

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 13 July 2016 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 4.35 pm
Concluded 5.45 pm

Present – Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
M Pollard	Engel Tait Thirkill	N Pollard

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

J Pickles

West Yorkshire Police

Observer: Councillor Shaheen

Councillor Thirkill in the Chair

1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

2. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meetings held on 13 January and 27 April 2016 be signed as a correct record.

3. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted by the public to review decisions to restrict documents.

4. APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Those present expressed their thanks to previous Co-opted Members; Jonathan



Pickles, Nancy O'Neill and Lynn Donohue, for their valued contribution to the work of the Panel.

Resolved –

That it be recommended to the Regulatory and Appeals Committee that the appointment of non-voting co-opted members to the Panel, for the remainder of the 2016/2017 municipal year, be confirmed as set out below:-

- **Inspector Kevin Taylor - West Yorkshire Police**
- **Ali Jan Haider – Bradford District Clinical Commissioning Group**
- **Yasmin Umarji - Bradford Education**
- **The Chair of the Children in Care Council**

ACTION: *City Solicitor*

5. THE ADOPTION SERVICE - PERFORMANCE UPDATE AND PROPOSALS FOR REGIONALISATION

The Chair introduced the new Deputy Director (Children's Social Care) who had recently joined the Authority and welcomed him to the Panel.

He responded stating that in the short time he had been with the Authority he had become aware of some fantastic and innovative practice taking place. He also informed Members of two current bids to the Department for Education's Innovation Fund in relation to the provision of therapeutic support within residential care to facilitate the retention of those looked after children with more complex needs within the district and the strengthening of fostering arrangements to increase the ability to deal with more complex cases.

The Deputy Director submitted a report (**Document "A"**) which provided Members with information on the performance of the Adoption Service during the year 2015/16 and also informed them of proposals for adoption reform, as contained within the Education and Adoption Act 2016; specifically the intention to form a new Regional Adoption Agency based on West Yorkshire within a Yorkshire and Humber Hub. The planned implementation date for which was 1 April 2017.

He presented the report in two parts; in the first instance an update on the work of the service over the preceding year and secondly the proposals for the introduction of a Regional Adoption Agency. The following issues were highlighted:

Update on the work of the Adoption Service during 2015/16

- The landscape of adoption had changed significantly within the last two or three years with a reduction in the numbers of children coming forward for adoption both nationally and locally.
- The Adoption Reform Grant had helped to improve performance significantly



but had now come to an end.

- At this point in time 15 families were undergoing the assessment process and between 25 and 30 children awaiting adoption.
- There had been a decrease nationally in the number of people putting themselves forward as potential adopters. Specific work had been undertaken to generate interest and this had been effective in increasing the number of enquiries.
- It was considered that the figures for two of the Performance Indicators on the Government's 'Adoption Scorecard' (A1 and A2) had been skewed by a number of children with complicated circumstances.
- There had been some improvement in the length of time between a child becoming looked after to being placed with an adoptive family.
- Positive work had been undertaken with Early Permanence Placements during the year.
- There had been no pre-order disruptions and three post-order disruptions. These had involved children in the 13 to 17 age range which did pose particular challenges. Adoption support was being targeted towards this group and there was also a support group for adopted teenagers.
- The Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Support Team had been very busy with 155 families receiving a support service and over 1000 active 'letterbox exchanges'; which was a service which enabled adopted children to retain contact with their birth families. They also dealt with applications to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic support for families.
- A Birth Parent Support Group has also been established and it was hoped that this would have a positive impact in the future.

The Deputy Director responded to Members' questions:

- In terms of placement disruption, the authority compared favourably on both a regional and national basis. Research suggested approximately one-third of placements were subject to disruption.
- The Adoption Support Fund recognised the difficulties that could be associated with adoption and the use of this fund had been actively supported and promoted by the Council.
- In terms of performance on the Adoption Scorecard, Bradford took a very broad perspective and tried hard to pursue adoption for all children, including those with the most complex issues or disabilities, and it was considered that this had affected the figures but had resulted in successful placements in a number of cases. The numbers could also be skewed because of the relatively small numbers.
- Early Permanence Placements were not a new initiative but had changed in nature as they no longer just involved newborn babies. This sort of placement also required a particular sort of carer.

A Member commented that particular success achieved by Bradford, such as in terms of the low level of disrupted placements, should be publicised. If other authorities could learn from this Council's approach it would enhance the authority's reputation in addition to helping children.



Introduction of a new Regional Adoption Agency

- The Government's intention was to speed up the process and improve the life chances of children.
- There were currently approximately 180 adoption agencies nationally.
- Collaborative working had been undertaken in the Yorkshire and Humber area since 1993 and it had been considered that this provided a good base from which to embrace this challenge and work was now ongoing to develop a Yorkshire and Humber Adoption Hub. Further to a bidding process the region had been chosen as one of 5 pathfinder projects.
- The West Yorkshire & Humber Hub would encompass three regional agencies; North and Humber, West and South and would be hosted by Leeds. Governance would involve elected Members and a Management Board drawn from all five of the West Yorkshire authorities and approval was currently being sought for this.
- Responsibility for Bradford children would remain with this Authority.
- One of the aims was to facilitate the generation of a larger group of local adopters. It was hoped that it would also lead to an improvement in consistency of approach to assessment and training for adopters.

In response to questions the Deputy Director explained that:

- The new Agency would have to be registered for inspection purposes and a new performance/inspection framework would have to be established.
- If the initiative proved to be successful it may be that the Government would look to extend regionalisation to other areas such as fostering. It was noted that the Government Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families had recently stated that children's services would remain in the domain of Local Authorities.
- The performance of the local authorities involved was generally satisfactory or good. The aim was to raise all to the highest standard.
- There would be a Head of Service who would report to this Panel on the work of the new Agency.
- It would still be possible for the Panel to get information specific to Bradford children; one of the challenges of the process was the implementation of effective I.T. systems.
- It was anticipated that it was likely that allowances already agreed by individual authorities would have to be honoured but in the future a scheme across the five authorities would have to be agreed.
- There was no capital budget in Bradford to fund the extension of adopter's homes.
- There were costs associated with placement outside the district. One of the expected advantages of regionalisation was that it would be possible to place more children locally.
- One of the recognised challenges of regionalisation was how the adoption support service could be provided and developed.
- Having sufficient staffing to undertake the necessary work had been a challenge since the loss of the Adoption Reform Grant but a bid had been made for an additional member of staff for the Family Finding Team.



- The Government had amended the regulations in terms of SGOs to ensure that assessment covered the whole childhood and the ability of a carer to meet the needs of the child. It was considered very important to ensure that the support was in place for these carers.
- At this stage SGOs were not included within the proposals for regionalisation.

Resolved –

- (1) **That the regionalisation of the Adoption Service is supported as being in the best interests of the District’s children.**
- (2) **That the recommendations to be submitted to the Executive, at its meeting to be held on 19 July 2016, to:**
 - (i) **Approve the formation of a Yorkshire and Humber Adoption Service, and**
 - (ii) **Delegate authority to the Strategic Director - Children’s Services to progress the development of the Yorkshire and Humber Hub and the West Yorkshire Adoption Agency and to proceed with the revised structure leading to the transfer of staff to Leeds City Council, as the host of the West Yorkshire Agency, with the new arrangements being in place by April 2017,**

be endorsed.
- (3) **That the Deputy Director – Children’s Social Services be requested to submit regular progress reports to the Panel and that these include information in relation to resource allocation and the position in respect of Special Guardianship Orders.**

ACTION: Deputy Director (Children’s Social Care)

6. WORK PLAN 2016/17

The Panel’s work plan for the forthcoming municipal year was submitted for Member’s consideration (**Document “B”**).

Resolved –

That the Panel’s Work Plan for 2016/17 (Document “B”) be approved, subject to the addition of the following item to the November meeting:

Progress report on the regionalisation of the Adoption Service; to include information in relation to resource allocation and the position in respect of Special Guardianship Orders.

ACTION: Deputy Director – Children’s Social Care



Chair

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER

