appendix 2 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 of £5 million.

What impact will this proposal have?

- 7 An Equality Impact Assessment Screening document has been undertaken – see Appendix 1. 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: N/A, 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 total funding awarded is ££3,896,201 over 2 years. Full details of the successful RAAs and the amounts awarded are listed in Appendix 2.
- 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 the Council. Should the agreements not be issued, the Council, in consultation with the National Strategic Lead, will make other arrangements for the allocated amount with other activity or not claim this amount from the DfE (the Council is paid in arrears). Any underspend of funding over the two-year period would also not be claimed.
- 15 The Council, as the lead local authority, will receive and manage the funding on behalf of all RAAs The Power under which the grant is to be paid is Section 14 of the Education Act 2002 and will be claimed for quarterly in arrears.
- 16 Funding will be paid to the RAAs in two instalments per annum in advance (May and November). Advance payments in two instalments will ease the administrative burden on RAAs and is considered low risk given the payments are being made between local authorities. The Chief Officer, Financial Services approved payments in advance on 8 March 2023.
- 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 May 2022 (decision reference D55203). Therefore, this report is not subject to call in and does not contain any exempt or confidential information under the Access to Information Rules.

21 As the 7 agreements are purely grants of public money from the DfE, they are not classed as a procurement and therefore fall outside of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contract Regulations 2015.

Where a grant is being provided, it must also be assessed against the provisions of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 to ensure that no unlawful subsidy is provided.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

22 As this concerns grant money received by the DfE, there are no other necessary options in terms of procurement to be considered, however the terms of the grant agreement between the Council and the DfE must be taken into consideration as to how the grant money is distributed, spent, recorded and any requirements to seek best value for money.

How will success be measured?

23 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 and who will be responsible for implementation?

23 The RAAs will start the new project work on 1st April 2023.

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 - Equality, diversity, cohesion and integration (EDCI) screening.
- Appendix 2 - List of successful RAAs & grant amounts.

Background papers

- None.