

# **North Somerset Council**

## **Report to the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of Meeting: 19<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

**Subject of Report: Annual Report of Adoption West 2022/23**

**Town or Parish: All**

**Officer/Member Presenting: Carolyn Fair, Interim Director Children's Services**

**Key Decision: No**

**Reason: The Council has entered into a contract with Adoption West and this is a report outlining their activity during 2022/23.**

### **Recommendations**

That Members note the report and advise officers of any areas about which they would like further information.

#### **1. Summary of Report**

Adoption West is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) commissioned by Bath and North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, Gloucestershire County Council, North Somerset Council, South Gloucestershire Council and Wiltshire Council. The agency is a local authority company wholly owned by the aforementioned local authorities. As a separate legal entity from the local authorities Adoption West is registered with Ofsted as a Voluntary Adoption Agency.

#### **2. Policy**

A council which empowers and cares about people

#### **3. Details**

The report comes at the end of Adoption West's fourth year of operating as a Regional Adoption Agency. Adoption West is now an established agency with a clear identity across the region. The service has continued to respond to growing support needs alongside a continued focus on the key priorities of improving the timeliness for children by recruiting sufficient adopters who are prepared and understand the needs of the children. There remain challenges in relation to improving and providing a more consistent adoption support offer. The focus on improving the Adoption Support offer has been boosted by increased investment and a new structure that enable the continued development of in-house therapeutic services. The agency remains committed to improving the support available to children, adopters and birth families. Over the course of 2022/23 there were two ILACS, and both inspections noted the strength of the work of Adoption West.

As an adoption agency that is funded by public finances to provide statutory adoption services it is crucial that there is effective scrutiny of Adoption West. The Joint Scrutiny Panel has been established to provide this function. The panel meets quarterly and each meeting includes a briefing about adoption issues. In this period adopters have met with councillors and shared their experience of support via the Adoption Support Fund and being an Early Permanence carer. Joint Scrutiny Panel comprises elected Members from each of the local authorities: North Somerset's representative is now Cllr Tristram.

Each of the priorities identified for the coming year is subject to a number of specific actions to ensure the priority is delivered:

- To improve timeliness of Stage 1 and Stage 2 assessments 29
- Ensure that placements are timely either through placing children as soon as they are subject to a Placement Order or through an early placement scheme, in order to promote positive attachment - improved children's performance data across the region
- To increase the number of children placed in Early Permanence placements
- To obtain the CORAM BAAF EP Quality Mark
- The long term needs of adopted children in the region to be understood and reflected in a regional adoption support offer
- Promoting children's positive identity, so that they have a positive self-view, emotional resilience and understanding of their background
- Adopted adults and birth relatives are assisted to obtain information in relation to adoption
- To improve the consistency of the adoption support offer.

#### **4. Consultation**

In compiling the report Adoption West have included feedback from staff and adopters.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

None

#### **Costs**

None

#### **Funding**

None

#### **6. Legal Powers and Implications**

N/A

#### **7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

Adoption West staff are based in three hubs, each within a local authority office building. They undertake significant amounts of mileage through the use of public transport or pool/lease cars wherever possible. They have moved to a hybrid way of working but face to face visits to adopters are critical to ensure they are supported and children are seen.

#### **8. Risk Management**

Adoption West maintain a Risk Register which is scrutinised by the Board of Directors.

#### **9. Equality Implications**

Not as part of producing this annual report.

#### **10. Corporate Implications**

None.

## **11. Options Considered**

N/A

### **Author:**

Carolyn Fair, Interim Director Childrens Services

### **Appendices:**

Annual Report from Adoption West 2022/23

### **Background Papers:**

None.