

Decision Maker: Executive
For Pre-Decision Scrutiny by the Care Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 2 October 2014

Date: 15 October 2014

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Non-Key

Title: **ADOPTION GRANT DRAWDOWN**

Contact Officer: Ian Leadbetter, Head of Social Care, Care and Resources
E-mail: ian.leadbetter@bromley.gov.uk
Kay Weiss, Assistant Director Safeguarding and Social Care
E-mail: kay.weiss@bromley.gov.uk

Chief Officer: Executive Director of Education, Care & Health Services

Ward: (All Wards);

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 In January 2013, the department of education announced grant funding to local authorities to support adoption reform activity. The grant was divided into two parts. Part A, totalling £547,752 is non-ring fenced and is to support whole system reform to ensure that children are adopted without delay. Part B, totalling £149,840 was ring-fenced to the recruitment and approval of adopters
 - 1.2 The Executive of 12 June 2013 approved the proposals for spend and drawdown of Part B of the grant totalling £149,840. On the 11 September the Executive agreed a drawdown of £140,000 from part A (£547,752) of the grant. The executive also agreed to receive a further report seeking approval for further drawdowns at a later date.
 - 1.3 An additional non-ring fenced grant of £273,154 was received for 2014/15
 - 1.4 This paper seeks approval for a further drawdown of £345,700 in 2014/15 and £272,400 in 2015/16
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2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 **The Care Services PDS is asked to note and comment on the proposals for the request for the drawdown of the adoption reform grant as detailed**
- 2.2 **The Executive are asked to approve the proposals for the drawdown of the non-ring fenced adoption reform grant totalling £618,100 for 2014/15 and 2015/16.**

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy
 2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal::
 2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Adoption Service/833110
 4. Total current budget for this head: £1,048,670
 5. Source of funding: Grant
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Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 15
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
-

Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement
 2. Call-in: Applicable:
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): N/A
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

3.1 In January 2013, the Department for Education announced funding to support adoption reform. This grant is paid in two parts; Part A is non-ring fenced and was designed to support 'whole system' reform to ensure that children are identified and adopted without delay. Part B of the grant is ring fenced to be used specifically for the recruitment and assessment of adopters.

3.2 After considering a report which outlined spend against Part B of the grant, Executive approved the proposals and draw down of £149,840 (total amount of part B of the grant allocation) from central contingency. Executive may recall that the Council was required to report expenditure against activity against Part B of the grant to the department of education as part of the grant conditions.

3.3 Following a review of the requirements to improve adoption performance and our capacity to respond, we developed a set of objectives to underpin the use of the grant, namely:

- Further increase the number of London Borough of Bromley looked after children being placed for adoption;
- Speed up care planning and adoption timescales to ensure children are moved out of foster care and into adoptive homes in the shortest possible time;
- Achieve compliance with the duties, regulations and expectations of central government and its regulators;
- Help to meet the requirement to complete care proceedings within six months;
- Pay for, in the short term, new financial pressures created as a consequence of having to undertake more connected person assessments, more adoption medicals, and more family group conferences; and;
- Ensure we can meet the expectations of the new Ofsted Inspection Framework for the new integrated inspection of Children's Social Care, currently out for consultation, and which identifies adoption as a contributory 'graded judgement' regarding the quality of the overall service. In light of the Government drive to improve the numbers and timeliness of adoption, it is expected that adoption will come under increased scrutiny.
- Help further to contain the placement budget;

3.4 As a result, the Executive agreed proposals to spend £140,100 in 2103/14 from part A of the grant (Part A grant total £547,752) leaving £407,652 in contingency for further consideration once future priorities were identified.

3.5 In addition to the remaining grant being held in central contingency the Council was awarded a further grant of £273,154 for 2014/15. This additional money was unexpected as we had been led to believe that the grant awarded in 2013/14 was a 'one off' and no further support would be forthcoming. It is therefore prudent to anticipate that it is unlikely that the adoption reform programme will receive further funding going forward.

3.6 Difficulties in recruitment meant that there was some slippage in the spend in 2013/14 and the financial position of the grant on the 1 April was as follows:

2013/14 allocation still in contingency

£407,652

Underspend from amount drawn down 2013/14 – CF
 2014/15 grant
Total

£ 77,617
 £273,154
£758,423

3.7 PERFORMANCE AND COMPLAINE WITH NEW LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS

3.7.1 Performance against objectives have been achieved or are improving. Increased staffing capacity, funded by the Adoption Grant, has made this possible. In all cases increased staffing is undertaken in the form of short term contracts or by increasing existing hours. Additionally, capacity has been increased in the form of more adoption medicals and more family group conferences. Adoption medicals are mandatory and family group conferences are required as part of care proceedings. The increased capacity is also being used to implement the policy, procedural, assessment, and systems changes necessary to achieve compliance with new legislation and regulations.

Number of Adoptions:

2011-12	10
2012-13	17
2013-14	14
2014-15	21

Full Year Projection

Number of Adopters:

2011-12	6
2012-13	9
2013-14	17
2014-15	18

Full Year Projection

Average time between entering care and moving in with adoptive family (3 year average):

2008-11	821
2009-12	704
2010-13	683
2011-14	641

Average Duration of Care Proceedings:

2012-13	55 Weeks
2013-14	26 Weeks

- 3.8 It is clear that the adoption reform grant (Part A & B) drawn down in 2013/14 has had a significant impact on our ability to deliver positive changes in the speed in which adoptive families are assessed and matched to children waiting an adoption placement.
- 3.9 The average cost of a foster placement for children under the age of 10 is £380 per week (c£20k per annum)The average age of London Borough of Bromley adoptions is 4.6 years, a savings of 15 years care costs per child. The London Borough Bromley primary objective in utilising the adoption grant funding is to secure the long term best interests of the child however we aim to support the further containment of the placement budget. In 2013/14 this was achieved and the placement budget was underspent by £18,000.

- 3.10 Although adoption performance continues to improve, a Court of Appeal Judgment in the summer of 2013 in relation to adoption being the preferred plan being made by the Family Courts has meant that Family Courts are more challenging of adoption plans which in turn has led to a significant increase in the number of children being made subject to Special Guardianship Orders as an alternative plan in securing 'permanence' for children.
- 3.11 The number of children who have been made subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) has significantly increased since 2011/12 (see table below). For many of these children SGO is entirely appropriate however for some, the Local Authority plan was for adoption but that plan was rejected in favour of Special Guardianship Orders being made to family members. Special Guardianship Orders bring with them a maintenance payments to the carers for two years and costs in terms of social work support for three years. High levels of support are required for some of these families.

2011/12	10
2012/13	15
2013/14	42
2014/15 (end of July)	4 (Full year projection 40)

- 3.12 This increase is significant insomuch that all of these Orders were made following a full home study assessment and report being presented to the Court. The Implications of the new family justice requirements enshrined in the Children and families Act 2014, which require that Care Proceedings are concluded within 26 weeks has placed significant pressure to complete these assessments within tight timescales. The use of the Adoption reform grant to support this activity over the next two years will negate any requirement to seek additional financial support through general growth.
- 3.13 As agreed in the report to the Executive on the 11 September and an undertaking given by the Education, Care and Health Services Portfolio Holder, we have reviewed our priorities (including those imposed upon us following the Court of Appeal Judgments) against our objectives as outlined in 3.3, and have identified that we need to fund the following from the adoption reform grant between 2014 and 2016.

Purpose	2014-2015	2015-2016
2 x SW post to undertake connected person assessments	82,000	82,000
Adoption Reform Lead	62,000	62,000
DGM – Connected Person (new post)	48,000	48,000
Additional hours for current adoption staff – equivalent to one fte	39,000	39,000
Adoption medicals	30,000	To be reviewed as new contract will be required
Additional FGC capacity (over spend was £26k in 2013/14)	30,000	30,000
PT admin worker – to progress adoption/SGO/RO payments and reviews	11,400	11,400
Adoption project worker to continue for a further year to completely embed new assessment process	43,300	0
Total	345,700	272,400
Amount remaining	412,723	140,323

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Improving permanence for looked after children contributes to building a better Bromley

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The local authority has received a non ring-fenced grant of £820,906 to improve adoption and permanence for looked after children. In 2013/14 £62,483 has been spent.
- 5.2 Although there are some additional burdens being funded through this grant, fewer children will be placed in fostering and more into special guardianship and adoption placements.
- 5.3 The average cost of an in house fostering placement is £20k whilst an adoptive placement is £10k and a Special guardianship order £9k. This means that every child diverted from a foster placement will save in the region of £10k to £11k per annum per child. The impact of these potential savings will need to be reassessed in light of the further implementation of the programme.
- 5.4 The grant funding appears to be short term in nature with no indication of funding beyond 2014/15. Arrangements will need to be put in place for an exit strategy that does not put additional burden on council resources.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

All posts created as part of the grant funding allocation will be offered on fixed term contracts not exceeding the funding period

Non-Applicable Sections:	Legal implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Report to the Executive (CS13003) – 12 June 2013 Report to the Executive (CS13032) – 11 September 2013