



## One Adoption West Yorkshire Annual Report 2021/22

June 2022

### 1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report sets out the developments within One Adoption West Yorkshire from April 2021 to March 2022.

### 2 Background information

- 2.1 Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield adoption functions as specified in the partnership agreement were delegated on the 1st of April 2017 to Leeds City Council and One Adoption West Yorkshire formally opened on this date.
- 2.2 The regionalisation of adoption services by the government as a structural reform programme is almost complete with 31 Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) and 145 local authorities (LA's) now live, with the remaining 6 local authorities likely join existing RAA's. The government is supporting the RAA's and is funding a small national team to develop and improve services and support for vulnerable children and families within the adoption system, working closely with Association of Directors of Children's services (ADCS) and others across the sector.
- 2.3 The latest figures released nationally show that there continue to be more adopters available than children with an adoption plan. However, there is a mismatch between the needs of the children requiring adoption and the adopters willing to consider these priority children. Nationally there has been a fall in the numbers of children with an adoption plan over the last three years. However, this is not being replicated in the West Yorkshire region, with numbers remaining broadly consistent.
- 2.4 The future of the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) has now been confirmed until 2025, along with funding for the National Adoption Strategic Group. Sarah Johal, National Adoption Strategic Lead, continues to bring together RAA Leaders from across the country to focus on developing and improving adoption practice in relation to adopter recruitment, matching children with adopters and the provision of adoption support services.

### 3 Main issues

#### 3.1 Use of Resources

##### 3.1.1 Staffing

There are currently several interim appointments within the management and senior management team of One Adoption West Yorkshire with Michelle Rawlings (Head of Agency), Rhian Beynon (Service Delivery Manager with a Recruitment and Assessment Lead) and Nicola Steele (Service Manager with a Family Finding Lead) all being in temporary posts until the Autumn. Permanent recruitment to posts is being explored as the impact of uncertainty is acknowledged.

- 3.1.2 There have been several changes over the year as some experienced staff have retired and others have moved on to new roles or reduced hours for a better work life balance. This has caused pressures at different times in parts of the service, but as we move into 2022/23, we have successfully recruited to most vacant posts.
- 3.1.3 Morale for staff has continued to fluctuate, with this being impacted by both work pressures and external factors. Wellbeing was a focus of the staff Winter Conference and of mid-year appraisal discussions. Leadership check ins have been introduced for staff to communicate directly with the Head of Agency regarding queries or concerns. Discussions are underway with staff regarding retuning to offices to ensure an appropriate balance between home and office working.
- 3.1.4 Sickness levels have remained low in comparison to children's social care.

##### 3.1.5 Duty System

The duty and advice service has continued to run as before on a remote basis, with duty managers overseeing a daily check in each morning where tasks are able to be allocated and workers keeping in touch with one another throughout the day via MS Teams messaging. The number of calls to duty has remained consistent, there were a higher number of calls relating to letterbox in the first part of the year, but these have subsequently levelled off as the backlog of letterbox exchanges was cleared.

- 3.1.6 The 'choice' system for callers has continued to be in place, however the line 2 option (letterbox) has continued to be suspended to allow business support colleagues to concentrate on the actual exchanges and put a 'post-pandemic' system

in place for managing these going forward. As before, this has meant that line option 3 (the main duty line) has responded to all calls other than those enquiring about becoming an adopter. We are planning to start to utilise line option 2 again in May 2022.

- 3.1.7 The total number of calls to the duty and advice line for the second half of the year is 1764, with an annual total of 3,626. This averages at 69.7 calls per week or 13.9 calls per day. 309 calls (8.5%) related to people enquiring about adoption; 3317 calls (91.5%) were relating to support and letterbox.

3.1.8 Accommodation & service delivery

Staff are continuing to work predominantly from home, though some teams are beginning to work from the office more regularly. Workspace is now available in all 5 of our partner local authorities for teams to come together. This space is more limited than prior to the Covid 19 pandemic and systems are in place to ensure workers can have a workspace when travelling into an office. In most areas current workspaces are temporary with exploration ongoing in relation to future office use. Discussions are taking place with staff teams regarding future working patterns and service delivery by One Adoption West Yorkshire.

- 3.1.9 Results from the LCC Future Working Arrangements Survey showed 61% of OAWY respondents would like to work from home 'most or all of the time' and that 0% would like to work from the office all the time. This suggests staff have found working from home beneficial. There is no indication that home working has impacted upon service delivery, though there is a recognition of the importance of peer support and practice development from time spent together.

## 3.2 Partnership working

3.2.1 Operational Leads Meetings

Over the last year this group has continued to meet to discuss children's care planning in relation to adoption and the interface between the West Yorkshire Children's Services teams and One Adoption West Yorkshire. Discussions have taken place regarding joint auditing of children's adoption permanence plans and adoption related training for children's social workers and foster carers. Discussions have taken place regarding arrangements in relation to Foster Carer adoptions, where there is often evidence of delay in achieving permanence.

3.2.2 Multidisciplinary Team

Over the last year there has been considerable change in the team staffing, with two Clinical Psychologists and a Speech and Language Therapist being appointed in the summer of 2021. A Social Work team manager and senior therapeutic social worker were recruited to replace team members who left due to retirement and finding work opportunities outside OAWY. The Clinical Psychology Lead also left the team in early 2022 and a new Psychology Lead has been successfully appointed at a consultant grade. This change has allowed the opportunity for restructuring the Multidisciplinary team, with the Social Work team manager, managing the MDT service as MDT Team Manager, alongside the Consultant Psychologist to ensure a coherent service.

- 3.2.3 With all staffing in place, this has allowed the team the opportunity to continue to develop their service and develop a clear clinical model which embeds the MDT within OAWY. The model builds upon and supports the core adoption support offer, making MDT more accessible to families and OAWY staff. Key areas of development include supporting OAWY Social Workers in using and developing their skills in Theraplay, DDP and Life story work through supervision and developing and expanding the Therapeutic groups for families to access through ASF, ensuring that this support is provided equally across all the regions.

3.2.4 Agency Medical Advisors and GP's

Medical advisors have continued to work hard during the Covid 19 pandemic to ensure that they provide medical information for children in a timely way for their adoption plans to progress and to offer support to our adoption panels. We have continued to run 8 panels per month and have secured a medical advisor from Wakefield for the 8<sup>th</sup> panel. One of our Leeds Medical Advisors is due to retire soon, and we anticipate a smooth handover to her replacement. We have reviewed and updated the medical protocol in July this year with input from the medical advisors and local authority operational leads. GP capacity for undertaking medical assessments of adopters has increased over the year and we no longer face significant delays. We do however continue to face some challenges from a small number of GP's who have refused to carry out medicals regarding prospective adopters, have set their own fees or who request OAWY pay the CCG Fees. In these cases, issues have been escalated within the Clinical Commissioning Groups locally.

### 3.2.5 Virtual school heads (VSH)

Our Education Lead continues to meet with the Virtual School Heads on a termly basis. At the last meeting there was a particular focus on the increase in the number of pupils being excluded – both officially and un-officially; a plan is being drafted as to how we can support parents to manage the situation when this is the case.

3.2.6 The Education Advice line continues to be well used by parents and professionals alike. It is evident that the Virtual Schools across the region are gathering momentum in supporting their schools to become more attachment and trauma informed, understanding this is key in being able to further support schools across the region. Kinship also attends the meetings and will be included in any planning.

### 3.2.7 Special Guardianship Regional Work

Financial support - the financial offer is being implemented in 4/5 of the local authorities. Wakefield have decided not to proceed with implementing the regional approach and will continue with their current offer to special guardians. The implementation of the financial support policy has stalled due to issues around the waiving of the means test for non-agency SGOs where the carer is in receipt of means tested benefits. Policy and legal advice indicate that the means test cannot be waived where children were not previously looked after, and Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit must be deducted unless the child was previously looked after. Local Authorities will need to complete calculations to gauge the amount of child element in Universal Credit in these cases. We are awaiting further advice from Counsel before meeting with leaders in Leeds and Kirklees to reach a point of agreement on this issue. At that stage the Leeds policy is ready to be implemented. This will be used as a template within the other 3 local authorities.

3.2.8 The Kinship (formerly Grandparents Plus) project is progressing well with the contract having been renewed for a further two years until March 2024. There remain three project workers offering 1:1 Support to kinship carers in the region, alongside support groups and access to telephone advice. Between January and March 2022 166 carers accessed the advice line, 5 accessed peer mentoring, 54 accessed support groups and project workers secured 21 grants totalling £8142 for West Yorkshire carers. Over the year Kinship have given 1:1 support to 122 carers.

3.2.9 The Kinship regional Facebook group now has over 284 very active members. This allows us to connect with many Special Guardians in the region and hear their views. There has been a marked increase in the number of younger carers engaging with Kinship. The emerging themes from Special Guardians this quarter have been Education, Finances, Diagnosis Pathways and Mental Health. The cost-of-living increases have been an additional pressure on many low-income families, pushing them further into poverty. There remains a significant Covid backlog for medical assessments resulting in significant delays in children receiving diagnosis or support and there has been an increase in Special Guardians presenting with mental health difficulties due to the prolonged Covid situation. The support groups run by Kinship have been a lifeline for Special Guardians during the last 6 months and have provided training and support:

- *“Lovely to meet you all today, what a lovely group of people, so glad I came to the meeting.”*
- *“After our meeting, my daughter said that you were lovely and the type of person who we should be working with”.*
- *“Thank you so much, this is the sort of thing I was looking for”.*

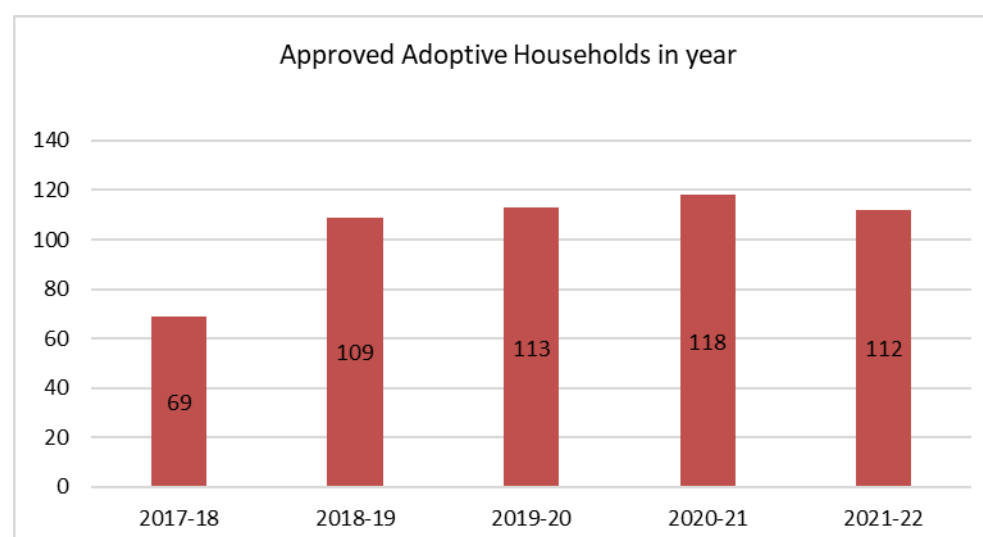
3.2.10 Guiding Guardians has continued to run over the October to April period with 19 families attending programs in October, January and April. OAWY made the group applications to the fund on behalf of the region.

- *“I thought the program was amazing and feel I’ve come away from it with answers and a great understanding which can only help me so much. So happy I could be part of it thank you”.*
- *“Really good, thoughtful examples as to approaches and how to respond went a long way beyond previous courses and reading; it really helped to reshape my understanding of ‘therapeutic parenting’.”*
- *“This programme is invaluable to anybody who is a Special Guardian and struggling to support children who are trying to deal with things they have had to deal with earlier in their lives.”*

3.2.11 Rhian Beynon’s co-ordination role has now finished. OAWY will continue to manage and oversee the Kinship contract and Rhian will support the implementation of the Leeds policy following advice from counsel. Kirklees will facilitate the Guiding Guardians programme going forward and support regular regional practice meetings.

### 3.3 Performance Management

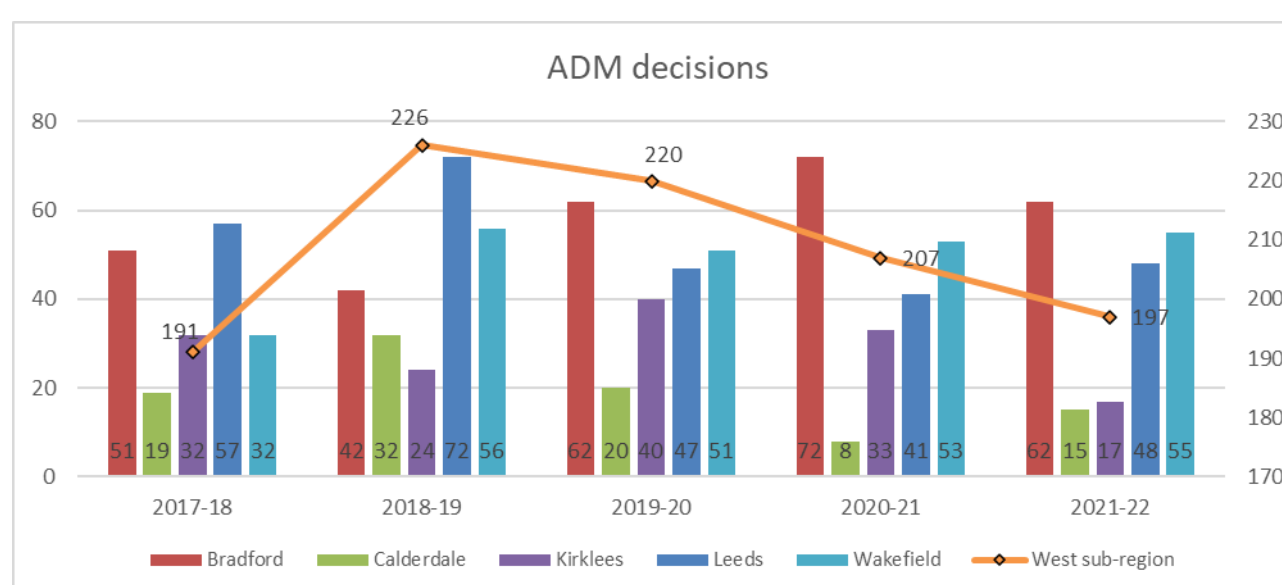
3.3.1 The agency provides quarterly reports to the management board. This data provided has developed over the last 5 years and is gathered to ensure that we are aware of how much work is undertaken, how well it was undertaken and if anyone is any better off.



**A) Sufficiency:** Are enough of the right kind of adopters being recruited and approved to meet the needs of the children waiting:

#### 3.3.2 The children with a plan ratified for adoption during 2021/22

Between April 2021 and March 2022, 197 children had a plan for adoption ratified by the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities Agency Decision Makers. Of the 197 children with a plan for adoption, there were 98 female and 99 male children. In total, this is a reduction of 10 from last year's full year figure of 207 children from across the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities.



#### 3.3.3 Ethnicity

Of the 197 children with a plan for adoption ratified this year, 134 (83%) children were from white British backgrounds (including information not obtained) and 33 children (17%) were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, including children from eastern European, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds.

#### 3.3.4 Placement with Siblings

As a general principle, siblings will be placed together; however, due to the individual needs of children, this is not always appropriate and cannot always be achieved. It is essential that sibling assessments are carried out to ensure good quality decision making and support plans are evidence based if children are placed together or apart. Of the 74 individual siblings placed during the year, 31 individual children were placed apart, for which 29 the plan was to be placed apart.

#### 3.3.5 Adopter recruitment

112 adoptive households were approved during the year, this is a slight decrease compared to the previous two years.

3.3.6 Within the 112 households, 206 individuals were approved throughout 2021-22. Of these, 20 (10%) are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds (last year was also 10%). We need to improve our percentage of BAME carers and keep a focus on ensuring that we approve a full range of adoptive families to meet the range of children requiring placement, while at the same time not relying on matching children with families of the same ethnicity, but rather a family who can meet their holistic needs. We continue to work with the national recruitment campaign, and it's work on recruiting adopters who can reflect the heritage of all our children.

3.3.7 Households approved for sibling groups has increased by 3 this year with 27 households approved for sibling groups, all 27 for 2 children. The Sibling Adopter training course has helped to shift thinking of those prospective adopters in being able to have the confidence to consider adopting brothers and sisters together. 19 households approved were open to an Early Permanence Placement. This has reduced but has, nevertheless, exceeded the demands for these placements over the year.

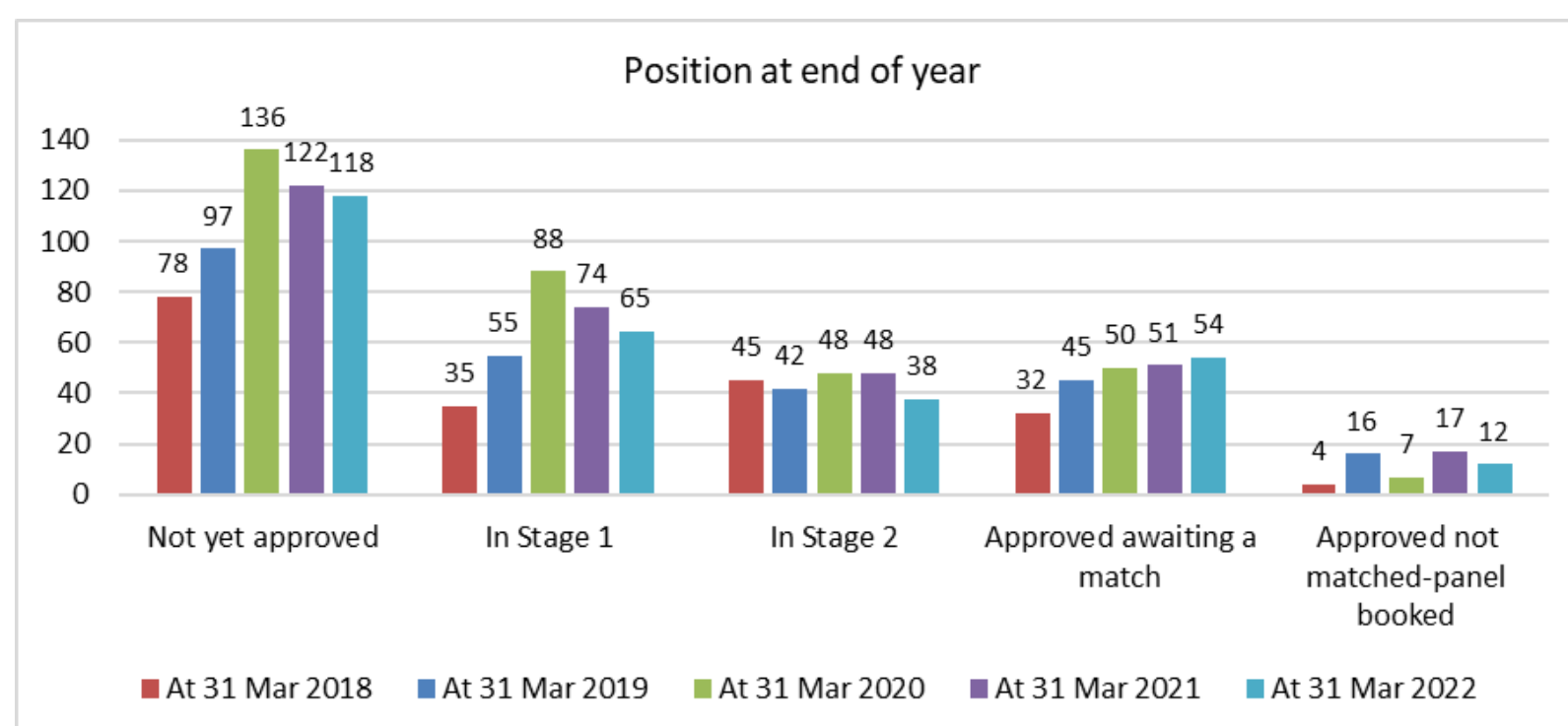
### 3.3.8 Children currently with an adoption plan

As of the end of March 2022 there are 143 children with a plan for adoption, and have a Placement Order, from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities not currently placed and requiring adopters. 85 children out of the 143 are 0 - 2 years, 37 are between 2 and 4 years and 21 children are 5 years of age or older.

3.3.9 From the children waiting for a placement there are 65 girls and 78 boys, and 20% are children from BME backgrounds (including children from eastern European, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds). 71 children are from sibling groups. The plans for these children are actively reviewed with the local authorities with clear monitoring and tracking systems to understand the range of family finding activity going on for these children and whether adoption remains the right plan for each child. The delays for these children are related primarily to the needs of the children; the need to place siblings together, the age of the children or their special needs or complexity.

### 3.3.10 Adopters available

As of the end of March 2021, there are 54 approved adoptive households that have not been matched and 5 are in the process of looking and are in discussions about considering placements and 12 have a panel date booked.



3.3.11 On the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2022 118 adopters are in the process of assessment (in stage 1 or 2, or on hold pre-approval) although these will take several months to become approved. This is a positive picture, however, a more nuanced approach to recruitment and approval is required to ensure that we have adopters who can meet the needs of children with a plan for adoption and particularly the children we know who wait longer. This will be discussed later in the report.

**B) Timeliness:** Are children being matched and placed without delay including those children who wait longer?

### 3.3.12 Children matched in the year for adoption

Between April 2021 and March 2022, 182 children from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities were matched with families at adoption panels; this has remained stable compared to last year from across the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities and is positive given the pandemic. From April 2021 to March 2022, 18% (33) of the children matched were from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and this is extremely positive news as these children often wait longer to be placed.

- 133 of the children matched were 0 to 2 years old.
- 34 children matched were 2 to 4 years old.
- 15 children were aged 5 years or older.
- 80 children were part of a sibling group (of the 182 matched).
- 49 children (of the 182 matched) were placed and are part of a sibling group of which 21 were placed apart, the plan for 20 of the 21 children was to be placed apart due to their individual needs.

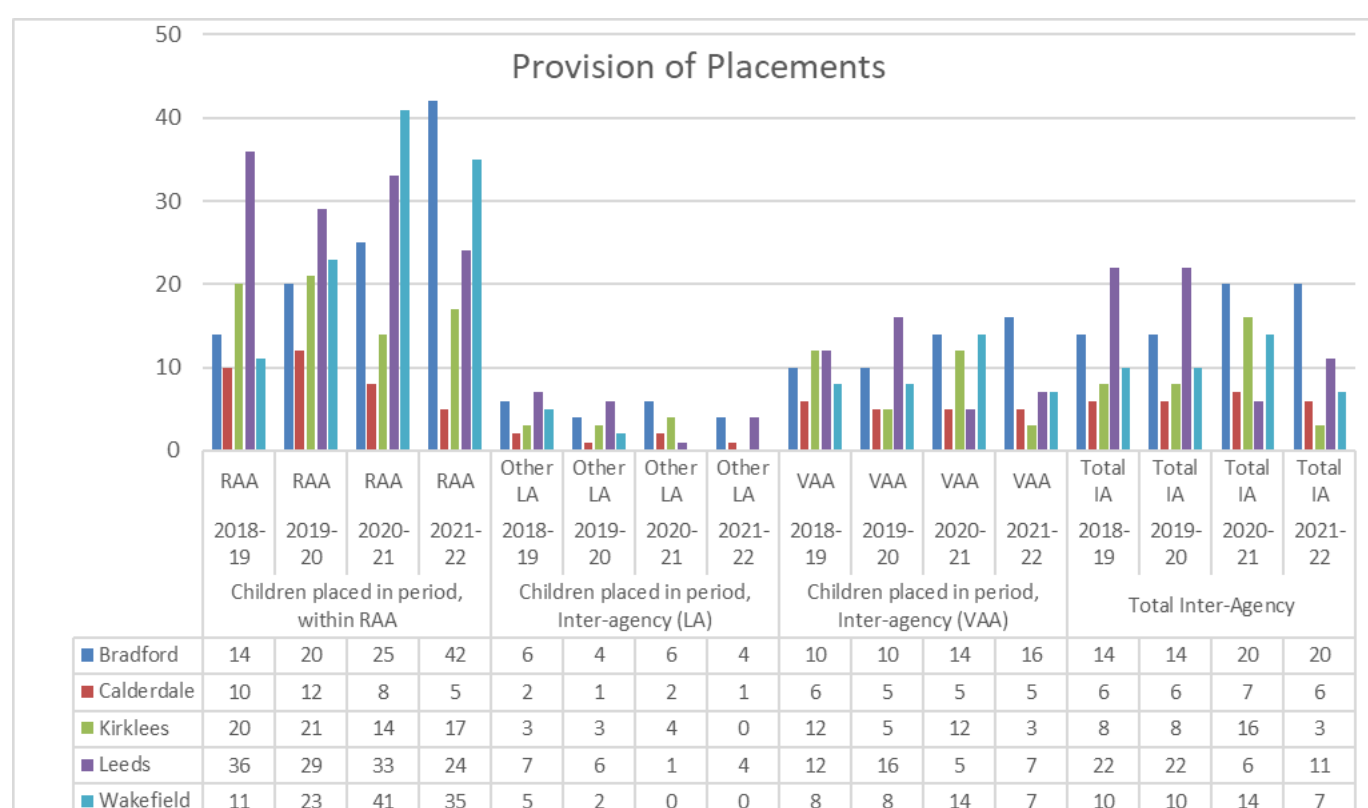
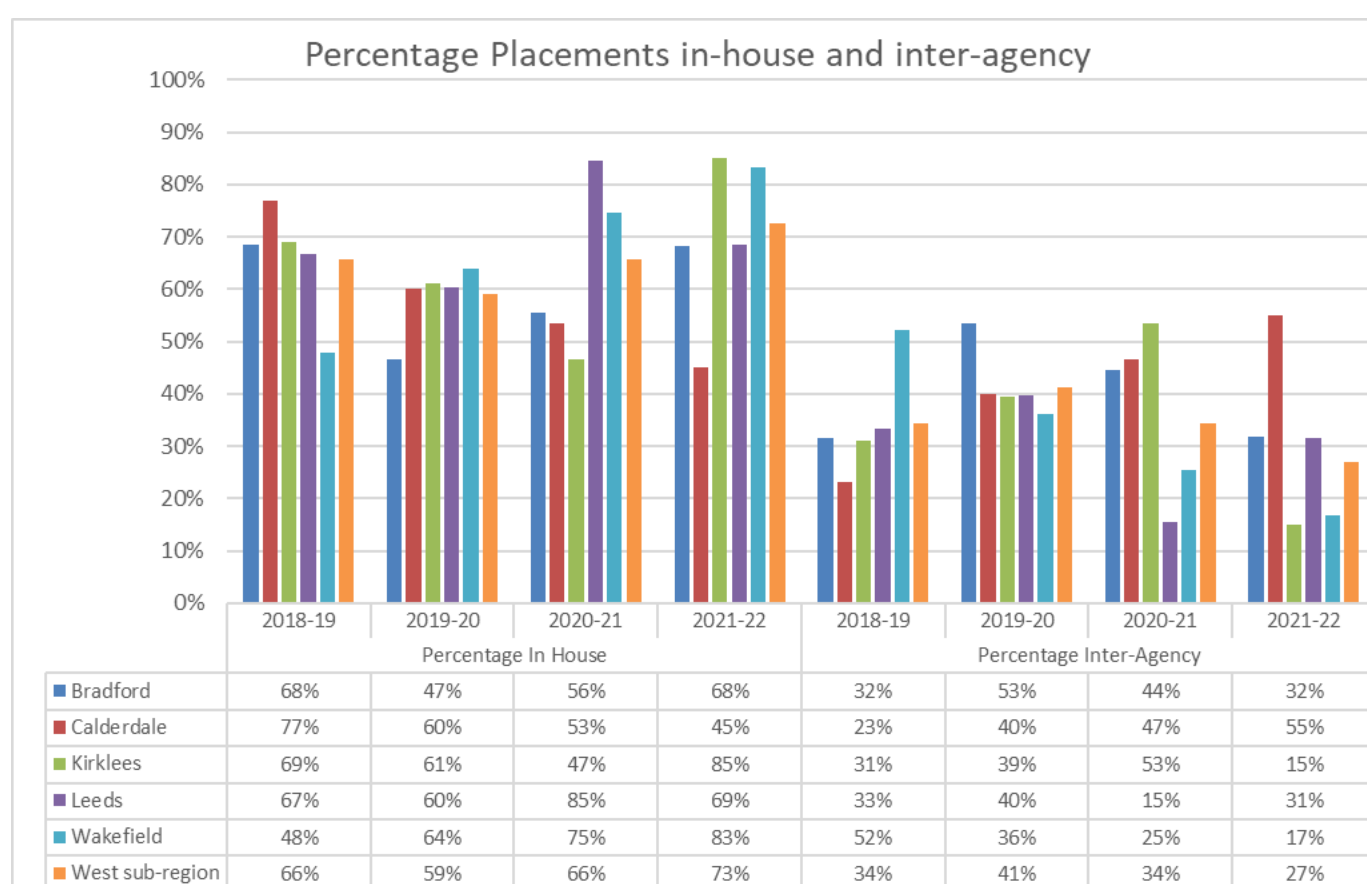
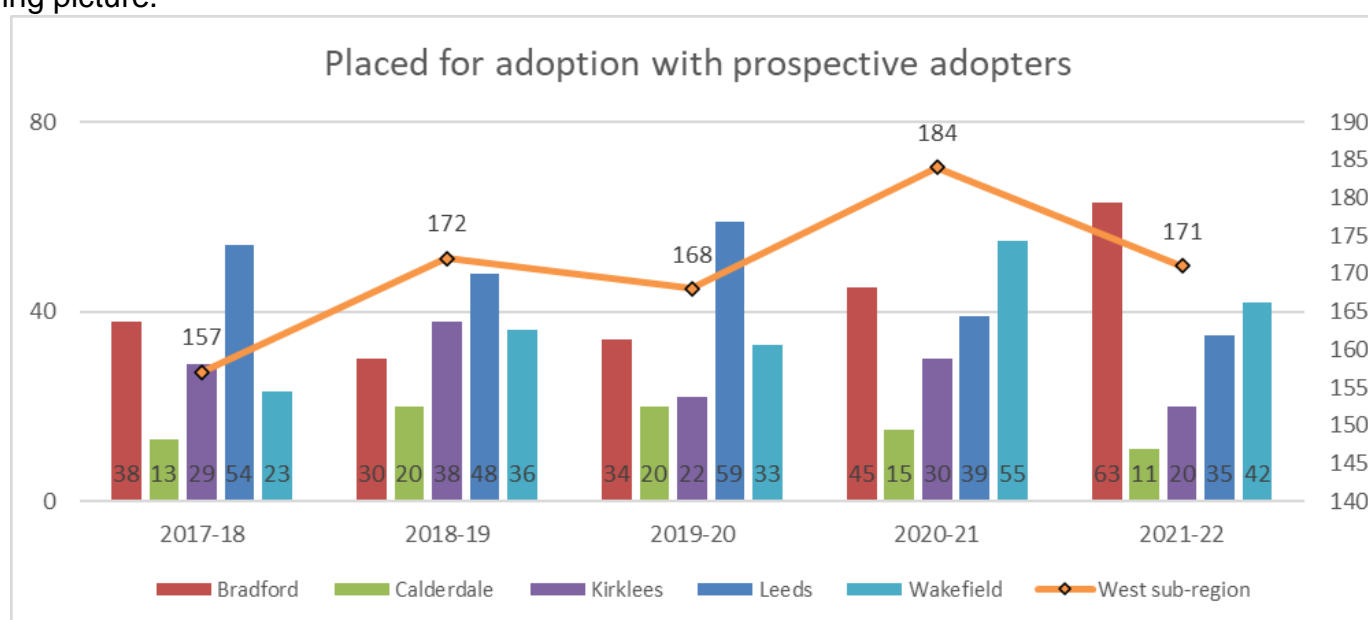
- 15 children (of the 182 matched) had been previously placed in early permanence placements (7 placed EPP during the year); 7 of these 15 children have been adopted in the year.

### 3.3.13 Provision of Placements

171 children were placed this year. The percentage of placements provided in-house within the region has again increased significantly this year.

- 124 children within OAWY.
- 9 children with other local authorities or other Regional Adoption Agencies.
- 38 children with Voluntary Adoption Agencies

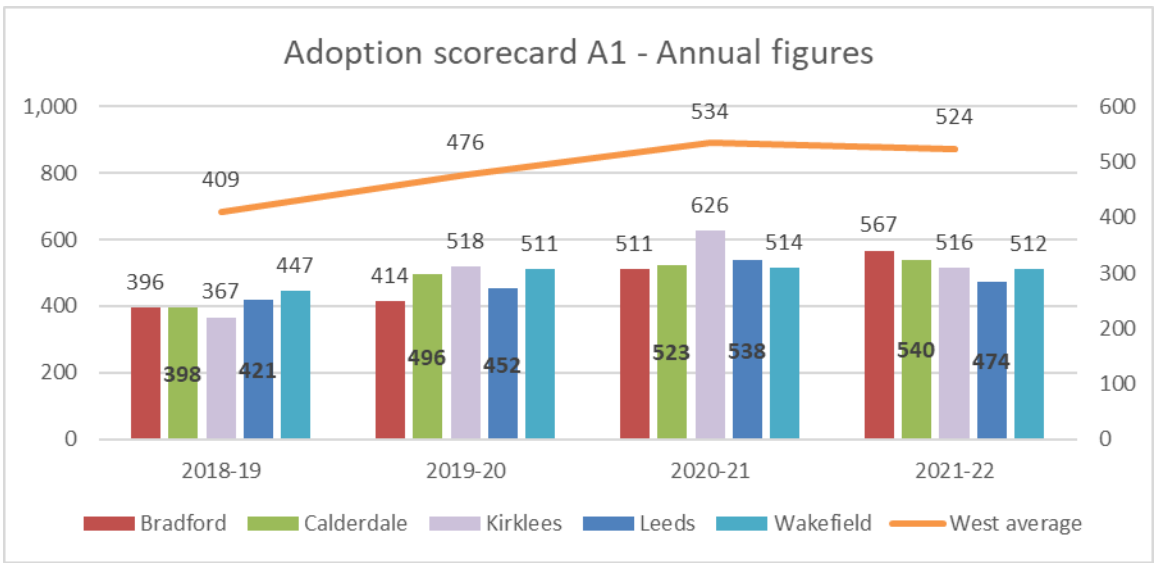
The percentage this year was 73% in house and 27% interagency. Last year it was 66% in house and 34% interagency and is an improving picture.



3.3.14 Adoption Scorecards

**A1 indicator**

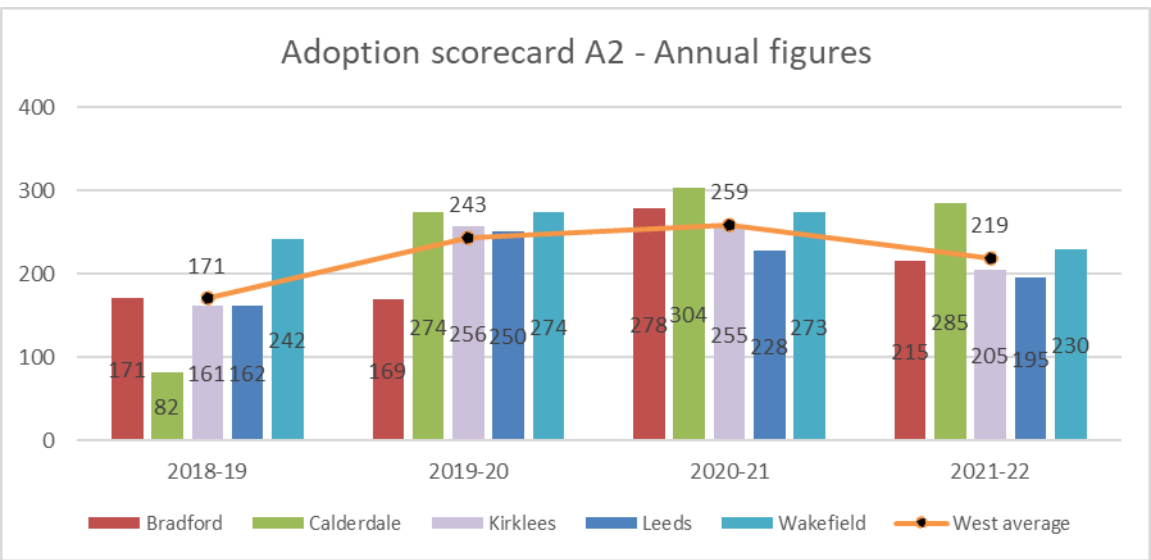
The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (indicator A1) for children in West Yorkshire is 524 days, the National Indicator target is 426 days.



- 21 of the 167 children adopted entered care more than 3 years ago.
- 112 of the 167 children adopted were hard to place children.
- 71 of the 167 children adopted took more than 500 days between entering care and being placed,
- Of the 71 children that took more than 500 days 54 of the 71 were hard to place children with 27 having 2 or more characteristics

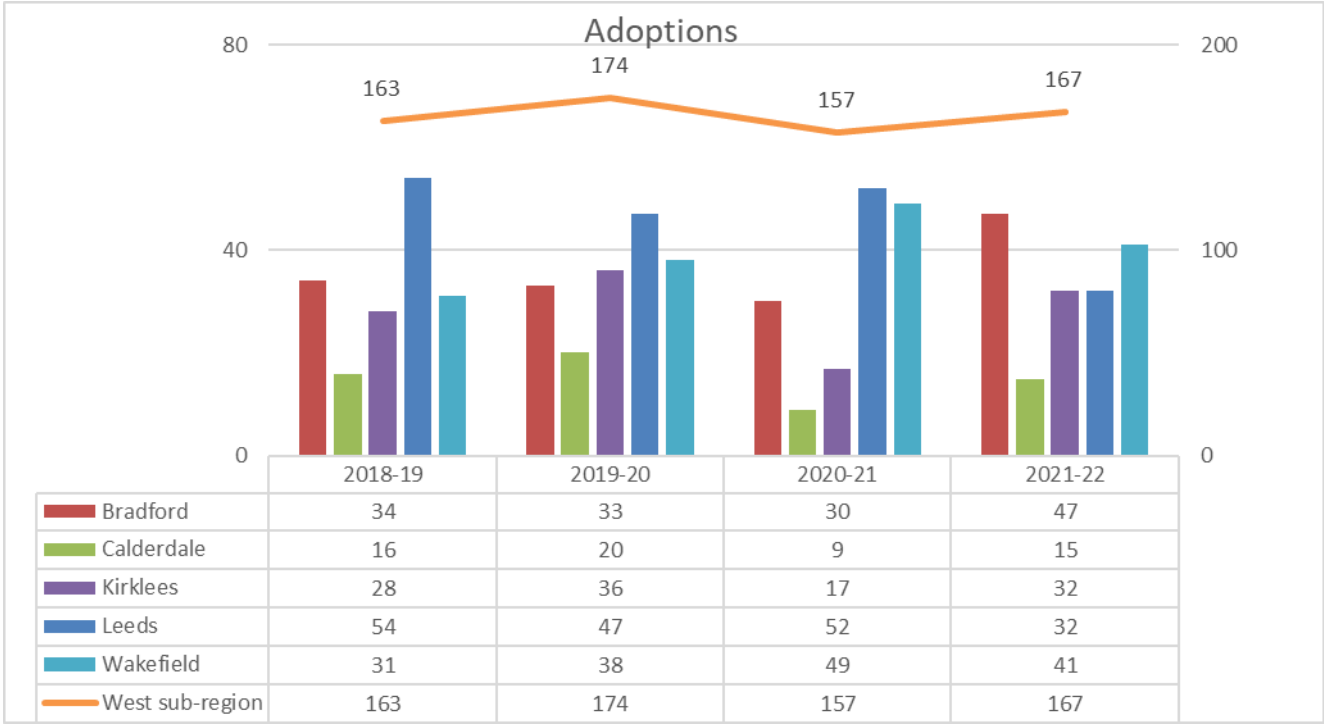
3.3.15 **A2 indicator**

The average time for those children adopted in the period, between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (Indicator A2) for children in West Yorkshire has decreased to 219 days, the National indicator target is 121 days. This is above the national indicator and reflects an issue of a disconnect between the matching criteria of adopters available and the complexity of children waiting for adoption. However, as discussed in the above paragraph the cohort of these children adopted is important to note and the fact that children have secured permanence and an adoptive family is positive for each of these individual children.



3.3.16 Children adopted from care

The number of children who have been formally adopted has increased by 10 (167) with 13.6% of children leaving care being adopted across the region. The National average is 12%.



### 3.4 Practice, quality of provision and management oversight

#### 3.4.1 Recruitment and Assessment

We have approved 112 adoptive families over the course of this year and matched 106 families with children, all of these being children from the West Yorkshire region. We have had fewer enquiries in 2021/22 than we did last year but the number of these proceeding to an initial visit has remained similar. We no longer have a backlog of families waiting for assessment and families are allocated at the point they are ready for assessment. We are increasing our online marketing activity to encourage enquiries and our social media presence has improved significantly this year. The numbers of families entering stage 2 have stayed consistent. We have continued to use sessional workers to support capacity in the service and ensure timeliness, though more recently we are managing to allocate far more of our assessments to OAWY workers. Following retirement, we no longer have the additional three recruitment and assessment social work posts.

3.4.2 The feedback from adopters regarding their experience has overall been very positive. Feedback from the 2021 annual adopter survey:

- *Really quickly managed to get help and support in place. Very much appreciate having N (OAWY social worker) in our lives.*
- *R our support worker has been amazing.*
- *T our social worker has been more than brilliant at supporting us. Without her I really think our daughter may not have remained with us.*
- *Very helpful social worker who has helped us with some tricky issues as a family.*
- *Our adoption support team is brilliant.*

3.4.3 Feedback from a Bradford IRO:

- *“N and J wanted it to be noted that the support they have received from T (OAWY) and S (SW) is exceptional and that they wanted to thank them for all the support they have provided to them as adopters and to the children. It’s clear that the consistency in workers for these children, along with the day-to-day support given, has enabled N and J to feel well supported, which in turn has ensured the children are very well cared for and settled.”*

3.4.4 Further feedback from S and K, prospective adopters (EPP):

- *“There is so much support, it has been absolutely fantastic. The professional support has helped us be more realistic”. The couple also said that they would love to “pay back” the support they have received by providing it to other prospective adopters.*

3.4.5 Feedback from a colleague in children’s services:

- *“You have made my first adoption experience less difficult than I thought it would be! Thank you for supporting me with this, it’s been a pleasure.”*

3.4.6 Our training offer has continued to develop. 112 households attended the preparing to adopt training in 2021/22, 61 households have attended our Adopting Siblings training, 127 have attended our connected by adoption training, 54 have attended EPP training, 33 have attended our Experienced Adopter training, and 21 have attended our Foster Carer Adopting training. Some feedback from the Preparing to Adopt training:

- *“It was thought provoking and challenged some of my pre-existing assumptions. I came away with a much greater understanding of adoption. Also, great to meet other potential adopters and have first-hand knowledge from an adoptee and an adoptive parent.”*
- *“I feel like I gained a lot of insight, knowledge and confidence from the training. It was great to hear from others on the same journey and begin to build a network of friends who can relate to possible experiences I might go through.”*
- *“I learned so much and have so much more to think about but know that me and much partner are on the right path and excited to carry on our journey. I also didn’t realise we would make the connection we did with other prospective adopters.”*

3.4.7 We have been working on reintroducing the Birth Parent workshop and plan going to run classroom training 6 times in 2022/23 in addition to some online training. We have commissioned Adoption UK to provide all our new adopters with access to the Adopter Passport, where they can access many resources, webinars and videos and complete modules on different areas of adoption. We have also delivered Brain Based Parenting online to many of our stage 2 adopters:

- *“It was very useful and explained in a very clear and practical way - even though I have read a lot about this, it is fantastic to have a clear reminder and practical tips. It will really help me explain my younger son's reactions to my older son - who struggles with the way we try to therapeutically parent our younger son - and my husband, who tends to revert to traditional parenting”*
- *“We attended the training last night and thought it was a really interesting and well-presented session which was really informative that we enjoyed. We are approved adopters but looking for a match now, so always happy to have resources available that would help us when we start our actual parenting journey.”*

3.4.8 The Stage 1 restructure has been in place for 12 months now. A recent audit of stage one work has shown greater consistency in decision making and good evidence of management oversight, along with a bespoke approach to meeting the needs of the enquirers; arranging interpreters, rearranging video visits to face to face, and meeting to provide information even when it was known an enquiry could not progress. This evidences a responsiveness to individual need and good customer service. A recent Mystery Shopper exercise gave very positive feedback about our helpful and open approach to enquirers:

- *“The advisor was quite dynamic, quite friendly. They showed a willingness to help further. Most of the time they sounded quite positive, suggesting solutions and expressing support.”*
- *“The advisor was dynamic and positive. They were helpful, I appreciated their offer to email further information and the invite to attend a meeting.”*
- *“The staff member was engaged, positive and really was keen to help me overcome what I saw as issues. They explained that the stability and length of the relationship was all that mattered and they didn't seem at all put off by the fact we were a same sex couple. They just emphasised that a strong relationship was all they were looking for.”*
- *“I thought the Agency came across as really understanding and seeking to remove as many barriers as possible while ensuring the child was getting the best possible options.”*

3.4.9 Having a strong management focus on the front end of the recruitment service did lead us to decrease the amount of time taken between enquiries, initial visits and receiving and accepting a registration of interest in the first half of the year. In the second half of the year our stage one timescales have been impacted by a shortage of adoption advisors due to staff moving on to study or take up new roles. We have now recruited and will be fully staffed in June. We have also increased the forms embedded in the OAWY website to reduce reliance on post and email, which should reduce delays further. We continue to experience delays at all stages of the process due to GPs being unable to prioritise medical appointments and reports.

3.4.10 We continue to take steps to increase the number of adopter enquiries through our marketing strategy for priority children, and through increasing the possible number of attendees at online information events, which take place twice per month. A key priority for us is recruiting families who can provide a home for siblings. Throughout 2021/22 27 households were approved for sibling groups, an increase of 3 households from the previous year. 61 households attended our sibling training which runs every two months, and we have held a sibling specific profile day for families across the country. Discussions are ongoing regarding our strategy to increase further the number of sibling adopters and a focus group with adoptive families is due to take place in early July to consider recruitment strategy and the support provided post placement. We continue to support the national recruitment campaign and it's work on recruiting adopters for siblings.

3.4.11 A priority for the next year is to increase Early Permanence placements in the region. 19 households approved in 2021/22 were open to Early Permanence Placements, which is 5 fewer households than in the previous year. The number exceeds the number of children identified in the year to be placed via Early Permanence. However, we have still had to place two children externally due to not having families that could meet their needs in the timescales. Numbers of children identified for EPP remain low across the region. One Adoption were successful in a pan regional bid for funding to develop Early Permanence in West Yorkshire and have appointed a project lead to take this forward.

#### 3.4.12 Advertising and marketing

Over the next six months we will be significantly increasing our marketing output, with a combination of paid and free campaigns across our social and digital channels. General brand awareness campaigns to attract top-of-the-funnel audiences will be interspersed with more focused campaigns to help recruit more adopters for sibling groups, children of Black and mixed-Black heritage and older children. We will continue to promote our information events but will have greater focus on our adoption support offer and what makes our offer unique. Social and digital channels will continue to be the key platforms used however we will consider out-of-home and/or radio campaigns later in the year if recruitment numbers remain low. Internal resource to support our social media campaigns will be increased to help deliver more strategic and coordinated messaging.

3.4.13 We are developing a suite of mobile-only landing pages on the website, to improve the overall user experience for people who find our website through a search engine. These pages will be designed to respond to specific search terms used and

will offer a more focused response to individual queries. The improved speed and relevance to search terms will help our Google Ads perform better, which will in turn mean better value for money.

#### 3.4.14 Adoption Panels

Panels are still being run virtually via zoom and this continues to operate well. We hold 8 panels per month and capacity has been less of a challenge in recent months. Bridget Puddepha and Michaela Bass have joined as Panel Chairs bringing the number of Panel Chairs to 4, which has been helpful in managing capacity and covering leave. The panel chairs provide a biannual report for the adoption agency and this feedback is discussed with the local authority adoption leads and decision makers regularly. Lois Highton continues in her role as panel advisor and the consistency and scrutiny she provides has contributed to the smooth running of our panels and an improvement in the quality of paperwork being presented to panel due to the feedback she provides to workers. The business support teams are central to the effective running of panels and the feedback regarding the quality of the organisation of these and minutes are very positive.

3.4.15 Panel Members access their paperwork and join panels either via iPads or their own equipment with SharePoint/secure email providing a secure platform for panel members to read their paperwork. This has helped us with improving diversity of our panels with panel members being able to join from other areas of the country. We are looking to move more panel members to accessing their paperwork via SharePoint as this is more user friendly and plan to use PAR accounts with multi factor authentication to make this happen in the coming months.

#### 3.4.16 Family Finding

197 children have received a should be placed for adoption decision this year, this is down slightly on the previous year of 207 children. 183 children have been matched with their adopters in this year, 171 of which have been placed for adoption. The number of children regionally leaving care through adoption has increased in the last year and is above the national average.

3.4.17 The family finding teams have worked creatively to undertake family finding and achieve matches for children. There have been additional pressures on all the teams in family finding; the complexities of transitions during the pandemic have remained challenging, this has meant an increase in the work required to ensure effective planning to ensure transitions can be undertaken safely as well as a higher level of support needed for both adopters and foster carers. Over the last few months of the year, we have moved to more face-to-face meetings and visits, and some of the additional pressures that came with the covid pandemic have reduced.

3.4.18 There has been an increase in the percentage of children placed with One Adoption West Yorkshire families during 2021/22, from 66% (during 2020/21) to 73% of children placed. This has been possible due to the number of adopters that progressed through for approval in the last 2 years. As a service we are working hard to ensure that children are matched with adoptive families within or close to the West Yorkshire area. The OAWY commissioned contract with the Voluntary Alliance entered its second year and we exceeded the number of 30 adoptive placements for West Yorkshire children. As this contract enters its third and final year analysis will be completed regarding whether the contract has met the aims and objectives and if a further contract should be commissioned. Alongside the various family finding methodologies that we utilised this year we have invited 2 VAA adopters to be featured at each of our internal linking meetings twice a month. This gives family finders an opportunity to find out more information about VAA adopters living in or close to West Yorkshire before other RAAs and for links to be made for our children who are waiting longest.

3.4.19 Workers from the Local Authorities have continued to value the support of the family finders in OAWY with positive feedback from Local Authority Social Workers being received:

- I just wanted the opportunity to praise one of your workers. I have been in social work many years, but new to the adoption/ family finding process. She has gone above and beyond to advise me on the processes and what to expect now and moving on. She has ensured that all documentation has been processed in a timely manner to avoid drift and delay and is already ready to look at going to an internal matching panel on Thursday. I would just like it noted my praise, as in social work as we all know, good work can often go unrecognised.*
- I just wanted to raise with you how helpful she has been during this last week with my EPP case. It's my first EPP case and she's really taken the time to explain everything to me which I really appreciate. It was also clear that she had really taken the time to read the case files in great detail before the linking meeting and she has done an amazing job with the EPP paperwork, she has kindly taken the lead on this and done the majority of the paperwork which I really appreciate, and I just cannot thank her enough for this!*

3.4.20 Profiling events have continued to be delivered virtually with five events taking place over the year. We have changed the format of events, moving from 'live' Skype events to pre-recorded weekend events where adopters can log in and view children's profiles over a longer timeframe. This change was made following feedback from adopters regarding the online profiling events and has enabled the service to significantly increase the number of adopters viewing the profiles from One Adoption West Yorkshire. The events have engaged adopters nationally with a particular focus on engaging adopters approved or in Stage Two of the assessment process within OAWY or with local VAAs. These events take a great deal of

organisation, and the business support staff are key in ensuring the booking system works well and that the technology is working to manage such big events. One of these events specifically focused on profiling children part of a sibling group and two sibling groups were matched from this targeted event. The children featured at these events are children who wait longer for an adoptive family and 75 children have been profiled at the events (some children will have been featured at more than one event). 670 adoptive families have attended the events, with 103 expressions of interest being made in West Yorkshire Children. 6 linking visits with adopters have taken place and 4 matches have been made with the other 2 progressing to panel. Since moving to weekend pre-recorded events the number of adopters in attendance and the expression of interests have risen significantly. There is a plan to continue to run our online profiling events with the next one scheduled for April 2022.

3.4.21 We received the following feedback from adopters who attended the online profiling events:

- *“Fantastic presentation, very good detail, absolutely loved the event in its shape!”*
- *“I found it particularly helpful to see and hear the family finders talking about the children”*

3.4.22 Our first fun day since the start of the pandemic took place in October 2021 and 9 children attended (5 single children and 4 children part of a sibling group) and 31 adopters. This event was kept small due to needing to continue to navigate the continued risks associated with COVID 19. 16 expressions of interest were made at this event and 1 of these has progressed to a match. There is a plan to run a further three fun days next year with the first event scheduled for May 2022.

3.4.23 We received feedback from one social worker following the fun day that said, *“two of my adopters are now considering matches they wouldn’t have before the event, it was a very well-run event”*.

3.4.24 OAWY is utilising Link Maker to profile children to OAWY approved families as well as being able to use the system to profile children to a wider reach of adopters, including targeted profiling to adopters through the contract with the Voluntary Adoption Alliance and nationally where needed. Internal linking meetings continue to be practitioner led with both family finding and adoption social workers profiling the children and families they are family finding for. We have included the profiling of targeted adopters from voluntary adoption agencies who are part of the VAA contract since November 2021 at our internal linking meetings. We are planning to strengthen our connections with other local RAAs in the year ahead, namely those in other areas of Yorkshire as at times they have surplus adopters. We will be inviting them to feature their adopters at our internal linking meeting from May 2022 and exploring hosting fun days pan regionally. We continue to have several family finding methodologies to support children being matched with adoptive families.

#### 3.4.25 Adoption Support

a) **Adoption support:** Do children and families have timely access to high quality support services?

The teams have continued to work mostly from home as their base but with increasing numbers of contacts with families or other professionals being carried out face to face; we have recognised that there are occasions (for ease or to make best use of time) that a virtual response is appropriate. The teams are benefitting from spending time together in office bases working as a team and having face to face team meetings. Discussions are taking place about what the future work pattern will look like; how often teams will work in the office base (once a week, for example), and this will form our future hybrid model of working along with the face to face and virtual approaches detailed above.

3.4.26 Some feedback from adopters about the work undertaken by OAWY staff in the last 6 months include:

- *I just wanted to thank you personally for all the support you have given us as a family over the years. It made all the difference to us to know you were there to reach out to.*
- *F had empathy and understood as well from the point of view of adoption and Muslim culture as well.*
- *JW has given our family such tremendous support. For our girls she is so caring and nurturing and has brought out the best in both even in times of great difficulty....She has been able to be the voice of reason with other professionals at the table who perhaps would hear G and I as "just" the parents.....She's gone above and beyond every single time*
- *Just listened to this (podcast from an adopter experiencing difficulties) and it made me so grateful for all your support over the last couple of years. Thanks for all the training and help for C. It really has made a massive difference*
- *It is not possible to convey how much JE has supported and helped us over the past 18 months. She has been on the end of the phone and email, checking in when I've been at breaking point, and to generally checking in the whole time. She has helped me fight for services locally and highlight H's needs. She has helped find appropriate support and assessments and we would not have coped with out her support*
- *You probably won't see M working day to day with adopters so I thought that I should let you know that she is INCREDIBLY good at her job. P and I feel very supported by her....always manages to decipher what is going on and give us really useful advice. She has been brilliant with school and very diligent in contacting people for us and writing up meetings etc. As you know, she is a lovely person too and always makes us feel better!*
- *Thank you so much K for your help and the information you gave me on Thursday and the email you sent me (duty caller)*

3.4.27 We have continued to make full use of the Adoption Support Fund to commission therapeutic work for families, children and young people. Most, if not all, therapy appointments are taking place face to face now although some providers have maintained virtual working as an option if that meets the needs of the young person better. This year in total we have had 624 applications to the fund approved resulting in £2,544,704.43 being awarded. Of this £59,283.81 was generated income

where we had provided services in-house and were able to charge for these from the ASF. Local authorities in the region agreed to £51,091.38 match funding for therapy.

3.4.28 Our Stay and Play groups are now back up and running inside venues across the region. We have lately made the difficult decision to cease provision in the Hebden Bridge area of Calderdale due to dwindling take up; we will review this again in future if indicators are that there is a level of need in that area. The Bradford 'Tweens' group continues to run, and we continue to work on setting up 'tweens' and teens provision in the other areas with new groups planning to be launched in the Leeds/Wakefield boundary area at the end of summer. Kirklees/Calderdale planning is also in the pipeline.

3.4.29 We now have an established offer of 4 adopter support groups running online per month: Adopter Chat (general support group), Single Adopters, Dads Group and TRECS (trans-racial/ethnic/cultural adopter group). They are incrementally building in size, with the slight exception of the Single Adopters group which we plan to refresh and relaunch in the coming months. The opportunity to attend TRECS group was also offered to colleagues in One Adoption North and Humber as well as One Adoption South Yorkshire and we are pleased to have a couple of families from South Yorkshire who have attend the group.

3.4.30 As before, we have continued to offer a programme of evening workshops for families on topics ranging from: Brain Based Parenting, Education workshops in relation to transitions to a new school and SEND, and our new workshop around contact and identity. We have identified in the last few months that there seems to be less appetite from families to attend group parenting programmes; planned groups for Underdeveloped Systems (US), NVR and Persevering Parents have all had to be either abandoned or offered on a 1:1 basis to a couple of families (in the case of NVR) due to a lack of take-up. We are monitoring the need for this provision and are well placed to provide these programmes again when required.

3.4.31 We have continued to offer attendance at all our online events to families who live beyond the confines of West Yorkshire and recognise these now as part of our core offer of support to families outside the region who have adopted a child/ren from West Yorkshire.

3.4.32 Access to records work is recovering from the impacts of Covid, and we are increasingly moving towards a position of 'business as usual'. We continue to have a dedicated Business Support Officer to deal with these requests, who has received the following feedback from a partner agency:

- ... (name of manager in partner agency) *mentioned to me how amazing the work is that you do around accessing files – they commented that out of all the RAAs and LAs they have a contract to work with (which will be pretty much the whole north of England at least, I should imagine) – you are the best person to deal with.*

3.4.33 And specifically, a birth parent was very complimentary about the work undertaken to provide her with letters and pictures of her children that had sat on file for several years, not able to be passed on at the time. The Business Support Officer went over and above in collating some additional non-identifying information about her children and which siblings they had been placed with, which was a comfort to the birth mum to know even several years after the event.

3.4.34 In total, we received 330 requests for access to records in the year – averaging 27.5 requests per month. Requests are mostly received from adopted adults, birth family members, adoption support agencies, social workers and police.

#### 3.4.35 Commissioned Contracts: Adoption UK and PAC/UK

##### Adoption UK: Peer Mentoring

There are currently 20 active peer mentors supporting 55 families across the region via the 1:1 support service, 27 via WhatsApp groups and 28 via 1:1 support. Furthermore, there are 9 families who are accessing enhanced support via the transitions service.

3.4.36 Here are some comments from those accessing the mentoring service:

- Mentee – *“No matter what you’re struggling with there is always someone on hand to help you with their life experiences through adoption. It’s about having someone who understands and who can provide guidance and support to you. It’s about them saying you’re doing a good job and we don’t always get everything right but things will get better and to keep on going. It’s about having that person that has the same thing in common with you and you don’t have to check in on them because they check in on you. It’s just overall brilliant and the value you get from it is priceless.”*
- Mentor – *“Having previously used the mentoring service when going through the adoption process myself, I found the service invaluable. To have somebody who people can talk to who has “lived” the adoption process and offer real life experiences is really useful to the mentees. As mentors you are offering a completely different perspective to the professionals and one that is as vitally important.”*

- WhatsApp participant – *“the support group and our mentor have been an amazing help for us. No question is too big, too small or too stupid.... a great help through the process and made everything seem possible and easy to get through.”*
- WhatsApp participant – *“reassuring knowing there’s others in the group where we can seek support, people who understand what we are going through. It’s a safe space where we can ask anything and know we will get an honest answer. E.g. buying nursery furniture, to someone else outside adoption it would seem trivial but to us was a big step and the group get it!”*
- Transition Service User – *“Best adoption service we have ever used – learned so much, looking at things differently now, better than any training course!”*

#### 3.4.37 Adoption UK: Adopter Engagement

The Adopter Engagement provision has been active in One Adoption West Yorkshire in the following work:

- Prep training
- Sibling training
- Pre-matching training
- Experienced parent training
- Experienced adopter training
- EPP training

3.4.38 In addition Facebook groups run by Adopter Engagement coordinators across the whole of the Yorkshire and Humber region have reported the following activity:

- Adopter Voice, Facebook group, 911 members.
- Early years and primary school, Facebook group, 284 members.
- Secondary and further education, Facebook group, 149 members.
- EPP, Facebook group, 40 members.

#### 3.4.39 PAC-UK: adults work

PAC-UK have dealt with 461 calls to their advice line and worked with 167 service users (existing and new) across the year. These services are provided for all adults affected by adoption but most of the work is undertaken with birth parents and adopted adults. A total of 655 appointments were offered across the year to service users.

#### 3.4.40 PAC-UK: Adopteens service

81 young people from West Yorkshire have been involved in Adopteens during the year. Additionally, 6 of the members of the Adopteens Youth Council are from West Yorkshire.

#### 3.4.41 Non-Agency Adoption

One Adoption West Yorkshire undertakes non-agency adoption on behalf of Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield councils; Bradford and Leeds councils undertake their own. Due to the pandemic this work was suspended and reopened on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2021. Throughout the year we have received 27 Notifications of Intention to Adopt (NOIs).

3.4.42 Over the last 12 months there were a total of 81 enquiries/ briefing session registrations received for non-agency adoption. 28% (23) of enquiries were from families living in Calderdale, 27% (22) were from families living in Kirklees and 44% (36) were from families living in Wakefield.

3.4.43 Over the past 12 months there were 9 non-agency adoption orders granted, 22% (2) were for families from Calderdale, 33% (3) were for families from Kirklees and 44% (4) were for families from Wakefield.

3.3.44 2021 saw the introduction of virtual briefings which started in July. Those interested in non-agency adoption book onto an online briefing session. Sessions are delivered every 5 weeks in the evening. Attendees can learn about the process and can ask questions, leaving them equipped to make an informed decision about proceeding.

#### 3.4.45 Disruptions

There were 8 children who had an adoption disruption (preadoption order) during 2021/22 which relates to 6 placements. This is an increase from last year. The children part of a sibling group was aged 3 and 4, and 2 and 6 at the time of the disruption.

The single children were aged 4,2,3 and 7 at the time of their disruption. 3 of the placements were internal adoptive placements and 3 of the adoptive placements were external.

#### 3.4.46 Quality Assurance

One Adoption West Yorkshire has developed a practice improvement framework and is committed to an improvement culture of learning. The principal sources of feedback are:

- Views of Children and Families, including the views and experiences of children & young adults.
- Performance Data: statistical data that helps us judge the quality and effectiveness of our professional practice.
- Practice Wisdom & Knowledge: practice wisdom of those staff who work with children, young people and families, adoption panels and learning from disruptions.
- The findings of external and internal inspections, audits and evaluations of our practice.

3.4.47 A Quality Assurance mechanism for panel work is used as a matter of course and has found that 98% of prospective adopter reports were of a good or outstanding standard (1% outstanding, 97% good, 2% requiring improvement) this is an improvement on last year's figure of 93%.

3.4.48 In relation to Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) provided by local authority social workers 95% were considered good or outstanding (1% outstanding, 94% good, 4% requiring improvement and 1% not recorded) this is an improvement on last year figure of 85%. OAWY continue to work with the 5 local authorities to raise the quality of CPRs and support them with training and development work. More detailed feedback is provided for each local authority.

3.4.49 There have been 49 responses to the panel survey in 2021/22. Attendees were asked to rate their overall experience of attending adoption panel, the responses were:

- Very good – 42 (85.71%).
- Good – 5 (10.20%).
- Neither good nor poor - 2 (4.08%).

3.4.50 Between 01 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 the Customer Relations Service logged twenty complaints for One Adoption West Yorkshire. The types of complaint were as follows:

Breakdown in adoption process	5
Access to or breach of information	5
Post adoption support	4
Staff attitude	2
Correspondence not answered	2
Contact not adhered to	1
Challenge assessment	1

3.4.51 One complaint was escalated to stage two. This concerned a mother who was unhappy that she was not given access to information about her child's sibling at the time of adoption as it may have changed her decision to adopt them both. A full explanation was given as to the reasons for the decisions made at the time. The customer relations team continue to report a good working relationship with managers from One Adoption West Yorkshire and complaints are responded to in a timely manner.

#### 3.4.52 Case File Audits

41 audits were completed across the service during 2021/22 by Service & Team managers. The result of each audit is recorded as either excellent, good, satisfactory or requires improvement. Any actions identified from the audits are fed-back to the worker to support improvement. Of the 41 audits:

- 5 (12.2%) were excellent.
- 20 (48.78%) were good.
- 11 (26.83%) were satisfactory.
- 5 (12.2%) required improvement.

3.4.53 Joint audits were completed across the region, 7 in total, between a OAWY Service Manager and an LA lead during 2021/22. OAWY recorded the result of each audit as either excellent, good, satisfactory or requires improvement. Of the 7 audits:

- Good – 4 (57.14).
- Satisfactory – 2 (28.57%).
- Requires improvement – 1 (14.29%).

#### 3.4.54 Compliance Audits

Compliance audits are system generated reports that identify missing and/ or incorrectly entered data and were introduced in Q2. Anomalies identified are forwarded to the worker and/ or team manager for investigation with support provided by the performance team. The aim is to reduce the number of anomalies and the time taken to resolve them. Here are the results of the 2021/22 Compliance Audits:

	No. identified	No. (%) resolved
<b>Children</b>	1,166	686 (59%)
<b>Adopters</b>	591	211 (36%)
<b>Adoption support</b>	1,068	97 (9%)

3.4.55 Work is underway to improve the speed in which anomalies are resolved, improvements are expected in 2022/23.

#### 3.4.56 Thematic audits

Two thematic audits have been carried out during 2021/22 to look at specific areas of practice:

3.4.57 Families who left the adoption process following the initial visit - 62 files were audited, 33 (53%) families withdrew, and 29 (47%) families were not recommended. Of the 29 households that were not recommended:

- 5 were enquiring relating to specific children and joint decisions were made with the local authority not to progress to application.
- 22 were given advice and support in relation to returning to the process later and addressing vulnerabilities.
- 2 were informed that the level of risk was such that adoption with OAWY could not be progressed.

3.4.58 Children allocated to family finders post Adoption Order - 43 files were audited looking specifically at date since adoption order, workflows (in particular the existence of a contact workflow) and case records. Of the 43 case files audited:

- 11 were of a good standard.
- 12 files require updates to case records. There was a particular theme in relation to a lack of recording post-match to evidence the transition period and support to the child and family post placement prior to the adoption order.
- 16 files require a contact workflow adding to evidence plans for future contact between the child and their birth family.
- 8 files needed workflows updated, for example supervision workflows closed and trackers closed.
- 15 files were identified as being ready for closure, either immediately or following update, being over 12 months post adoption order.
- 2 files had ongoing adoption support or ASF applications which should be on a new file in the child's adopted name.
- 7 cases were considered closed but have open workflows or allocations which require ending before the case is fully closed.
- 1 case has been closed since the report was run.

#### 3.4.59 Interactive audits

We are planning to introduce interactive audits in 2022/23. The process is currently being developed and a pilot will take place before we go live in Autumn 2022.

### 3.4.60 Voice and Influence of Children, Young People and Adopters

Appendix 1 provides the Voice and Influence of Children, Young People and Adopters report card. This highlights examples of work undertaken to capture the views of service users to help develop and shape the service.

## 3.5 **Continuous Professional and Service Development**

### 3.5.1 Staff development and support

An all-staff event was held in June which provided an update from each service area and featured an introduction to the Cultural Cohesion Quality Mark (CCQM) with related activities. A second event was held in November where the focus was the OAWY 3 Year Plan, wellbeing, key achievements, values and changes. Racism in adoption and a CCQM update also featured.

### 3.5.2 Training

A skills review of all social work staff was completed in 2020/21. The skills review allowed OAWY to develop a plan which prioritised training based upon the needs of the service. Here is an update of the training delivered and scheduled:

- Theraplay Level 1 – 22 workers completed training in February '22.
- Theraplay Group Work – 11 workers completed training in February '22.
- Theraplay Level 2 – 12 workers are booked on for April '22.
- DDP Level 1 – 24 workers are booked on for May and 24 workers for July '22.
- DDP Level 2 – 24 workers are booked on for November '22.

3.5.3 1 member of staff has been trained in therapeutic life story work and 3 more will be training in 2022/23.

3.5.4 All staff in the agency continue to work towards achieving the Cultural Cohesion Quality Mark.

### 3.5.5 Strategic issues and forward plans

OAWY's 3-year plan (Appendix 2) outlines the vision, mission, outcomes, and priorities up to 2024. Activities linked to the delivery of the 3-year plan are tracked through the OAWY Service Improvement Plan (Appendix 3).

## **Corporate Considerations**

### 4.1 **Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 There has been ongoing engagement with staff over the year. Two all staff events have been held, one in June and one in November which covered; strategic and service area updates, wellbeing, Adoption UK delivered a presentation on the Adoption Passport and the Cultural Cohesion Quality Mark (CCQM) team also delivered a presentation. There were facilitated team exercises were with a focus on the CCQM.

4.1.2 Quarterly newsletters are in place to keep staff updated as well as email bulletins if needed. Ongoing engagement with adopters, young people through Adopteens, adopted adults and birth parents is an integral part to co-develop and co deliver the services provided for children and families in the region.

4.1.3 The OAWY annual staff survey was emailed to all staff in Q2; 46% of staff completed it. 85% of staff enjoy working for OAWY (10% indifferent) and 89% of staff are proud to work for OAWY (6% indifferent).

4.1.4 When asked: What do you think we do well? The themes from the responses were:

- Support children and families.
- Work well together – friendly, helpful & supportive.
- Innovative, creative and forward thinking.

4.1.5 When asked: What do you think we could improve on? The themes from the responses were:

Theme	Action
Relevant/ specific training & career development.	<p>Theraplay level 1, Theraplay level 2, Theraplay group work, DDP1, DDP2, Therapeutic life story work and CCQM training are being delivered throughout 2022.</p> <p>OAWY have developed a bespoke CPD internal experience pathway that allows staff to shadow and experience key elements of other roles within the agency.</p>
Communication - SLT/ general updates, new starters.	<p>OAWY's 2022/23 SIP (Appendix 3) has a specific action to 'Identify and implement ways to collaborate across the agency'. This includes seeking and reviewing staff feedback to factor into the internal communication strategy.</p> <p>Email updates to team managers following SLT are now in place. TMs then cascade the information accordingly.</p> <p>Three weekly leadership check-ins started in April 2022. These are for optional online meetings where OAWY HOS provides updates and answers questions/ addresses issues raised by staff. They are intended to improve lines of communication by offering an alternative to email updates and provide an opportunity for staff to ask questions.</p>

## 4.2 Equality and Diversity/ Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 The OAWY Equality Impact assessment was reviewed and updated March 2022 and can be found at Appendix 4. Actions from this are fed into the annual service improvement plan and tracked throughout the year.

## 4.3 Resources and value for money

4.3.1 The final 2021/22 outturn position for OAWY was an overspend of £9.2k which was funded from OAWY's earmarked reserve. The main pressure on the 2021/22 budget was a £162k shortfall of Inter Agency income, a £60k overspend on Inter-Agency placements, and a £32k overspend on commissioned contracts. This was offset by additional income generated through support of the National Grant work. The backdated pay award resulted in an overspend of staffing costs, however an additional partner contribution was made to offset this. A further point to note is that a total of £2.34m of expenditure was attributed to the ASF and this was offset by corresponding ASF income received in year.

## 5. Conclusions

5.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has continued to present challenges for the service and impacted on staff wellbeing. Consultation is ongoing regarding the future balance between home and office working to ensure that we continue to deliver a high-quality adoption service alongside staff having a good work life balance. I am continually impressed by the passion and enthusiasm of the staff team and how they adapt to changes despite the pressures they face. As a result, we have over the last year recruited and assessed a diverse range of adopters and matched them with West Yorkshire children with an adoption plan. We have been proactive and creative in finding families for children, utilising a wide range of resources. We have also provided an ever-increasing range of training and support to our adoptive families. Our service delivery and development continue to be influenced by those impacted directly by adoption, with independent support offered to birth families and adoptees.