

13<sup>th</sup> September 2021

**Agenda Item: 5**

## **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL WORK**

### **CHANGES TO THE STAFFING ESTABLISHMENT AT ADOPTION EAST MIDLANDS**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks approval to establish 2 FTE Social Work Support Officer (Grade 4) posts within Adoption East Midlands and to disestablish the following posts:
  - 0.1 FTE Team Manager (Band D)
  - 0.1 FTE Panel Manager (Band C)
  - 1 FTE Social Worker (Band B).

#### **Information**

2. The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was established in May 2015 by the Department for Education (DfE) because there was recognition that many adoptive families needed some kind of therapeutic support following adoption and too many struggled to get the specialist support that they needed. In October 2016, the demand for funds was over twice the level that the DfE had forecast and despite an increase in funding, it was necessary to introduce a Fair Access Limit of £5,000 per child (and the opportunity to match fund with the local authority). In the year 2017/18, as well as a £5,000 Fair Access Limit for therapy per child, a Fair Access Limit of £2,500 per child to fund a specialist assessment was introduced. The defining aim of the Adoption Support Fund was to provide financial support to local authorities following an Adoption Support Needs Assessment, to commission specialist therapeutic support for families where the local authority did not have the relevant resource or expertise to deliver.
3. Since its inception in 2015, the Adoption Support Fund has fundamentally changed the landscape of Adoption Support and how the needs of adoptive families across our region are supported. Whilst undoubtedly access to the Adoption Support Fund provides valuable therapeutic support, there is now an increasing expectation from families that that this should be the primary source of support to meet their adoption support needs. Increasing knowledge and understanding of the Adoption Support Fund within the adoption community has resulted in many families believing that they are entitled to access the fund, and many have already identified the type of therapy and therapist that they want to work with prior to

contacting the Team. This increase in adopter led demand as well as their increasingly established relationships with and reliance on therapy providers, has resulted in adoption support social workers taking on an increasing role as 'commissioner' in the eyes of adoptive families as well as a provider of support themselves.

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>Applications</b>	<b>Total £</b>
<b>2015/16</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>629,000</b>
<b>2016/17</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>1,009,000</b>
<b>2017/18</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>849,000</b>
<b>2018/19</b>	<b>547</b>	<b>1,424,000</b>
<b>2019/20</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>1,297,645</b>
<b>2020/21</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>1,404,507</b>
<b>2021/22 (Quarter 1)</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>549,346</b>
	<b>748 – est FYE*</b>	<b>2,197,384 – est FYE*</b>

\* estimate for financial year end

4. The growth in applications to the Fund, as well as the complexity involved in the application process and the increasing administrative demands of the application process, are having a significant impact on the service from a resource, time and cost perspective, which is unlikely to have been anticipated at the time of its launch. Resource diverted into facilitating and administering the Adoption Support Fund funded work is increasing and is anticipated to continue to increase as more families within the region are aware of and wanting to access the Fund for specialist therapeutic interventions alongside the direct support work they receive from the social work team.
5. In addition, re-commissioning is becoming more the norm for families (successive applications to the Fund over a period of time), and there is a significant growth in families who are pre adoption order also now accessing specialist therapeutic support via the Fund, which, whilst positive as a form of early intervention, creates additional work for the post order team which has sole responsibility for administering the Fund applications.
6. As the volume of commissioning work and therefore related administrative tasks and processes increases, the turnaround time for completion of applications to the Fund is increasing which directly impacts on the timeliness of support provided for all families who make contact with the service, whether this be for a commissioned service or for social work support. Ultimately this will go on to have an impact on the overall satisfaction of adoptive families who are wanting / needing to access a service from Adoption East Midlands and indeed feedback from adopters both locally and nationally is often that they have to wait too long to access a service from adoption support teams which inevitably heightens their feelings of being 'in crisis'.
7. As well as the above costs, in order to remain compliant with procurement rules, work is currently being undertaken to enable the future tendering for therapeutic work to come through ProContract, the Council's Tendering and Contracts system. Set up tasks are

currently underway with the new process going live from September 2021. Whilst there are significant benefits to the service in commissioning in this way (increased pool of providers, quality assurance, best value, improved access to support), it will inevitably add additional administrative process to the task which will need to be resourced.

8. Whilst providing valuable additional support to vulnerable adoptive families and children across the region, the ongoing administration of the Adoption Support Fund is resulting in escalating direct and indirect costs to Adoption East Midlands. In order to meet these costs, the overall adoption support service provided by Adoption East Midlands is being compromised as expensive skilled resources are diverted into largely administrative tasks away from client facing direct social work. This is resulting in a more dissatisfied workforce and a compromised wider support offer from Adoption East Midlands as resource is used to administer the Adoption Support Fund rather than the development and growth of our universal support offer within the region.

### **Other Options Considered**

9. Since Adoption East Midlands went live in 2019, significant work has been undertaken to identify solutions to the increasing challenge of resourcing the Adoption Support Fund commissioning task
  - a comprehensive LEAN review of the commissioning process has been undertaken to streamline tasks and to identify whether tasks require a qualified social worker input or whether they are largely administrative / business support tasks
  - tasks have been delegated where appropriate to Business Support colleagues and Social Work Support Officers in an attempt to increase social workers' time for direct work
  - a new Pathway to Support has been established and launched which provides a graduated response to families seeking support for their identified adoption support needs. As part of this service / support offer, Adoption East Midlands has established a comprehensive programme of universal support services and access to consultation which provide options for early intervention support, hopefully reducing the need for long term therapy for many children and families and builds the confidence of adoptive families in Adoption East Midlands.

### **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

10. Despite making significant changes to the service, the continued impact of the Adoption Support Fund commissioning process on current resource within the Team can no longer be sustained and this is only anticipated to increase.
11. As well as supporting the administrative needs associated with the Adoption Support Fund commissioning process, the additional resource would be utilised proactively (alongside current Social Work Support Officer resource) to support the new Universal Support offer to families within the Adoption East Midlands region, including being frontline support for families accessing our Information Line. The benefits that this will realise will include a more timely and robust social work support offer to regional adoptive families when they need it with an increased focus on early intervention and support.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

12. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **Financial Implications**

13. The establishment of 2 FTE Social Work Support Officer (Grade 4) posts will cost £56,934 and this can be fully contained in the current Adoption East Midlands staffing budget by disestablishing the following posts:
- 0.1 FTE Team Manager (Band D)
  - 0.1 FTE Panel Manager (Band C)
  - 1 FTE Social Worker (Band B).

## **Human Resources Implications**

14. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. The new posts will be appointed to in line with the vacancy control and recruitment procedures.

## **Smarter Working Implications**

15. These additional posts will be based within Nottinghamshire, and part of the overall service adhering to smarter working habits.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1) That the following changes to the Adoption East Midlands establishment be approved:
- disestablishment of 0.1 FTE Team Manager (Band D) post
  - disestablishment of 0.1 FTE Panel Manager (Band C) post
  - disestablishment of 1 FTE Social Worker (Band B) post
  - establishment of 2 FTE Social Work Support Officer (Grade 4) posts.

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### **Constitutional Comments (AK 18/08/21)**

16. This report falls within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee under its terms of reference.

### **Financial Comments (JG 19/08/21)**

17. The establishment of 2 FTE Social Work Support Officer posts will cost £56,934 and will be funded through the disestablishment of 1 FTE Social Worker post, 0.1 FTE Team Manager post and 0.1 FTE Panel Manager post. The current Adoption East Midlands staffing budget is £3,406,692.

### **HR Comments (BC 12/08/21)**

18. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. The new posts will be appointed to in line with the vacancy control and recruitment procedures.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.

### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

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