

Variations to Matching agreements in Adoption

Date: 04/01/2024

Report of: Commissioning Manager - Children & Families

Report to: National Adoption Strategic Lead

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 vary 3 cooperation agreements by a total value of £115,000 for the 12 month period 01/04/2024 - 31/03/2025 to enhance the current agreements and further support of the development of adoption matching services following an application and evaluation process.

This follows decisions taken in May 2022 for Leeds to accept grant funding from the Department for education to lead and commission services supporting the National Adoption Strategy, to award the agreements to successful bidders in September 2022 and decision to vary the agreements in June 2023.

Recommendations

- a) The National Adoption Strategic Lead is recommended to approve the proposals in this report for the Council to vary 3 cooperation agreements with Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) for a total value of £115,000 of additional funding to further support the adoption matching services from the period 01/04/2024 - 31/03/2025

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. The Grant funding will 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 A second decision was taken on 28/09/2022 to award 18 cooperation agreements and directly award 3 contracts to charities for work on early permanence and matching for Children and Young people.
- 3 In early 2023, an application process took place by the National Strategic Lead on behalf of all RAAs where applications invited from RAAs and contracted providers who have received funding (as a result of the decision referred to above in point 2) for existing matching projects to enhance and be linked to current work they are carrying out, following this a decision was taken on the 26/06/23 to vary 4 cooperation agreements and one contract.
- 4 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.
- 5 A second round of applications has been undertaken in late 2023 by the National Strategic Lead on behalf of all RAAs, with Leeds acting as the lead local authority following the same process outlined in point 3 above. The activities and projects commissioned have been determined by the RAA Leaders' Group, with a focus on increasing the quality and timeliness of adopter and child matching activity.
- 6 Proposals were scored against priorities determined by RAA leaders and weighted against a scoring matrix with funding levels determined accordingly for 24/25.

What impact will this proposal have?

- 7 An Equality Impact Assessment Screening document has been undertaken and is attached at appendix two. 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.

What are the resource implications?

- 12 The funding for the variations awarded to each organisation totals £115,000 for the 24/25 financial year. Full details are listed in appendix 1.
- 13 This funding is additional revenue funding that is ring-fenced to deliver the outcomes specified in the DfE grant agreement. Issuing these variations 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 may 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 period would also not be claimed.
- 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, matching and support of adopters at a regional and national level.

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

- 15 The outcomes will be monitored by the National Strategic Lead and project team and reported back to the DfE.

What are the legal implications?

- 16 This is a significant operational decision as it is a direct consequence of the decision to accept and distribute DfE grant funding taken on 13/05/2022 (reference D55203), the decision taken on 28/09/2022 to award the 18 cooperation agreements and 3 contracts and decision taken on the 26/06/2022 to vary 4 cooperation agreements and one contract.
- 17 The cooperation agreement variations 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.

18 In making their final decision, the National Adoption Strategic Lead 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?

19 The option not to vary was considered however this was discounted as increasing the quality and timeliness of adopter and child matching activity is a priority for the National Adoption strategic lead and RAA leaders group

How will success be measured?

20 The National Adoption Strategy Team are responsible for ensuring the 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?

21 The variations for the successful organisations will be implemented as soon as possible

22 The National Adoption Strategy Team is responsible for ensuring the grant is managed effectively throughout the grant agreement period.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - list of successful organisations & value
- Appendix 2 - Equality, diversity, cohesion and integration (EDCI) screening

Background papers

- None

Appendix 1 - Successful bidders and funding amounts

AGENCY	Type of current agreement	Value of variation	Existing value	Total value
Adoption West	Coop agreement	£15,000 (£15,000 was previously approved for 24/25)	£313,826	£328,826
Adoption East Midlands on behalf of Midlands Together Collaboration (MTC)	Coop agreement	£25,000	£50,302	£75,302
Adopt London East on behalf of all Adopt London's	Coop agreement	£75,000	£320,854	£395,854
		£115,000		