Addendum to the Adoption Service Annual Report 2018/19

Response to Issues Raised at Scrutiny Committee Meeting February 2019 in Relation to Sheffield City Council Adoption Service

1. The following sets out a response as at the end of September 2019 to the requests made at the Scrutiny Committee meeting in February 2019 about the Council's Adoption Service.

2. The requests made by the Scrutiny Committee with a response are as follows:

(*i*) *Provide a briefing note for the Committee on the status of the Regional Adoption Agency and include progress reports within the regular Committee reports on the Recovery and Improvement Plan;*

Response:

The Government has set a requirement that all adoption services in the country become part of a regional adoption agency by 2020. Many areas nationwide have already established regional agencies, although there are still a number of places, including South Yorkshire, where they are not in place. During 2019 development work has re-commenced on establishing a South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). This work is being led by Doncaster Children's Services on behalf of the Directors of Children's Services for the four South Yorkshire local Authorities. Doncaster has employed a project manager to lead the development work and he is working with the four Heads of Service for Adoption in the four authorities to establish a RAA by April 2020.

A draft business case has been completed on establishing the RAA and this will be considered at a meeting of the four Directors of Children's Services on 4th October 2019. Sheffield's position in the development work has been that moving to a RAA must be cost neutral, must not involve our staff moving to the RAA organisation under TUPE legislation, and that the new service improves outcomes for children and adoptive families.

The business case currently being considered proposes that staff are seconded into the RAA so that our adoption staff working for the RAA will remain employed by Sheffield City Council on the same terms and conditions, although they will be managed by the RAA Head of Service.

Once the four Directors of Children's Services have agreed a final proposal for the RAA it will need to be considered and approved through the usual political process in each of the four local authorities.

(ii) reconsider publicity and communications of the Adoption Support Fund, via the website and other means;

Response:

We have updated our website and this now includes a link to information about the Adoption Support Fund. We have also updated our adoption support leaflet with information about the Adoption Support Fund and include this in our information to adopters who are going through assessment. Adopters are reminded of the support available throughout the process. Our adoption newsletter is used to advertise training and support group meetings as well as direct information to adopters on our mailing list.

We have extended our adoption social worker duty hours to offer an all-day service and have a single point of contact so if people wish to enquire about the Adoption Support Fund, or any other support then they can use this option too.

(iii) circulate information on national benchmarks for adoptions;

Response:

We will be circulating information about benchmarks and targets in adoption to adopters and applicant adopters systematically via our information material, training and adopter newsletters

The key national benchmarks/performance targets about adoption are around the percentage of children adopted from care and the timeliness with which children are placed for adoption.

On these two measures Sheffield's Adoption Service performed relatively well in 2018/19. Firstly, we secured adoption from care for 40 children in 2018/19. This equates to 15% of the children who left care in 2018/18 leaving via adoption. This compares well to the latest national average on this measure of 13.7%

On the timeliness measure, on average for the 40 children adopted in 2018/19, we moved the children on their journey from admission to care to 'placed for adoption' in 351 days. This is 75 days quicker than the Government target for this measure. So far this year (2019-20), we continue to perform better than the national target.

There are no formal bench marks nationally on adoption support. We have and are developing performance measures for our adoption support service and these developments are listed below under section iv.

One indicator of how adoptive families progress post adoption, and related to the support that they may or may not get, is the number of adoption disruptions, i.e. those situations where there is family breakdown to such an extent that the adopted

child has to move from the family back into local authority care. It is very difficult to quantify the numbers of adoption disruptions post adoption nationally and locally as families sometimes move away from the local area and are not required to inform the local authority from which they adopted a child if it disrupts.

Research in 2014 by the University of Bristol (Julie Selwyn) found that there was a 3.2% disruption rate in adoptions post Adoption Order and that most of these happened in the child's teenage years. This was the biggest research study into adoption disruption ever with 37,000 adoptions over 12 years analysed.

We are aware of only one post adoption disruption in 2018/19 of a Sheffield child.

(iv)report back to the Committee in three months regarding formal feedback mechanisms post-adoption, including performance indicators.

Response:

We have recently established a number of performance and evaluation measures/systems in relation to adoption support, as follows:

The number of adoption support cases unallocated - all cases are currently allocated to a named worker

The timeliness of allocation – all adoption support assessments in the last 6 months have been allocated within our target 5 working days

The timeliness of adoption support assessments. There is no guidance set around how quickly an adoption support assessment is completed. However we have set a target equal to that for completing child in need assessments which is 45 days. For adoption support assessments completed in the past 6 months only just over 50% have been completed in the 45 day target. We are working hard to improve this. The development of the Liquid Logic Pathway for adoption support will make this easier to measure.

We have recently reviewed our systems for evaluating the quality and impact of adoption support assessments and services. Following completion of all assessments, an electronic alert is sent to the social worker to send an evaluation feedback form to the adopter asking their opinion on the worker and the way in which the assessment was carried out. We have started to receive some of these back and will be systematically evaluating what the feedback tells us and using it to develop the service.

We have been systematically surveying adopters who have received therapeutic support via the Adoption Support Fund to ascertain the views of its impact and effectiveness. To date 22 families have responded. Of those 15 rated the service

received as good (4) or excellent (11). (the remaining 7 gave varying narrative comments in their response but did not answer the grading question)

We encourage those who attend theraplay sessions or any of our support groups to complete feedback forms. Feedback from those who have completed feedback forms about theraplay have been very positive about its quality and impact. However all the questions are free text questions. We will be revising this and all other feedback forms to include scaling questions so it is possible to aggregate and collate the feedback into meaningful management information.

We use the Adopter Voice meetings to get input into service developments and adopters experiences of using a particular service. The next meeting is on 09/10/2019, when the AD for Provider Services is attending to answer questions and respond to matters raised by adopters. The Adoption UK co-ordinator also provides advice and feedback to the service based on both regional and national feedback. This has impacted upon our core offer to our adopters in terms of the range of support groups we offer. We have developed our post approval training to include workshops on contact, life story work and therapeutic parenting. Adopters have told the service for some time that they would like a Peer Mentoring Scheme. Sheffield, along with the other South Yorkshire local authorities is exploring commissioning a Peer Mentoring Scheme from Adoption UK.

In the recent Ofsted inspection of Sheffield's Children's Services, Ofsted reported positively about the Adoption Service, including our adoption support offer, as follows:

'Systems, processes and procedures for recruiting and supporting adopters are effective. The service has a strong programme of targeted recruitment to increase placement options for those children who wait longer for a new home. Adoption assessments are thorough, with good analysis. Adoption panels execute their functions well and provide good scrutiny of applicants' motives to adopt. Strong quality assurance systems improve the quality of reports, ensuring that a clear focus on improvement is maintained. Adoption support plans are clear, and adopters say that they receive good-quality social work support. There is a range of support services for children and adopters, who are at various stages of their adoption journey. Adopters speak positively about the support they receive. The service is using the Adoption Support Fund effectively to buy packages of therapeutic support and training and put them to goof effect.'

Next Steps

The performance measures on children adopted and timeliness are monitored each month at the Directors Performance Clinic. We plan to include indicators around adoption support performance into the Directors Performance Clinic, from October, to ensure senior management oversight and to drive improvements.

Paul Dempsey

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