

BRIEFING	TO:	Improving Lives Select Commission
	DATE:	21 September 2021
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	TITLE:	One Adoption South Yorkshire – Impact Report

1. Background

- 1.1 From January 2021 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council’s Adoption team joined our three neighbouring authorities to form One Adoption South Yorkshire, which is a regional adoption agency. Whilst the journey to become a regional adoption agency had been developing over the previous years, a huge amount of work took place in 2020 to finalise this plan and set a date to officially merge. One Adoption South Yorkshire went live on 1 January 2021 and the previous RMBC Adoption Agency ceased. This report highlights the key areas of work undertaken and provide an overview of the impact over first six months of operations.
- 1.2 One Adoption South Yorkshire is a ‘partnership’ model Regional Adoption Agency. The main difference with the partnership model to other models is that other than the ‘Hub’ staff, practitioners remain employed by their original Local Authority. This allows staff to retain their terms and conditions, and for each authority to gain the benefits and efficiencies of pooled resources in order to maximize outcomes for children and adopters. Nationwide there are now 31 Regional Adoption Agencies in England rather than the 180 original adoption agencies and only five or six local authorities remain unaligned, all of these authorities have plans to join a Regional Adoption Agency in the not-too-distant future.
- 1.3 For One Adoption South Yorkshire Doncaster Children’s Services Trust (DCST) is the host agency. There is a very small ‘Hub’ team comprising the Head of Service, a full-time Business Support Officer and a planned, half-time Data and Performance Analyst. The Business Support post has just been appointed to and the Performance Analyst post is expected to be filled by August 21. As host agency DCST is responsible for employing the Hub staff and supporting the management of those aspects of the budget which are held centrally.
- 1.4 Each local authority has also made a ‘contribution in kind’ for support services such as Human Resources, Finance, Communications, Business Intelligence and Commissioning.
- 1.5 At National level the Regional Adoption Agencies are well supported with regular leadership meetings and developmental opportunities for practitioners and adopters.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 Below is an overview of the main targets linked to One Adoption South Yorkshire for the first 12 months.

2.2 **Recruitment of Adopters**
One of the key targets within One Adoption South Yorkshire is to recruit 92 adopters within a 12-month period. Data has been gathered to offer a comparison over the previous years across each of the 4 local authorities. The number of adopters approved in a 12-month period was 94, so it is likely that this key target will be met.

2.3 **Progress in the first 6 months**
Since January 2021 current data shows that across the Regional Adoption Agency 40 adopters have been approved within the first 6 months; 13 of those approvals had been completed by RMBC.

2.4 **Number of children placed for adoption**
Previous data has also suggested that across South Yorkshire, there is an expectation that 154 children would be placed for adoption within a 12-month period. When compared to the data from the previous year only 116 children were placed for adoption.

2.5 **Progress in the first 6 months**
Since January 2021 78 children have been placed for adoption across One Adoption South Yorkshire, which would indicate that if things continue along this trajectory, we are likely to meet the 12-month target.

2.6 **Reduction on inter-agency placements**
A further key area for One Adoption South Yorkshire is the number of children placed within South Yorkshire. The overall aim is to try and keep children local and be less reliant on inter-agency placements which come at a cost. There are several positive factors to placing children within our in-house adopters, the main reason being that as a Regional Adoption Agency we know our adopters and are therefore much more likely to find suitable matches between adopters and children. Since One Adoption South Yorkshire became live, a monthly matching meeting takes place that has already proven successful in enabling the early identification of potential links across the four authorities.

2.7 **Progress in the first 6 months**
Whilst it is too early at this stage to be able to comment on the exact data related to the reduction of inter-agency placements and cost within across the whole One Adoption South Yorkshire, we can comment on the impact this has already had on Rotherham alone.

2.8 Looking at the Rotherham data from January to June 2020 seven interagency placements were made. If we compare this to January to June 2021 only three interagency placements have been made so far.

2.9 In total, in 2020, 16 interagency placements were purchased by RMBC, so it is positive to see that within the first 6 months of Rotherham joining the Regional Adoption Agency there have only been three of this type of placement, and while this number may increase, the trajectory to be below 2020 numbers is positive.

2.10 **Improving post adoption support**
A key area of the work undertaken within One Adoption South Yorkshire is the offer of support post adoption. This has been an area of focus during the first 6 months as it was clear from the outset that each authority had a different resource. Within

2.11

Rotherham, there was one post adoption support worker who would provide support related to applications for therapy via the Adoption Support Fund, alongside practical support/advice to carers who may have been experiencing some challenges. Rotherham were aware that compared to the neighbouring authorities, this was a much smaller resource as we had a different approach.

Progress in the first 6 months

Over the past 6 months Lindsey Knight, Service Manager for Rotherham and One Adoption South Yorkshire has worked closely with team managers and the head of service for the Regional Adoption Agency to look at ways in which Rotherham's offer could be increased while using the existing staffing establishment costs. As a result, two posts with a specific focus on Post adoption support have been developed:

- It was agreed that following one member of staff retiring, this post would change and create a part time post specifically for post adoption support.
- In addition to this, a new letter-box coordinator has been appointed full time and their role has been redefined to include post adoption support.

2.12

One Adoption South Yorkshire is still currently developing the way the four services come together to offer a more uniformed approach to post adoption support. The aim is to ensure that the service maximise the positive impact and outcomes linked to adoption and that One Adoption South Yorkshire becomes more attractive to potential adopters as we build a reputation for a focus on post adoption support. The impact of this on outcomes will be clearer over the next 6 to 12 months.

3. Finance

3.1

As outlined in Section 1, One Adoption South Yorkshire now operates on a pooled budget basis following its formation on 1 January 2021. Following its implementation some elements are now managed centrally, such as contracts which have been novated and aggregated under One Adoption South Yorkshire, Interagency Placements and the Adoption Support Fund.

3.2

The financial position as at the end of July is as follows:

ONE ADOPTION - Financial forecast for 2021/22 as at July 2021

	2021/22 Adoption Projection - July 2021					
	Rotherham	Barnsley	Doncaster	Sheffield	Central Costs	TOTAL
ONE ADOPTION - Financial forecast at July 2021	£	£	£	£	£	£
Total Budget	772,444	571,203	813,750	1,162,681	1,644,094	4,964,172
TOTAL - projection July 2021	771,082	564,278	816,567	1,182,958	1,410,865	4,745,750
(Deficit +)/Surplus (-)	- 1,362	- 6,925	2,817	20,277	- 233,229	- 218,422

Breakdown of Central Costs

	Budget	Projection	Variance
Central Costs	£	£	£
Adoption Service	110,000	111,517	1,517
Contracts & Marketing	214,003	214,003	0
Interagency	1,320,091	1,085,345	- 234,746
Subtotal Central Cost Service (Deficit +)/Surplus (-)	1,644,094	1,410,865	- 233,229

3.3

The above position is based on the following adoption projections as of June

Projected Number of Children Placed through Adoption

	Projection at June
	No:
Inter Agency	50
In house recruitment	70
Total No: children placed	120
Sold Placements	10

4. Key Actions and Relevant Timelines

- 4.1 Recruiting a more diverse range of adopters to meet the specific needs of many of the children we are family-finding for. There are multi-ethnic and multi-cultural communities in South Yorkshire and as a Regional Adoption Agency we need to be promoting ourselves, making ourselves more approachable if that is the issue and finding the right families for children
- 4.2 Post Adoption Support – the quality of post adoption support is key to adopters having confidence to adopt with One Adoption South Yorkshire in the first place and key to keeping families together. Now each area team has its own approach to settling in grants, allowances, training and initial support. One Adoption South Yorkshire plan to come together with a consistent offer right across the Regional Adoption Agency.
- 4.3 Support for birth parents and more direct approaches to post adoption contact. At the moment most arrangements for post adoption contact are via the letter-box scheme but with the advent of social networking and the increased use of Early Permanence Placements where adopters have more contact with birth parents we need to be considering and refining our approach.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 That the Improving Lives Select Commission notes the impact of One Adoption South Yorkshire since it became a live regional adoption agency in January 2021.