

# WEST YORKSHIRE ADOPTION JOINT COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 13TH OCTOBER, 2023

**PRESENT** Councillor F Venner – Leeds City Council (Chair)  
Councillor S Duffy – Bradford Metropolitan District Council  
Councillor D Tremayne – Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council  
Councillor V Kendrick – Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council  
Councillor J Pritchard – Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

**1 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS**

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspection of documents.

**2 EXEMPT INFORMATION - POSSIBLE EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The agenda contained no exempt information.

**3 LATE ITEMS**

No late items of business were added to the agenda.

**4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

No declarations of interest were made.

**5 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Isherwood (Wakefield Metropolitan District Council) and Councillor A Wilkinson (Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council). Councillor J Pritchard (Wakefield) and Councillor D Tremayne (Calderdale) attended as substitutes.

**6 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 7th February 2023**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held 7th August 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

**7 MATTERS ARISING**

Page 5 – Medical delays - Delays to medical examinations at GP surgeries remains an issue, with an inconsistent approach between surgeries.

Page 5 - Member Engagement – Details of engagement by the Agency for adoptive parents were previously distributed and will be recirculated.

Page 8 – M Rawlings was confirmed as Head of Service in January 2023.

Page 9 – There are financial challenges facing the multi-disciplinary team which has led to the removal of the speech and language therapist post. The Chair suggested writing to the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board.

**8 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR**

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor V Kendrick be appointed as Vice Chair of the Committee for 2023/24.

## **9 HEAD OF SERVICE REPORT**

The Head of Agency submitted a report presenting the Annual Report of One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) which provided an overview of adoption service activity and development from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. The Annual report was presented as required by the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2014, pursuant to the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Head of Service advised the Committee that the format of the report had been refreshed, and stated that the Agency's current objectives are;

- Children to move in with their adoptive family without unnecessary delay
- Families get help and support at every stage of the adoption journey
- Children have good quality care, a good understanding of their identity, a sense of belonging and stability within their adoptive family
- Children, adoptive and birth parents and adopted adults feel they have a voice and influence

The Head of Service drew attention to the report's notable statistics;

- 181 children were adopted in 2022/23, the highest number since the agency formed in 2017.
- 242 children had an adoption plan and were not yet matched with an adoptive family, an increase of 72 from the previous year.

### **Engagement**

The Agency has noted fewer attendees at information sessions, but an overall increase in applications from potential adopters, including an increase from 10% to 21% of adoption applications coming from the BAME communities.

A digital first approach to marketing has been identified as providing the best value for money, as well as better suited for targeting certain demographics. Instagram was noted as being a growth area for the agency's engagement, with an increase from 300 to 900 followers. It was noted that the platform is particularly adept at communicating with members of LGBTQ communities.

The digital first approach has been extended to the wider agency offer, with events and training being bookable on the website. This offer was noted to include birth parent information sessions as all adoptive parents are asked to meet birth parents, as well as six month training, provided six months into an adoption to develop therapeutic parenting skills. Support has also been delivered to friends and families of adoptive parents which has helped build a sense of community.

The digital first approach is being supplemented by providing a presence at events important to communities identified as key demographics to target, notably at Pride and at Carnival. A Black adoption manager has started to lead on this work by building links and networks with religious and community groups.

## **Placements**

The Head of Service noted work to find families for children who typically wait the longest, and for whom adoption may not be achieved through a pilot project which has received funding from the national adoption strategy team. The project would feature these children to encourage potential adopters to apply to adopt them. The Head of Service noted there are many layers of ethical dilemmas about this type of programme, as well a large financial implication. The Committee noted previous programmes of this type, and how changes in technology have altered the appropriateness of them. As there had been no consultation done with children directly on this topic, the Head of Service raised the suggestion to explore this as part of the research being undertaken alongside the project.

The Head of Service noted two pieces of work to develop the use of early permanence. The Agency currently receives funding for one part time early permanence worker, with a view to developing early permanence practice and increasing its use across Yorkshire and Humber. A second project involves working with local Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The Committee noted the increasing need for older children's permanence due to increasing pressures on families such as the cost of living crisis meaning children are entering the care system at an older age.

## **Multi-Disciplinary Team**

Following on from Minute 24 – Minutes of the Previous Meeting, the Committee resumed discussion of the financial challenges facing the multi-disciplinary team.

The Head of Service identified the financial challenge affecting the multi-disciplinary team within the Agency. Whilst the team has widened the services it offers, there has been a funding reduction from the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (WYICB). This has led to the removal of the speech and language therapist position in the team. The Agency is still able to provide an occupational therapy service provision and other therapeutic support, as the two psychologists on the team are able to provide the clinical lead necessary for social workers to carry out this service. However, if the psychologist positions are removed then this service will no longer be able to continue.

The Committee gave assent to the Chair to write to the WYICB to request a reconsideration.

## **Health Services**

Councillor J Pritchard sought information regarding the Agency's support for adoptive children with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders FASD and their families. She noted that families are struggling to get diagnoses under the NHS. The Head of Service advised the Committee that whilst adoption funding cannot be used towards FASD diagnoses, One Adoption South Yorkshire received funding to develop pathways to FASD diagnosis, and One Adoption West Yorkshire will seek to implement any relevant findings in West Yorkshire. One challenge towards providing FASD diagnosis support to

adoptive families is that diagnosis for FASD must be taken out within a multi-disciplinary team, rather than an individual doctor. The multi-disciplinary team within the agency currently is able to screen a child for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or ADHD and with the agreement of the NHS Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), move them to a more advanced stage of the process for diagnosis. This also ensures children are not unnecessarily added to CAMHS waiting lists. However due to the challenges already facing the multi-disciplinary team this is not work that they currently have capacity to undertake for FASD.

The Committee noted barriers to adopter's medical examinations being conducted at GP surgeries. As this work is classified as private and is the largest single piece of work the surgeries perform, many surgeries are deprioritising the examinations. This creates delays in the adoption process.

### **Inspections**

The Head of Service noted that the agency is likely to receive its first inspection from OFSTED soon as part of OFSTED's pilot programme of inspections of regional adoption agencies. The Agency is currently inspected through inspections of the five Local Authorities of West Yorkshire, however these inspections focus on scrutinising children's care planning, and not supervision and governance of the Agency or adoption support work.

### **Sufficiency**

The Head of Service noted challenges with sufficient numbers of prospective adoptive parents, with this problem particularly prevalent within the North of England. As there are insufficient numbers of adoptive parents, some children with adoption plans are having to have their plans moved away from adoption. Councillor V Kendrick noted that the cost of living crisis must be having an impact on both children and adoptive families.

### **Staffing**

The agency is able to recruit staff and there are low levels of sickness.

### **Complaints**

All complaints received by the agency were resolved in stage 1. The Head of Service committed to improving communication as most of the complaints related to how information was shared following decision making.

After hearing from the Head of Service, The Chair highlighted a recent case, which she was informed of by Councillor H Bithell, and had been discussed with the Head of Service prior to the meeting. An adopted child's birth parent had been placed into a halfway house next door to the child. The Chair noted that a positive had been that it was the birth parent themselves who had notified the relevant authorities, however the adoptive parents decided to move house. Both the child and birth parent were not in their original Local Authority. The Head of Service highlighted why adoption records cannot be shared with external agencies, and that Probation Services need to consider tracking whether those they support have had children removed from their

care. Further work to identify steps to take to prevent a repeat of this incident is ongoing.

The Committee noted that this was a sad case which was unlikely to happen again, but that steps needed to be taken to ensure this. The family requested that their experience be shared with the Committee so that lessons may be learnt, and OAWY continues to support them.

#### **RESOLVED –**

- a) To note the progress and outcomes of the agency
- b) To note the Head of Service's assurance that the agency is achieving good outcomes for children/service users
- c) To support the progression of these arrangements
- d) To write to the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board and request a reconsideration of the funding towards the Agency's multi-disciplinary team

#### **10 DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

That the next meeting be arranged for April 2024, exact date and time to be confirmed at a later date.