

## Update of the Adoption Support Fund

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### Purpose of this report

1. To update the Corporate Parenting Panel on the Department for Education Adoption Support Fund

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to:

1. Note the content of the report
2. Comment on the report

### Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

2. This item is not planned to go to Overview and Scrutiny as the report is for the Corporate Parenting Panel only.

### Issues

3. A Report about the use of Adoption Support Fund was presented to Corporate Parenting Panel on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2017. This report provides an update from the period 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017 to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

4. The Adoption Support Fund has remained available throughout this year to provide therapeutic support and intervention for adopted children and their family. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 the Department for Education extended the criteria for applications to include Inter-country Adoptions (once the placement has been made and the child is in England) and for Special Guardians who care for children who were previously looked after.
5. In October 2016, following a budget review of the fund the Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families advised of changes to the funds available for families. The letter advised that in 2015/16 the £19 million pound fund was accessed by 3500, families. In 2016/17 the available funding was increased to £21 million and a further £2 million increase was introduced in October 2016. However demand for support was twice the level forecast and in October 2016 the fund had already been accessed by more families than the total in the previous year.
6. Following discussions with the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Adoption Leadership Board, an interim measure was introduced with immediate effect. This measure was the introduction of a £5000.00 'Fair Access Limit' which meant a maximum amount of funding was available per child for the remainder of the year.
7. The review did recognise that a small number of children may require an exemption to the Fair Access Limit and advised that funding will be available for such children in exceptional circumstances. In such cases funding would be available but only where the Local Authority agrees to 'match' funding. An example would be an application for £14,000.00 which would result in the Adoption Support Fund providing the 'Fair Access limit' funding of £5000,00, and if the Local Authority agree to match-fund, a further £4500,00 Adoption Support Fund 'top up' and £4500,00 from the Local Authority.
8. On 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2017 the Minister of State for Children and Families wrote to Local Authorities advising that the ASF has been a success in enabling 25,500 children receive therapeutic support since its Launch in May 2015 (this included adoptive and Special Guardianship families).
9. Demand for the fund continues to grow and is almost three times the level it was in 2015-16. In recognition of the rising demand an additional £1m will be made available this year, bringing spend on the Fund to £29m this year. Whilst funding has increased, and will continue to do so until the end of March 2020, it remains necessary to keep the fair access limits in place confirming that the existing fair access limits – up to £2,500 for specialist assessments and up to £5,000 for therapy - will remain in place for the next two financial years.

10. The DfE evaluate the fund efficiency and is commissioning evaluation through to the end of this parliament which will be closely aligned with the evaluation of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) programme.

11. The scope for access to the fund has remained unchanged

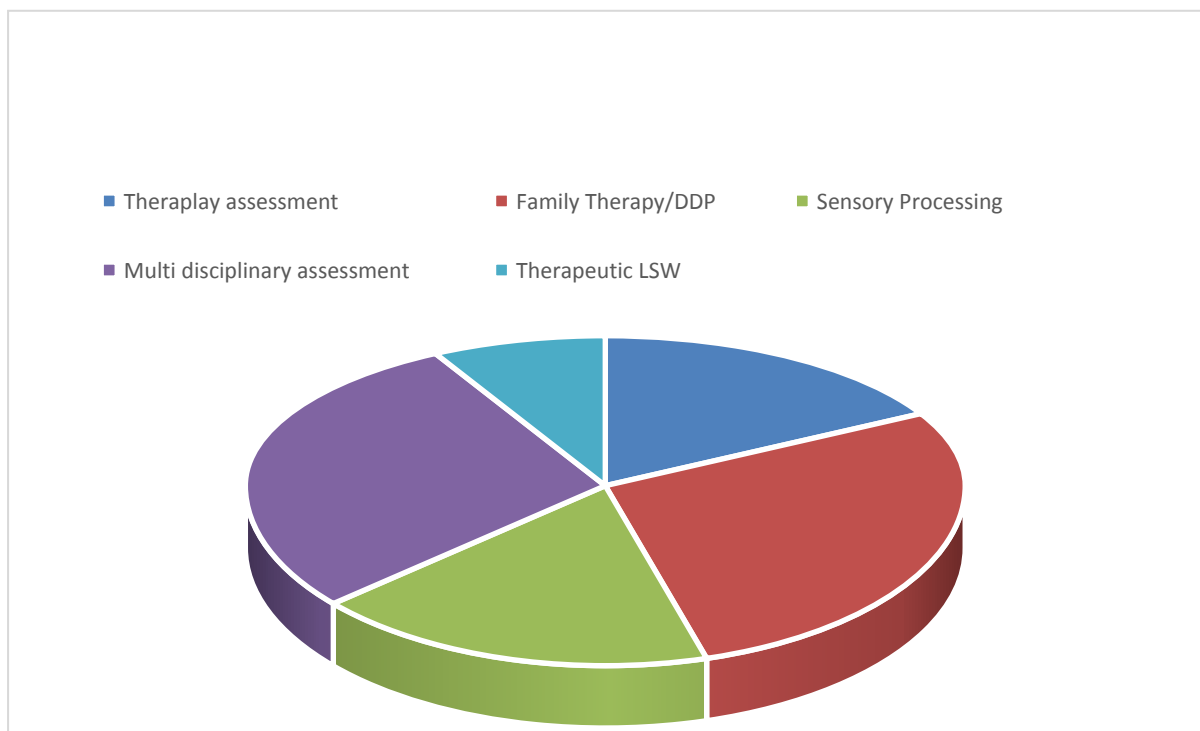
### Central Bedfordshire Update

12. 5 applications for funding for therapeutic intervention for Special Guardianship have been submitted and agreed providing a total of £6610.00 to date.

13. Central Bedfordshire Adoption Agency has received £241,896.54 from the fund since it began. A total of 49 applications have been submitted and agreed with the average funding request being £4875.94.

14. From 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017 to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2017 11 applications have been submitted and agreed providing a total of £52,055.00 to access therapeutic support for 15 children. The Local Authority matched funding contribution has been £2937.14 to date.

15. The type of therapeutic support accessed for the 11 applications is shown below:



16. Assessments to identify therapeutic support and Family therapy have been the primary reason to apply to the fund in this reporting period.

17. Feedback from adoptive families who have accessed support via the fund include:

## **PARENT 1:**

*“Through the Adoption Support Fund, my adopted son and I are currently receiving two courses of therapy sessions. Both are proving to be an invaluable support, as we're experiencing some very challenging issues due to my son's complex birth family situation and his making sense of how this is affecting our everyday lives.*

*These sessions have given me strength, stability and some self confidence, all of which were lacking and are obviously vital in terms of parenting an adopted child.*

*The sessions my son has with a psychologist, have had significant, positive impact on both my son and myself. Without these, we would still be struggling to control his anger and high levels of anxiety. Her knowledge of autism and the difficulties experienced because of it, is outstanding. Her level of empathy and engagement with my son has enabled him to open up to her, giving us both a deeper level of understanding of how he sees the world and, in return, enabling us to put coping strategies into place.*

*Having been an adoptive parent for 11 years, the last 6 of which have been on my own, it has stretched me beyond anything I thought humanly possible.*

*I am deeply grateful for the support which has been funded through the Adoption Support Fund and hope that other families too have experienced the difference it is making to our lives”.*

## **PARENT 2:**

*“CAMH and the therapy support has been very useful for both ourselves, the school and our child. The assessment and feedback from the therapy provider was very good and confirmed quite a bit whilst also making us think about how we deal/ interact with our child. We hope that the analysis from will give us more tools to continue the work that she started.*

*Thanks for all you help and support in enabling this support”.*

## **Parent 3:**

*“I have found the Adoption Support Fund brilliant in finally having support for my daughter's needs. After many years of trying to find help, we finally have found a solution. So a big thank you for this funding”*

18. The Council has a small cohort of children accessing adoption support aged 12yrs + who have complex needs due to multiple diagnosis of autism and/or ADHD, foetal Alcohol syndrome, education needs requiring support from an Education Health Care Plan and anxiety. Children with such difficulties often face exclusion from school and parent to child violence can occur within the family home if the parent

struggles to understand and respond to the child's needs resulting in a risk of family breakdown. Due to their multiple needs such children are unable to access universal services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services or Children with Disability services as they often do not meet the eligibility criteria or the complexity of their needs means that the service is unable to be accessed. For the children identified, applications to the fund have assisted to commission a Child and Adolescent Family Psychiatrist who specialises in children with a wide range of mental health, social and educational difficulties to provide an assessment of need and recommend the best type of therapy to support the child and family. This is obtained on a spot purchase basis by accessing the fund. This input has significantly reduced the risk of a family breakdown and identified the 'best fit' therapeutic service and support to improve family life. However such children often require long term intervention to maintain family life.

19. The provision of regular ongoing respite often features within these cases and is either accessed through the adoptive parents support network or via local authority services such as fostering.

#### **Options for consideration**

20. None

#### **Reason/s for decision**

21. Not applicable

#### **Reason for urgency**

22. Not applicable

#### **Council Priorities**

23. Making effective use of the Adoption Support Fund ensures that the Council is able to provide a responsive service that protects the vulnerable and improves the child's wellbeing and quality of family life.

#### **Corporate Implications**

24. None

#### **Legal Implications**

25. None

#### **Financial and Risk Implications**

26. The Adoption Support Fund has assisted the local authority to provide therapeutic support to families and children in need where previously

this provision was unavailable unless accessed via universal services or funded solely by the Local Authority. As such access to such services was often limited.

27. If children and families do not receive the therapeutic support they need, they are more likely to experience an adoption breakdown with the child or children returning to care at significant expense to local authorities.
28. To date the average application amount made to the fund has been below the Fair Access Limit. However there is a future financial risk with the requirement of 'match funding' beyond the FAL for families with a higher level of need and therefore a higher level of risk of family breakdown if therapeutic support is not provided.
29. An example of high cost applications prior to the introduction of the Fair Access Limit have included amounts of £14,000.00, £8, 200, .00 and £34,650.00.

### **Equalities Implications**

30. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Accessing the Adoption Support Fund enables Central Bedfordshire Council to achieve better outcomes for children and young people with complex needs due to multiple diagnosis of autism, ADHD, foetal Alcohol syndrome, education needs requiring support from a EHCP and anxiety

### **Implications for Work Programming**

31. Not applicable

### **Conclusion and next Steps**

32. Access to the Adoption Support Fund has provided opportunity to provide families with a therapeutic service to achieve the following outcomes:
  - *Improved confidence and ability to enjoy a positive family life and social relationships*
  - *Improved emotional regulation and self esteem*
  - *Improved behaviour management*
  - *Improved relationships with family and friends*

This has assisted to reduce the risk of family breakdown resulting in the child/ren returning to care impacting on a child's sense of belonging, identity, self-esteem and self-worth and mental and emotional wellbeing.

33. Information about the Adoption Support Fund is provided to all those who enquire or request an adoption support assessment. Information can also be accessed on the Local Authority website to ensure fair access for all and maximise the use of the fund to support families and improve family life.
34. At present the adoption service carefully considers families needs and how the fund can be accessed to achieve maximum efficiency of fund and therapy to improve family life. The majority of enquiries for support can be dealt with by providing information and advice including signposting to universal services and accessing advice from the virtual school service. However, for those who require a higher level of input the service completes an assessment to identify the need. If therapeutic intervention is recommended an appropriate provider is identified and an application to the fund is completed with consultation and agreement with parents and child, where appropriate.
35. The Regional Adoption Agency remains in the design and development stage with Central Bedfordshire now being the lead Local Authority. The RAA partnership is aiming to develop an adoption support service able to offer a high level of adoption support to all that is sustainable beyond the fund to reduce the financial risk to the Local authority and increase the local offer to adoptive families.
36. In the meantime the service continues to access the CAMH consultation service available and is working in partnership with other Local Authorities within the RAA, Early Help and Adoption UK to provide services such as Therapeutic parenting programmes focussing on parenting Teens.
37. Social workers within the service are undertaking training in Theraplay so this attachment based intervention can be provided to prepare children for adoption with the support transferring and continuing into their adoptive placement.

## **Appendices**

38. None

## **Background Papers**

39. None