

Aspire Adoption Strategy Board- 26th May 2022

Peter Feedback Notes

There were some questions arising, but I'll address them individually in separate posts with the Aspire Adopters & Special Guardians Forum.

This meeting comprises the Directors of Childrens Services from both Dorset and BCP, and the relevant Councillors. Paul Dempsey is new DCS in Dorset - started last Monday! (feedback notes written on 30th May).

Cathi Hadley sent apologies. BCP was represented by Jane White, director of corporate parenting and permanence, Mike White, councillor, and Jo Collins-Heavens, finance.

Interviews for the new Service Manager will be on 7th June. Michelle Whiting (interim manager) will then pass on to the new appointed person.

Both Dorset and BCP have been inspected by Ofsted in the past 6 months, and in both cases, Ofsted were positive about the way that Aspire is working with the two local authorities.

The two councils are happy because Aspire spend was within budget in 2021/2.

There's a grievance case ongoing re pay-scales. Apparently BCP social workers received a 'labour market supplement' and the Aspire workers feel that it's unfair that they haven't got the same. But Dorset will not give the same increase to their SWs, so if the grievance case is upheld, BCP alone must fund the increase for Aspire. And all this is really because BCP still hasn't aligned its T&Cs from the Poole/Bournemouth days, and has now decided not to do so properly until April 2024!

Aspire adoption panel is still meeting virtually for time being. They're considering whether virtual or face-to-face is better long-term.

Aspire is being successful in recruiting enough new adopters to be able to place almost all children within Dorset/BCP, without needing to place children out of area, and without spending money on an advertising campaign.

There has been a big increase in the number of Special Guardian referrals. Both BCP and Dorset have now employed additional social workers to do SG assessments. Furthermore, Ofsted advised BCP that they should increase SG arrangements further. Therefore, the two LAs are now considering whether it is better to increase the SG team at Aspire, or to keep parts of the process at the referring LAs. There is discussion ongoing about the best way to organise the process in a holistic way.

The demand for adoption/SG support services has doubled in the last six months. This is leading to delays in providing support, and delays in referrals to Adopton

Support Fund (ASF). The new three-tier approach was working well before November, and the previous backlog of support requests had been cleared. I confirmed that there are adopters and Special Guardians in the forum who are experiencing this problem, and I shared their comments from last week.

The good news is that Aspire is proposing to add two new support worker posts in order to add capacity to the support team. And also they want to develop more of their own therapeutic capability in-house, instead of having to refer people to external providers.

The example cited was therapeutic life story work - the external providers have waiting lists, but there are workers within Aspire who could do the work, so adding additional people to the team would allow them to free off some time for the more experienced support workers to deliver earlier life-story work in-house, instead of waiting for external providers.

Peter Phillips
Parent Carers Together