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Bridgend County Borough Council



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Cyfarwyddiaeth y Prif Weithredwr / Chief Executive's Directorate

Deialu uniongyrchol / Direct line /: 01656 643148 / 643147 / 643694

Gofynnwch am / Ask for: Michael Pitman

Ein cyf / Our ref:

Eich cyf / Your ref:

Dyddiad/Date: Friday, 4 January 2019

Dear Councillor,

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

A meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting will be held in the Committee Rooms 2/3 - Civic Offices Angel Street Bridgend CF31 4WB on **Thursday, 10 January 2019 at 10:00.**

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
To receive apologies for absence from Members.
2. Declarations of Interest
To receive declarations of personal and prejudicial interest (if any) from Members/Officers in accordance with the provisions of the Members' Code of Conduct adopted by Council from 1 September 2008.
3. Approval of Minutes 3 - 6
To receive for approval the minutes of 17/10/2018
4. Remodelling Fostering Services Project 7 - 16
Invitees:
Rebecca Walsh – Foster Carer
Clive Wilkinson - Foster Carer
5. Monitoring the Performance and Progress of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service 17 - 60
6. Care Inspectorate Wales - Inspection of Western Bay Adoption Service - Action Plan 61 - 114
To be accompanied by a presentation by the Western Bay Adoption Service
7. Urgent Items
To consider any other item(s) of business in respect of which notice has been given in accordance with Part 4 (paragraph 4) of the Council Procedure Rules and which the person presiding at the meeting is of the opinion should be reason of special circumstances be transacted at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

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Yours faithfully

K Watson

Head of Legal and Regulatory Services

Councillors:

N Clarke
HJ David
DK Edwards
J Gebbie
T Giffard

Councillors

CA Green
RM James
D Patel
JC Radcliffe
CE Smith

Councillors

CA Webster
DBF White
PJ White
HM Williams
RE Young

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3 - CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2018 AT 14:00

Present

Councillor – Chairperson

MC Clarke	N Clarke	HJ David	J Gebbie
T Giffard	CA Green	RM James	D Patel
CE Smith	CA Webster	DBF White	HM Williams
RE Young			

Apologies for Absence

PJ White

Officers:

Susan Cooper	Corporate Director - Social Services & Wellbeing
Nicola Echanis	Head of Education & Family Support
Julie Ellams	Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Lindsay Harvey	Corporate Director Education and Family Support
David Wright	Family Support Services Manager

179. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

180. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting meeting of 11 July 2018 be approved as a true and accurate record.

181. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN EDUCATION

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support presented a report providing Corporate Parenting Committee with an update on the support for Looked After Children in Education (LACE) across the local authority. The report specifically focused on the support provided to and the attainment outcomes of Bridgend's Looked After Children for the school year 2017-18. He explained that LAC often under achieved compared to their peers in terms of educational attainment and were less likely to progress into further education or training.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support explained that in May 2018, the role of supporting LACE moved to the Vulnerable Groups Team (VGT). The team worked in close partnership with Children's Social Care and other Early Help services to ensure LAC were accessing good quality education that met their needs. He added that as at January 2018 there were 278 LAC pupils in Bridgend profiled against the school clusters detailed in the report. The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support reported that locally a significant amount of work was being undertaken to ensure the right support for all pupils was achieved. This included the development of the access to education panel (AEP). The panel was created to ensure that all children could access an education that met their needs in a timely manner.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support stated that VGT training included raising awareness across schools on the impact of becoming a looked after child, including the trauma and how this could affect a child's ability to engage in learning. He explained the role of the authority in the development of a work experience and apprenticeship opportunity for LAC. All year 11 LAC learners had the opportunity to engage in work experience over the summer holidays and 7 took that opportunity resulting in 4 securing an Agored qualification.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support explained that a number of schools had introduced learning support assistants to assist with literacy and numeracy of LAC. This was a positive response and enabled more consistency of support.

A Member asked if there had been an increase in the number of LAC. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing confirmed that numbers were relatively static, possibly down a little on last year.

The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support provided an update on Bridgend LAC school attainment across the different age groups. He added that generally they were in a very positive position. He identified an error in the way 9 of the 19 children in Level 2 and level 2+ were reported. He referred Members to the two case studies included in the report and concluded that there were no financial implications associated with the report however the LAC PDG distributed to schools for 2018-19 amounted to £240,987.

A Member asked if there were any LAC in pre-school and if the children attending Heronsbridge had been taken out of these results. She also asked if there were any LAC out of county and if their results were included in the figures. The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support confirmed there were pre-school LAC, he did not have the information to hand but would provide details following the meeting. The Heronsbridge children had been included in the clusters. Members asked if they could be dealt with separately and the figures adjusted accordingly.

A Member said that results were very positive and asked if some clusters were performing better than others. The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support explained that it varied but generally they were all making progress but very small cohorts so it was difficult to compare like with like

A Member asked if the Pupil Development Grant was the same for primary school children. The Group Manager Integrated Working and Family Support explained that it was more a cluster bid rather than for individual schools.

A Member asked who represented the children at an Access to Education Panel. He was advised that the Corporate Director Education and Family Support chaired the Panel with representative from across the directorate including primary, secondary and special schools. This was helpful for schools and made it clear who they should contact and progress could be made quickly. The VGT played an important role and helped the authority meet its statutory responsibilities in identifying every vulnerable group and working closely to make sure they offered the best deal for learners as early as possible.

A Member asked for information on LAC out of county and if in terms of attainment they had the same opportunities. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing explained that they were no less a priority but often had specialist needs in specialist placements.

The Leader stated that there had been positive progress made in the last year. The outcomes they would like to see in the next year were clear along with the actions

necessary to make sure there were further improvements. Members welcomed the inclusion of case studies in the report.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Parenting Committee noted the content of the report.

182. **REVIEW OF THE MODEL FOR EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES**

The Family Support Services Manager provided an update on the work completed to date in response to one of the recommendations made by the Institute of Public Care (IPC) specifically around the impact of early help services. In response to the recommendation - to review the impact early intervention services have to ensure that they are making a difference for children and families, existing services available within the Central Hub were reviewed.

The Family Support Services Manager outlined the services available within the Central Hub that supported children and young people open to Children's Social Care. These services included Connecting Families, Western Bay Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS), Rapid Response, Baby in Mind Service and the Reflect Service. He also summarised local authority visits to Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Newport City Council and Carmarthenshire County Borough Council who were deemed to have good early help services. In addition a workshop was held in May 2018 to review existing services, share good practice and identify any perceived gaps in service provision. The Family Support Services Manager reported that following the visits and the workshop it was apparent that there was no significant difference in the way Bridgend delivered its services compared to those visited. He stressed that a number of new services had recently come into effect and the impact of these would be evaluated in due course.

The Family Support Services Manager added that all local authorities commented on the positive joint-working relationship between Early Help and Children's Social Care in Bridgend. He believed it was evident that Bridgend was more advanced in relation to step up/step down work between Children's Social Care and Early Help and seamless transitions for children and families. All local authorities appeared to be facing similar challenges.

The Family Support Services Manager outlined the matters previously presented to the local authority's Corporate Management Board in September 2018 for information.

A Member asked if when children were taken into care, the families left behind were given support to make sure it didn't happen again. The Family Support Services Manager explained that these families were closely supported by Barnardo's.

A Member asked what support was given to these children to involve them in wider life experiences such as participating in football etc. The Group Manager, Case Management and Transition explained that foster carers were expected to support children and to prepare them for life in a positive way.

A Member asked if any Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) had broken down for financial reasons. He was advised that SGO's did not break down for financial reasons. Existing carers could become SGO's and the rates would be fixed for 2 years.

The Leader asked if SGO's were given the same support as foster carers. The Group Manager Case Management and Transition explained that the support given to SGO's in Bridgend was well regarded. There was a specialist team that focused on this area providing annual reviews and crisis support.

The Deputy Leader asked what the impact would be of moving from Western Bay to Cwm Taff. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing explained that there were financial implications and with a 200% increase in referrals, it was important to deal with these as early as possible avoiding care costs. She added that a ministerial advisory group had recently visited 5 authorities including Bridgend. The team had given a presentation outlining 3 years of work and the improvements made. Further support had been promised by Welsh Government for LAC. Cwm Taff had been successful in bringing money into children's services and social care however the majority of regional funding was in adult care. It was important to press for children's social care in future. The level of Western Bay funding for Bridgend had been secured. The financial projections were that the bill for social care would be coming down because of progress made in other areas. They were starting to see better outcomes for children and also protect the budget.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the considerations in the report and agreed to monitor progress towards the implementation of these as part of its forward work programme.

183. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 15:00

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

10 JANUARY 2019

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

REMODELLING FOSTERING SERVICES PROJECT

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To inform Corporate Parenting Committee of the work that has been undertaken as part of the Remodelling Fostering Services project, and the resulting changes to Fostering Services.

2.0 Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priority/priorities:-

- Supporting a successful economy – taking steps to make the county a good place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions of all people in the county.
- Helping people to be more self-reliant – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.

3.0 Background

3.1 As part of the Remodelling Children's Social Care Programme, Children's Services have undertaken a wide-reaching review of residential services, and the fostering service was identified as an area where further service development and potential efficiencies could be made.

3.2 It is anticipated that reviewing fostering services will not only benefit the population of Looked after Children through increased placement choice, improved placement matching and more local placements, but it will also achieve cost avoidance and cost savings, which will help the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate meet the requirements of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

3.3 Reporting to the 'Remodelling Children's Social Care Programme', a project team was convened during 2016/17, whose role was to oversee the development of a range of options which would deliver against these service improvements and help achieve the MTFS savings requirements. The proposals made and initiatives implemented are shown below.

4.0 Current Situation/Proposal

Staff and service structures

- 4.1 Currently the fostering team is led by a team manager and three senior social workers. One of the senior social workers works within the residential hub and is assigned to the placements team. This role is primarily responsible for assessing and supervising specialist carers such as parent and child and transition carers (which fall under the remit of the residential remodelling). The other two senior social workers, within the fostering team, share supervisory responsibility for the fostering social workers, and placement support workers. There are eight full time social workers, five part time social workers and two full time placement support workers. Fostering social workers hold a caseload of both general carers and relative carers, (although each social workers caseloads are weighted towards one or the other) and are responsible for assessments of carers and support and supervision of placements.
- 4.2 The Fostering Team is now separated into two distinct areas; one with responsibility for relative carers and one with responsibility for general foster carers. This will enable the specialisms to further develop and also recognises the distinct differences between relative and general fostering support and training needs.
- 4.3 When recruiting new social workers in the future, job descriptions will be kept generic i.e. to cover relative and general carers, in order to ensure resilience across each service area, as necessary.

Liaison Carers

- 4.4 We currently have five Liaison Carers, who are active foster carers with a significant amount of fostering experience and have the capacity to offer one to one mentoring to a small group of carers. They attend the Skills to Foster training' programme which is available for applicants considering a career in fostering and they also arrange a monthly informal support group meeting for approved foster carers.
- 4.5 As part of the work of this project, meetings have been held with the current Liaison Carers to scope their current role and to work with them to understand how they could be more effective in the future and how their role can be developed to be more pro-active in providing increased support in:
- The recruitment of new carers
 - Carers going through the complaints/allegation process
 - Carers with complex placements
 - New carers within the service
 - Training and advice on the career development of carers
 - Monthly workshop/support groups with fostering social workers and Development Officer.
- 4.6 The existing five liaison carer roles will be maintained, with one being dedicated to relative carers and the other four to general carers. When the numbers of general carers further increases, an additional general liaison carer role will be considered.

Training

- 4.7 A pre-assessment course (Skills to Foster) is currently offered to new applicants going through the three day assessment process. Within the first 12 months following approval, foster carers are expected to attend a series of one or two day

training courses, offered in-house, identified as 'essential core training'. Currently both relative and general carers are involved in the 'skills to foster' training but post approval the general foster carers follow a 'mandatory' programme of training, whilst relative carers are provided with the opportunity to attend training but their learning needs are more usually met on a one to one basis, with their fostering link social worker.

- 4.8 In line with fostering regulations and good practice guidelines, all newly approved foster carers are reviewed within 12 months. During their second year they are offered a series of training such as child development, which is organised by Social Care Workforce Development Programme (SCWDP) and often involves the external commissioning of training in specialist areas.
- 4.9 General foster carers are offered a chance to attend Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) or equivalent training and this is linked to their payments. Following enrolment on such training they move up from Level 1 to level 2. This is not available to relative carers as they receive allowances only.
- 4.10 A review of both relative and general foster carers has been undertaken as part of this project. A number of short and long term proposals have been made with regards to improving the quality of training for foster carers. These are detailed below.
- 4.11 In the short term, the Skills to Foster course will be reshaped to align with the directorate-wide training programme that is being implemented as part of the remodelling Looked After Children's Residential, Placements and Support Services project, ensuring consistency and a common therapeutic approach across all services.
- 4.12 In the longer term, it is proposed that consideration be given to strengthening Bridgend's in-house training for foster carers, through the development and delivery of in-house courses that help foster carers to better support children and young people. This may include:
- Fostering Foundation Course (5 days- consisting of core training)
 - Child Development Course (8 days - Brain Based, Attachment, Resilience and Trauma model)
 - All Wales induction framework for Health and social care (this will be introduced 2019)
 - Playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy (PACE) Course
 - Development and introduction of Specific courses for relative carers
- 4.13 Stronger links will be made between the Social Care Development Workforce Programme team and the newly appointed Development Officer in the Fostering Team. This will enhance the development and production of a new training skills programme to better equip foster carers for the future.

Payments and fees

- 4.14 There are currently three levels within the payment and fee structure for carers. Foster carer payments consist of two elements: part one is an age based allowance for each child placed; part two is a fee which is based on the level of competence

(skill) of the carer and the completion of core training. Immediately post approval, both relative and general carers are placed on level one which is payment of allowance only.

- 4.15 After 12 months, following a successful review and the completion of core training, general carers are able to rise to level 2 and receive fostering fees commensurate to this status. General foster carers are able to progress further to level 3 and a further increase in fee following completion of prescribed training courses.
- 4.16 It is proposed that, in order to be competitive with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), the Authority needs to pay fees to general carers at an earlier stage in their fostering career. The recommendation is that they receive a fee post approval, with the expectation they complete the core training programme within their first year.
- 4.17 In terms of upskilling foster carers and as part of the fee eligibility process the criteria for receiving higher fees (level 2-3) will also include attendance at support groups.
- 4.18 This will be implemented as soon as possible in order to attract new carers, and that current carers are provided with a two year transitional period to align themselves with the new fee requirements before the changes are fully implemented.
- 4.19 Work has been undertaken to benchmark Bridgend's fees and allowances by comparison with neighbouring authorities. The work undertaken with the fee element paid to carers, is reasonably competitive with only a 3-6% variation when cross referenced with regional local authorities to include Neath Port Talbot, Swansea and Independent providers including TACT and Action For Children. The review has also focussed on the allowance element paid by local authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies and it is these allowances that require a full review.
- 4.20 In addition to the fee that foster carers receive for a child they are also awarded an allowance which is related to the living expenses for that child. On the advice of the National Fostering Framework, Bridgend Council consolidated an amount for birthdays and 'special events' into the main allowance. During the recent engagement events with foster carers they expressed disappointment with this as they preferred to receive a 'lump sum' at the time of the birthday/event. The National Fostering Framework is now reviewing, again, all payments and allowances and Bridgend will make sure that we can contribute to this review and process.

Bonuses

- 4.21 It is proposed that carers are offered a £250 bonus when they refer a friend to be a foster carer for Bridgend. This bonus will be paid when that new carer is approved and they receive their first placement. This should encourage more of our carers to recommend people that they know.

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

- 4.22 Bridgend has 279 children living within a fostering placement. This number comprises of 58 children placed with IFA Providers, 156 with in-house carers and

65 placed with Relative (kinship) carers. This indicates that BCBC has a reliance on IFAs to provide 16% of fostering placements. During this project we have analysed Bridgend's use of IFA placements to gain a better understanding of gaps in our in-house provision. As a result of this review, a number of changes have been made as described below:

- A new process to review IFA placements that have been in place less than 16 weeks has been implemented, with a view to transferring as many of these placements as possible in-house. Reviews of these placements are carried out by the Placements Team Manager, who is able to link with Safeguarding teams to discuss individual care and support plans and thereby prioritise those children who are in a position to move back into a local authority placement.
- A long-term marketing campaign led by the new Development Officer (see below) will be implemented, aimed at maximising the number of in-house foster carers, as opposed to using more costly IFA carers.

Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs)

- 4.23 Following the introduction of the new Special Guardianship Orders regulations and 'Code of Practice guidelines' by Welsh Government in July 2018, Bridgend's Special Guardianship Policy has been reviewed.
- 4.24 It was identified following the release of this guidance that the remit for Special Guardianship Orders would be better placed within the Fostering Team. Therefore two members of social work staff who are responsible for promoting and assessing potential Special Guardianship Order applicants are now situated within this team.
- 4.25 Following the transfer of these staff members to the Fostering Team, a plan is in place to undertake a full review of how Bridgend promotes and encourages applications from foster carers to apply for SGO's and the processes and procedures that underpin this. The aim of this work will be to transfer placements to SGOs as early as possible and to reduce the use of relatives as foster carers.

Recruitment of carers

- 4.26 A business case has been successfully approved for the recruitment of a Development Officer and additional assessing social work capacity for the Fostering Team. The appointments of these posts are underway.
- 4.27 The Development Officer will be directly involved in a number of activities that will enable the proposals above to be effectively and efficiently implemented, key tasks for the Officer will include:
- Gathering further information on what IFAs provide in relation to payments & training
 - Developing and increasing frequency and breadth of campaigns
 - Working with the Liaison Carers to get them more involved in recruitment

- Consulting with the designated member of the communications team to create an innovative marketing campaign to attract new foster carers
- Focusing on recruitment for other campaigns such as Transitional Carers and Parent and Child, to ensure they are a success
- Working closely with the training team and fostering team to ensure the development/delivery of the new in-house programmes
- Developing in-house support groups and workshops
- Reducing demand on the Senior Social Workers to enable them to undertake their day-to-day duties as the service grows
- Reviewing government guidance and changes in regulation and supporting the service to translate this into policies and procedures
- Undertaking competitor analysis of other local authorities
- Researching best practice and innovations across the UK and wider
- Reviewing Bridgend's benefits packages for new carers to ensure they are effective and are encouraging people to come to Bridgend.
- Launching the targeted 'supported lodgings' recruitment campaign

Targets

- 4.28 The service have set the following targets to be met as a result of implementing the above changes:
- 7 in-house foster carers to be recruited in 2019/20, 8 to be recruited in 2020/21, and 9 to be recruited in 2021/22
 - A reduction of 5% of IFA placements

5.0 Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

- 5.1 There is no impact on the policy framework and procedure rules. Any future services requiring commissioning as a result of this proposal will be undertaken in-line with Contract Procedure Rules requirements.

6.0 Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 As proposals progress and officers are in a better position to know which service users and staff could be affected by the proposed model, an EIA screening (and a full EIA if necessary) will be undertaken, to assess the potential impact on service users and staff.

7.0 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications

- 7.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (SSWBA) 2014, in turn, supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 within the County Borough of Bridgend. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances, the wellbeing goals of a healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.

8.0 Financial Implications

Staff and service structures

- 8.1 No changes to staff structures identified as a result of implementing these proposals. The additional development officer post and assessing social worker post will be funded from the change fund earmarked reserve for two years. Following this period, a decision will be made on whether the posts are still required and appropriate funding identified.
- 8.2 Any additional training costs incurred will be funded through core budgets and SCWDWP grant where applicable.

Liaison Carers

- 8.3 For every additional 20 general carers recruited, one additional Liaison Carer post will be created at a cost of £4,680 per annum. However, it is envisaged that these costs will be offset by the use of the new general carers that have been recruited as opposed to utilising IFA placements.

Payments and fees

- 8.4 Any changes proposed would result in no immediate financial effect on the authority as additional financial output would only be relevant when new carers are recruited. The cost of this per placement would still be significantly less than the Authority would need to pay an IFA for the same placement, resulting in cost-avoidance overall.

8.5 Bonuses

Details	Cost
Cost per referral	£250
Note: Average weekly cost of an IFA placement is around £735 Maximum weekly cost of an in-house placement is £413.98 Difference = at least £321.02 Bonus cost made back within one week of placing in-house as opposed to an IFA	

Targets

- 8.6 If all the above targets are met, this will result in the following cash savings over three year period:

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	
Cost avoidance	£25,040	£50,079	£75,119	
Cost avoidance from previous years – carried over	£0	£25,040	£75,119	
Total	£25,040	£75,119	£150,238	Total cash savings: £250,397

9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1 In summary, the main changes and proposals following the review are as follows:

Staff and service structures

- The Fostering Team is separated into two distinct areas; one with responsibility for relative carers and one with responsibility for general foster carers. (Paragraph 4.2 refers).

Liaison Carers

- The existing five liaison carer roles will be maintained, with one being dedicated to relative carers and the other four to general carers. (Paragraph 4.6 refers).

Training

- In the short term, the Skills to Foster course will be reshaped to align with the directorate-wide training programme. (Paragraph 4.11 refers).
- In the longer term, it is proposed that consideration be given to strengthening Bridgend's in-house training for foster carers, through the development and delivery of in-house courses. (Paragraph 4.12 refers).

Payments and fees

- It is proposed that, in order to be competitive with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), the Authority needs to pay fees to general carers at an earlier stage in their fostering career. The recommendation is that they receive a fee post approval, with the expectation they complete the core training programme within their first year. In terms of upskilling foster carers and as part of the fee eligibility process the criteria for receiving higher fees (level 2-3) will also include attendance at support groups. (Paragraphs 4.16- 4.17 refers).

Bonuses

- It is proposed that carers are offered a £250 bonus when they refer a friend to be a foster carer for Bridgend, which is paid when that new person is approved and they receive their first placement. (Paragraph 4.21 refers).

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs)

- A new process to review IFA placements that have been in place less than 16 weeks has been implemented, with a view to transferring as many of these placements as possible in-house. (Paragraph 4.22 refers).
- A long-term marketing campaign will be implemented, aimed at maximising the number of in-house foster carers. (Paragraph 4.22 refers).

Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs)

- Two members of social work staff who are responsible for promoting and assessing potential Special Guardianship Order applicants are now situated within Fostering Team. (Paragraph 4.24 refers).

Recruitment of carers

- The appointment of a Development Officer and additional assessing social work capacity for the Fostering Team is underway. (Paragraph 4.26 refers).

9.2 The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to:

- Note the information contained in this report;

- Provide views on the proposed changes to Fostering Services as summarised above and detailed in the report.

Susan Cooper

Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing
January 2019

10.0 Contact Officers

Laura Kinsey – Head of Children’s Social Care
01656 642314
Laura.kinsey@bridgend.gov.uk

11.0 Background documents

None

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BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

10th JANUARY 2019

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

MONITORING THE PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS OF THE WESTERN BAY REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Cabinet Committee about the performance and progress of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service, including the Annual Report on Regional PI Performance 2017/2018 which is attached at **Appendix A**.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priority/priorities:-
1. Helping people to be more self-reliant – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.
 2. Smarter use of resources – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities.

3. Background

- 3.1 Adoption has, and continues to receive, high levels of attention from both the UK and the Welsh Government. Members will be aware that the creation of a National Adoption Service is one of the key policy strands of the Welsh Government, as enacted in the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014. This Act provides powers, under Part 9, for Ministers to direct local authorities to collaborate in relation to adoption services and to prevent any local authority from withdrawing from these collaborations in the future.
- 3.2 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 came into force on 13th March 2015. The primary purpose of these Directions is to ensure effective joint arrangements are in place between local authorities in Wales for the delivery of adoption services
- 3.3 Schedule 1 of the Directions sets out which local authorities must collaborate with each other. For the Western Bay region the local authorities are Swansea, Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot. Swansea host and manage the

regional service on behalf of the partner agencies, this having been approved by Cabinets in all three local authorities in April 2014.

3.4 The Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS) is integrated into the National Adoption Service (NAS) as one of the five identified regional collaboratives. The National Service is underpinned by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015.

3.5 The broad aims of the joint adoption arrangements across Wales as specified in the Directions include:

- Consistent and high quality service
- Keeping delay to a minimum
- Widest choice possible of placement
- Eliminating waiting lists for training and assessments
- Improving the matching process
- Streamlining adoption services improved liaison between adoption social workers
- Keeping breakdowns to a minimum by providing adequate adoption support
- Collaborative working between local authorities, voluntary agencies, health and education services

3.6 The Management and oversight arrangements of the National Service consist of:

Governance Board

Includes representatives from each agency:

- Spokesperson and Deputy Spokesperson from WLGA for Health & Social Services
- Mayor or executive leader by the Lead Authority
- Independent Chairperson of the Advisory Group
- Representative on behalf of the voluntary agencies
- Elected member representation for each region

The functions of the Governance Board include: strategic direction, approval of annual work programme, ensuring the views of stake holders are represented and the monitoring & oversight of performance, complaints, engagement with voluntary agencies, service user representatives, budget & financial, Welsh language and reporting to the Welsh Ministers.

The nominated elected member representative for Western Bay on the Governance Board is Councillor Alan Lockyer from Neath Port Talbot.

Advisory Group

Includes the following representatives from:

- each collaborative Head of Children's Service
- the Association of the Directors of Social Services Cymru
- the Association of Directors of Education in Wales
- the WLGA
- 3 from voluntary organisations
- Legal adviser from the lead local authority
- Health professional for Looked After Children

- Medical advisor to an adoption panel
- CAMHS
- Service User
- Social Research Centre

The functions of the Advisory Group include:

- Provision of professional advice and Support to the Governance Board
- Supporting the effective operation of the service
- Notifying the Welsh Minister of any issues

The City of Cardiff Council has been given the role of Lead Authority for the National Adoption Service and as host authority it works with key partners to run an all-Wales adoption website, developing a centre of excellence for adoption services and employing a Director of Operations for Wales.

Director of Operations and Central Team:

The functions of the Director of Operations and Central Team include:

- Production of an annual work programme to include priorities and targets
- Financial plans and budget responsibilities
- Monitoring and analysis of performance data
- Determine actions to address issues arising
- Improvements and developments of the service
- Submission of a 6 monthly and annual progress and financial report
- Analysis of reports from regional collaboratives
- Establish and maintain website
- Co-ordination of pre-approval training and adoption support services

In addition to the development of the National Service and the Central Team, a Wales Adoption Register has been developed which is hosted by the Central Team operating on the principle of keeping Welsh children in Wales.

- 3.7 As referred to in paragraph 3.3, the 2015 Directions prescribe the membership of five regional collaboratives for the National Adoption Services with BCBC presently forming part of the Western Bay regional collaborative with Swansea City and County Council and Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. Following the Health Board boundary change, the 2015 Directions will likely be amended to require BCBC to form part of the current Vale, Valleys and Cardiff regional collaborative with Cardiff City and County Council, the Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council or another newly defined regional collaborative more closely aligned to the Cwm Taf region. In the meantime, it has been agreed that we will remain part of the Western Bay collaborative and the transition to a new region will not take place before April 2020 at the earliest.

4. Current Situation/Proposal

- 4.1 Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS) became fully operational in April 2015. Prior to this adoption services were delivered locally via the three local authorities.
- 4.2 The regional adoption service provides a range of services and interventions across the five key domains to those affected by adoption. Those being:
- Assessing and supporting prospective adopters
 - Assessing non-agency (parent/carer, formerly step parent adoptions)
 - Birth Record Counselling and Intermediary Services (BRC &IS)
 - Adoption support (assessments and support services to anyone affected by adoption)
 - Twin tracking and Family Finding (TT&FF), which involves working with birth families of children in or following care proceedings and once a Placement Order has been granted by court in searching for an adoptive placement

Performance and Activity

- 4.3 The attached annual performance report outlines the performance within the regional adoption service for 2017/18.
- 4.4 Key achievements for the year include:
- The number of children placed during the year has shown a slight increase on last year's performance, 74 compared to 71 in 2016/17. Of the 74 children placed, 30 were in 'harder to place' category, this included, 8 sibling groups of 2, 2 sibling groups of 3 and 8 children who were either older children or children with complex needs. This demonstrates the successes and positive outcomes the service has achieved for this particular group of children. The numbers of children placed for Bridgend were 24.
 - Of the children placed during the year we continued to place more children with Western Bay adopters than in Inter agency placements (IAs). By year end the service had placed 47 children within Western Bay and at the same time reduced the number placed in interagency placements from 32 to 27. Of the placements made 64% were placed with Western Bay adopters, despite there being challenges in placing those deemed as 'harder to place' children and a sustained position of adopters wishing to have the more straightforward and younger children. Six of these children were placed as a direct result of the profiling event in Western Bay. Nineteen children from Bridgend were placed with Western Bay adopters and 5 were placed in Inter agency placements.
 - There continues to be collaboration between the Family Finding and Adoption Support functions within the service to put together packages of support for more complex children or where placements need additional support. Of the 74 children placed for adoption during the year 18 had an ongoing service provision/package of support at the point of placement.
 - The region developed and organised a 'Profiling' event during the year which included some of our harder to place children who had been waiting

longer than 6 months. Thirty four children were profiled and 17 approved adopter families were invited to consider those children as potential links/matches. This event proved very successful and resulted in 6 children being placed, a little under 10% of the total number of children placed by the region. The feedback from adopters and staff was extremely positive and following the outcome and success of the event it has been decided to continue holding the 'Profiling' events on a regular basis within the region, with the aim of holding 2 events a year.

- The number of Adoption Orders granted (AOG) has increased significantly from the previous year from 69 to 90 in 2017-18. This is an excellent achievement despite many of our adoption applications being contested. Of the 90 Adoption Orders granted during the year 28 were Bridgend children. Thirty four (38%) of the applications made in the region were contested in 2017-18, resulting in delay and having an impact on the performance which is beyond the region's control.
- Following a number of strategies implemented by both Western Bay Adoption Service and the local authorities there had been an increase during the year in the number of children presented to panel where there was evidence of Life Story Materials (LSM). There had also been some improvement in the number of children who had Life Story Materials provided to adopters by the time of the second review with 58% of children having these in place compared to 30% last year. During 2017-18, Bridgend had 32 children who had a second adoption review, 21 of these children had Life Story Materials provided at this point.
- Despite the reduction in the number of adopter enquiries to the service there is evidence to demonstrate that less initial enquires are being withdrawn and more being deemed suitable resulting in higher conversion rates through to assessments and approvals. This may have been impacted on through, improved responses to enquirers, improved literature and website information as well as the outcomes of targeted regional/national campaigns.
- The average time taken to approve adopters from the inquiry stage to Agency Decision Making (ADM) decision has decreased compared to 2016-17 from 9.7 months to 8.2 months in 2017-18 which brings us closer to the national benchmark of 8 months.
- The number of adoption support interventions has increased. Whilst there is some evidence this has reduced the use of higher cost commissioned services, of more note is the range of interventions. These have included more requests for engagement in resolving letterbox issues particularly between siblings.
- We have invested in and further developed the Western Bay Adoption Service website to make it more interactive, user friendly and to include the active offer. This is now in the process of being translated. In the coming year all of our information leaflets will be accessible via the website. We are also developing a member's only login page where adopters will be able to access key information, including our newsletter,

playgroup dates and venues. There are child friendly pages included in the website also to target and encourage our children to access the site. The improved website will be launched in July 2018.

- Development and implementation of the Transition/Moving on model to assist in improving the preparation of children for adoption and in the provision of Life Story material has continued to be rolled out with training to staff across the region. Targeted training has been offered for all WB staff and for all three local authority social workers and foster carers where a child is subject to a plan of adoption.
- An inspection took place in December 2017 which was positive and demonstrated the service was improving. The key areas were identified as:-
 - Children, adopters and people receiving adoption support receive a good service overall.
 - Timeliness has improved for the period children wait to be placed for adoption, with every child placed being assessed for adoption support.
 - Some best practice was noted with regards to direct work with children and their adoptive parents.
 - A timely response to adoption enquiries with a slight increase in the numbers of adopters approved during the period.
 - The quality of adopters' assessments was mainly good but the recording of challenge was underdeveloped
 - Children, adopters and people receiving adoption support receive a good service overall.
 - Feedback from adopters about the service was mainly positive with some people expressing a high level of satisfaction.
 - Training for adopters was reported to be of good quality and a number of support services have been developed

4.5 The challenges/priorities that the service will need to focus on in the coming year include:-

- There has been a significant decrease in Adopter enquiry rates with 118 enquiries within the year compared to the 174 received in 2016-17. The issue of adopter recruitment has been an issue nationally and data shows there is a re-emerging gap between placement need and adopter recruitment. The region is working hard on improving website access and interactivity as well as with the NAS central team to develop a revised All Wales Marketing and Recruitment Strategy for the coming year the aim of which is to;
 - Increase interest, enquiries and approvals from prospective adopters who can meet the needs of our children and
 - Increase the number of children placed;
 - Reduce the number of children waiting;
 - Meet the need for sibling group placements and children with other complexities;
 - Reach a level of adopter sufficiency that allows for choice but does not create significant levels of adopters waiting lengthy periods.

Whilst we have seen some success during the year the reality is that many adopters are still presenting themselves as wanting younger children which is in line with national research. We have identified a target for the coming year to achieve 63 adopter approvals. Staffing issues within Recruitment and Assessment appear to be resolving which will aid in achieving the targeted number of approvals for 2018-19.

- Where possible to further reduce the time from LAC, SBPD and Placement Order (PO) to placement for adoption. We anticipate this continuing to be a challenge as we are mindful that the number of children that have been waiting longer than 6 months to be matched has increased. This is reflective of the National picture and we are currently participating in an All Wales National Recruitment Campaign to attempt to combat this. If we are successful in placing more of these children who have waited longer in the coming year we will anticipate our performance in this area to show a decline, however, overall this will be a successful outcome for those children.
- There needs to be a robust and whole region approach to the improvement of Life Story Materials (LSM) in relation to quality and timeliness. The current NAS measure is by 2nd review however, WBAS with the support of the senior management in the LAs has agreed that this measure should be the longest time and the best practice aim is on placement. Our IT system will need to be developed in order to capture this data at various points of match and placement of adoption. Although this measure has improved during the year close monitoring and continued development will be needed to maintain and improve our performance in this area to achieve the revised national benchmark of 100%.
- Performance in the number of Birth parents referred and offered a service has been sustained. Take up of this service within the same period remains particularly low with evidence suggesting that birth parents refer back into the service at a later date for support. WBAS has identified this as a key focus for the coming year to improve the work with birth families and take up of the service offered.
- Improving the early engagement of birth parents enabling greater information gathering of relevance to the child's adoption medical and identity issues.
- Consultation with adopters identified support for the additional training for family and friends, alongside the pre-approval training. As resources improve this will be implemented in the coming year.
- Improving the matching paperwork for children being presented to adoption panel.
- Further improvements are needed in Child Adoption Report – Annex B (CAR B) to improve quality of information. This will include rolling out additional training throughout the year.

- Further development of the IT system throughout all functions in WBAS is needed for the coming year to collate further information to feed into our reporting and identify areas of need. This will include recording life journey materials at various points of the adoption journey and capturing more closely the amount of adoption support provided in certain areas, focusing for example on therapy packages being provided and enabling more robust monitoring.
- The continuing development of policies and procedures is a key priority for the coming year.
- Continuing to address the significant backlog of non-agency assessments which is a hidden area of work as it not reported on nationally.

4.6 The service plan reflects the key priorities for the coming year with the focus being on:

- Increasing the number of enquiries and adopter assessments/approvals
- Recruiting the right adopters for the right children
- Ensuring effective planning for children whose plan is one of adoption
- Ensuring effective support services are available
- To have a workforce which is experienced and able to provide a quality service
- To have an effective and high quality adoption panel
- To improve the processes for those affected by adoption
- To embed robust governance arrangements and to develop and implement an effective quality assurance framework
- Improving the number of children who have LSM provided at placement

Conclusions

4.7 The current overall position of the regional adoption service remains generally positive but continued effort is required to ensure areas where the service has not performed as well as the previous year are improved upon. The key challenge facing the service is to increase the number of appropriate adopters to meet the growing need of those children who require adoptive placements, particularly those who are 'harder to place'. While at the same time to continue to maintain and improve on performance, achieve good outcomes for those affected by adoption and ensure that all performance indicators are on track.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

5.1 There is no impact on the Policy framework and Procedure rules.

6 Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 This report is concerned with performance information rather than policy or decision making therefore an equality impact assessment is not applicable.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications

7.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) (SSWBA) 2014, in turn, supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 within the County Borough of Bridgend. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances, the wellbeing goals of a Healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.

7.2 The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver wellbeing outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the relevant well-being goals have been considered in this report:

- **Long Term** – Social Services is demand led and the SSWBA focusses on sustainable wellbeing outcomes for the future. There is a requirement to meet the needs of people in the longer term and, because of rising demographics and increasing complexity, the transformation of services continues to be a priority.
- **Integration** – the implementation of the SSWBA and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 requires local authorities to work with partners, particularly the NHS and Education, to ensure care and support for people and support for carers is provided. The report evidences work with partners to enable children to be placed in permanent arrangements.
- **Collaboration** – The collaborative approaches described in the report, are managed and monitored through the regional collaborative management board and the National Adoption Service Advisory Group and Governance Board where there is local authority and sector stakeholder representation.
- **Involvement** – the key stakeholders are the people who use social care. There is considerable engagement including surveys, stakeholder meetings, feedback forms and the complaints process. The provision of accessible information and advice helps to ensure that the voice of adults, children and young people is heard.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising directly out of this report.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet Committee considers and notes the performance and progress of the Regional Adoption Service.

Susan Cooper
Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing
December 2018

10. **Contact Officer:** Val Jones, Regional Adoption Manager
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Email: v.jones1@westernbayadoption.org

11. Background Documents

- Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions
- The Adoptions Agencies (Wales) regulations 2007



ANNUAL REPORT AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

For Period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018

Annual Report on PI data for Western Bay Adoption Service 2017/18

Introduction

This report reflects the region's third full year's performance as a collaborative service.

It is fair to say that there are areas of performance in which the service was doing well in 2016-17 where there has been a dip in performance in 2017-18 namely the number of children waiting longer than 6 months, Adopter enquiries and approvals. However, in other areas it is pleasing to note that the service has made some significant improvements, such as the number of Adoption Orders Granted, provision of life journey materials by 2nd adoption review, number of children waiting overall has decreased and the number of placements made within Western Bay has increased. The report highlights those areas where we need to focus attention and improve, along with those where we have demonstrated improvement and provides analysis to demonstrate the reasons and challenges.

There are continued developments being progressed within the service as a whole, these include ongoing improvements to the IT system and reporting mechanisms, ongoing development of adoption support services, the progression of the Life Journey Framework regional implementation plan and the implementation of our recruitment strategy to increase the number of adopters required to meet the needs of children whose plan is for adoption.

This report provides data for the Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS) performance activity, against the national key PI measures. It provides data for the region as a whole along with comparative data across the three partner agencies, comparative data across the regions within Wales and against last year's regional performance.

Section 1 – Progress update

During 2017-18 the ongoing development of the Adoption Support service continued but has not been without its challenges. There has been a steady increase in demand for adoption support, which has impacted on capacity. In addition to this there has been an increase in the complexities of referrals, with higher levels of need warranting longer, targeted and more specialised interventions. Of particular note is an increase in contact investigations which require an analysis of existing arrangements to enable contact to be restarted where appropriate.

Areas of development within Adoption Support include:

- Co-creation/engagement with adopters particularly around life story / journey work and enabling adopters to engage in or create life story books where these are missing or inadequate
- Building on the previous training implemented in order to meet service and NAS objectives and improve adoption support delivery
- Continual improvements in the IT system as service need demands
- Greater involvement with and engagement of birth parents early on the adoption journey
- Revisit, improve and act on the analysis of the impact of adoption on siblings, particularly when these are being separated and some children remain in foster care or other permanent placements. These impacts on their longer term support needs and letterbox arrangements.

We have continued to increase our performance and ability to place children within WBAS despite the challenges faced regionally and nationally in recruiting adopters for harder to place children. This increase has resulted from improved marketing, recruitment and engagement of adopters.

Areas of development within the region have included:

- Continued development of the WBAS transitional model in relation to preparing children to move on to adoption
- Development and implementation of the Life Journey Framework-Regional Plan which includes the roll out of training in relation to the framework and the transition model throughout 2018
- Redesign and development of the Western Bay website to support recruitment
- Development of the regional recruitment strategy and marketing plan
- Facilitating open events for approved and shortly to be approved adopters. This included an, adoption support information event which was highly regarded
- A very successful profiling event which will be repeated twice annually

Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS) has also continued to play an active role in the national developments:

- Development of the national Life Journey Framework
- Partnership working with St David's and Barnardo's around the development of the new Adopting Together Project
- Engaging in the development of adoption support strategies, including joint work with AUK on promoting both Education developments and the first 1000 Day project.

The recruitment and assessment of Adopters was a key objective for 2017-18 and despite significant resource issues and lower numbers of enquiries and

approvals, there were improvements in the number of children being placed within the region. We continue to focus on:

- Service user consultation and engagement
- Better alignment of the take up of adopter assessments with the needs of children waiting for adoptive placements
- Increase the use of adoption support staff earlier in placements, specifically for more complex children
- Continue to reduce overall the time taken to approve adopters
- Increase the number of approved adopters for the more complex children through a process of an interactive website, open events and improved marketing.

The key achievements:-

- The number of children placed during the year has shown a slight increase on last year's performance, 74 compared to 71 in 2016-17. Of the 74 children placed, 30 were in the 'harder to place' category, this included, 8 sibling groups of 2, 2 sibling groups of 3 and 8 children who were either older children or children with complex needs. This demonstrates the successes and positive outcomes the service has achieved for this particular group of children
- Of the children placed during the year we continued to place more children with WBAS adopters than in interagency placements. By year end the service had placed 47 children with WB adopters and at the same time reduced the number placed in interagency placements from 32 to 27. Of the placements made 64% were placed within WB adopters, despite there being challenges in placing those deemed as 'harder to place' children and a sustained position of adopters wishing to have the more straightforward and younger children. Six of these children were placed as a direct result of the profiling event in Western Bay
- There continues to be collaboration between the Family Finding and Adoption Support function(AS) to put together packages of support for more complex children or where placements need additional support. 18 children placed for adoption this year had an ongoing service provision/package of support at the point of placement
- The region developed and organised a 'Profiling' event during the year which included some of our harder to place children who have been waiting longer than 6 months. 34 children were profiled and 17 approved adopter families were invited to consider those children as potential links/matches. This event proved very successful and resulted in 6 children being placed, a little under 10% of the total number of children placed by the region. The feedback from adopters and staff was extremely positive and following the outcome and success of the

event it has been decided to continue holding the 'Profiling' events on a regular basis within the region, with the aim of holding 2 events a year

- The number of Adoption Orders granted (AOG) has increased significantly from the previous year from 69 to 90 in 2017-18. This is an excellent achievement despite many of our adoption applications being contested. Thirty four (38%) of the applications made in the region were contested in 2017-18, resulting in delay and therefore, having an impact on the performance which is beyond the region's control
- Following a number of strategies implemented by both Western Bay Adoption Service and the local authorities there had been an increase in the number of children within the region presented to panel where there is evidence of Life Story Materials (LSM). During 2016-17, 23% had evidence of Life Story Materials in place at time of panel, during 2017-18 this figure rose to 50% amounting to a 27% increase in performance. There has also been some improvement in the number of children who had Life Story Materials provided to adopters by the time of the second adoption review, with 58% of children in the region having these in place compared to 30% in 2016-17
- Despite the reduction in the number of adopter enquiries to the service there is evidence to demonstrate that less initial enquires are being withdrawn and more being deemed suitable resulting in higher conversion rates through to assessments and approvals. This may have been impacted on through, improved responses to enquirers, literature and website information as well as the outcomes of targeted regional/national campaigns
- The average time taken to approve adopters from the inquiry stage to Agency Decision Making (ADM) decision has decreased compared to 2016-17 from 9.7 months to 8.2 months in 2017-18 which brings us closer to the national benchmark of 8 months
- The number of adoption support interventions has increased. Whilst there is some evidence this has reduced the use of higher cost commissioned services, of more note is the range of interventions. These have included more requests for engagement in resolving letterbox issues particularly between siblings
- We have developed the Western Bay Adoption Service website to make it more interactive, user friendly and to include the active offer. In the coming year all of our information leaflets will be accessible via the website. We are also developing a members only login page where adopters will be able to access key information, including our newsletter, playgroup dates and venues. There are child friendly pages included in the website also to target and encourage our children to access the site. The improved website will be launched by the end of July 2018/19

- Development and implementation of the Transition/Moving on model to assist in improving the preparation of children for adoption and in the provision of life journey material has continued to be rolled out with training to staff across the region. Targeted training has been offered for all WB staff and for all three local authority social workers and foster carers where a child is subject to a plan of adoption and a Placement Order (PO) has been granted
- An inspection took place in December 2017 which was positive and demonstrated the service was improving

Challenges / Priorities

A number of challenges have been identified for the coming year and these include –

- The service has seen a significant decrease in Adopter enquiry rates with 117 enquiries received during 2017-18 compared to the 174 received in 2016-17. The issue of adopter recruitment has been an issue nationally and data shows there is a re-emerging gap between placement need and adopter recruitment. The region is working hard on improving website access and interactivity as well as with the NAS Central team to develop a revised All Wales Marketing and Recruitment Strategy for the coming year the aim of which is to;
 - Increase interest, enquiries and approvals from prospective adopters who can meet the needs of our children and
 - Increase the number of children placed;
 - Reduce the number of children waiting;
 - Meet the need for sibling group placements and children with other complexities;
 - Reach a level of adopter sufficiency that allows for choice but does not create significant levels of adopters waiting lengthy periods

Whilst we have seen some success during the year the reality is that many adopters are still presenting themselves as wanting younger children which is in line with national research. We have identified a target for the coming year 2018-19 to achieve 63 adopter approvals. Staffing issues within Recruitment and Assessment appear to be resolving which will aid in achieving the targeted number of approvals in the coming year

- Where possible to further reduce the time from LAC, SBPD and Placement Order (PO) to placement for adoption. We anticipate this continuing to be a challenge as we are mindful that the number of children that have been waiting longer than 6 months to be matched has increased. This is reflective of the National picture and we are

currently participating in an All Wales National Recruitment Campaign to attempt to combat this. If we are successful in placing more of these children who have waited longer in the coming year we will anticipate our performance in this area to show a decline, however this will be a successful outcome for those children

- There needs to be a robust and whole region approach to the improvement of Life Story Materials (LSM) in relation to quality and timeliness. The current NAS measure is by 2nd review however, WBAS with the support of the senior management in the LAs has agreed that this measure should be the longest time and the best practice aim is to have these in place at the point of placement. Our IT system will need to be developed in order to capture this data at various points, i.e. match and placement of adoption. Although this measure has improved during the year close monitoring and continued development will be needed to maintain and improve our performance in this area to achieve the revised national benchmark of 100%
- Performance in the number of birth parents referred and offered a service has been sustained. Take up of this service within the same period remains particularly low with evidence suggesting that birth parents refer back into the service at a later date for support. WBAS has identified this as a key focus for the coming year to improve the work with birth families and the take up of the service offered
- Improving the early engagement of birth parents enabling greater information gathering of relevance to the child's adoption medical and identity issues
- Consultation with adopters, identified support for the additional training for family and friends, alongside the pre-approval training. As resources improve this will be implemented in the coming year
- Improving the matching paperwork for children being presented to adoption panel
- Further improvements are needed in Child Adoption Report – Annex B (CAR B) to improve quality of information. This will include rolling out additional training throughout the year
- Further development of the IT system throughout all functions in WBAS is needed for the coming year to collate further information to feed into our reporting and identify areas of need. This will include recording life journey materials at various points of the adoption journey and capturing more closely the amount of adoption support provided in certain areas, focusing for example on therapy packages being provided and enabling more robust monitoring
- The continuing development of policies and procedures is a key priority for the coming year

- Addressing the significant backlog of non-agency assessments through a number of strategies

Section 2 - Performance

The purpose of this section is to highlight some of the key performance areas for WBAS for the year 2017/18. The report is based on data that has been supplied to the NAS on a quarterly basis throughout the year and provides comparison data against last year's performance.

1. Children Referred 2017/18 - 187

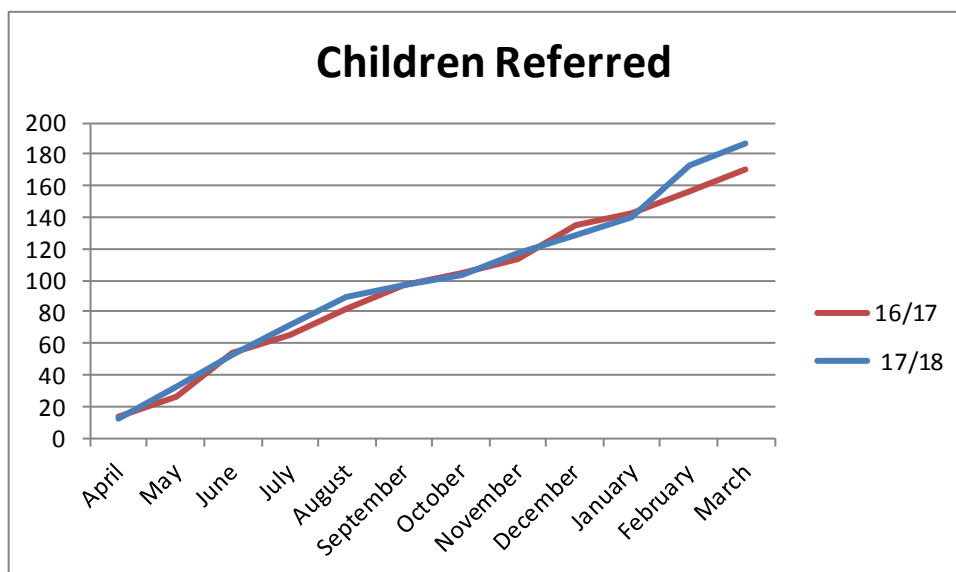
In the first three quarters of 2017-18 there was a downward trend in referrals, however a spike in quarter 4 resulted in the number of referrals at year end rising to 187. This shows a 10% increase on the 170 received last year.

Children Referred TOTAL	BCBC	NPT	SWAN	
2017/18	39	51	97	187
2016/17	72	43	55	170
2015/16	58	45	92	195
2014/15	68	56	79	203

Of the 170 referrals received in 2016-17, 90 were withdrawn, leaving just 80 active referrals. This could indicate why performance, in some measures this year has shown a decrease.

Whilst it is too soon to report on the whole of the year 2017-18, it is noted that at the end of Q3 129 referrals were made and 72 have been withdrawn to date (56%) leaving 57 active referrals at end of Q3. If this trend continues it will be likely to be reflected in lower figures for Placement Orders and children placed in the coming year.

At end of Q3 comparison of the local authority figures show that Swansea had 65 referrals, of which 42 were withdrawn leaving 23 active referrals (66% dropout). NPT had 43 referrals of which 25 were withdrawn, leaving 18 active referrals (58% dropout). BCBC had 21 referrals of which 5 were withdrawn leaving 16 active referrals (24% dropout).



Comparative data for other regions in Wales show that WB are the second highest in receiving the numbers of referrals. Figures for other regions are as follows Mid and West Wales Adoption Service (MWW) 65, North Wales Adoption Service (NWAS) 53, South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) 184, Valley, Vale and Cardiff (VVC) 245.

The overall figure across Wales is showing a slight decrease in the number of referrals for 2017-18.

2. Should Be Placed Decision (SBPD)

The number of children that progressed to have a 'should be placed decision' in Western Bay totalled 77 a decrease of 35 compared to 2016/17.

Compared to other regions across Wales, WBAS had the third highest number of SBPD with VVC having the highest at 120. MWW 46, NWAS 31, SEWAS 101.

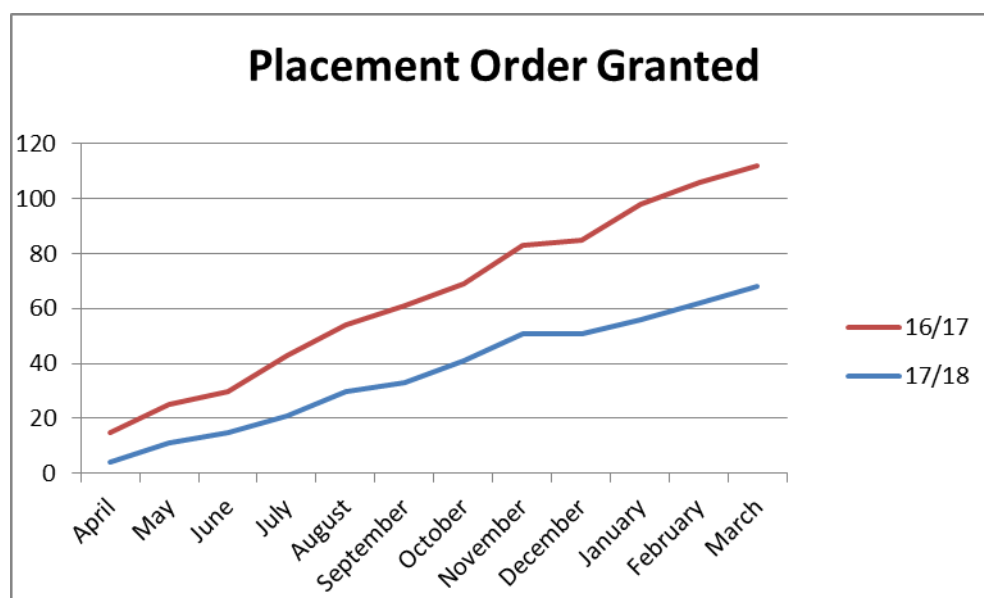
3. Placement Orders Granted = 68

WBAS regional data

There has been a decrease in the number of POs granted during 2017-18 with 68 being granted compared to 112 in 2016-17, showing a 39% decrease. The data in the second table below shows a significant decrease in the number of POs granted in two of the LAs with one LA decreasing by more than half.

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
2017/18	15	18	18	17	68
2016/17	30	31	24	27	112

POG	BCBC	NPT	SWAN	TOTAL
2017/18	22	26	20	68
2016/17	36	23	53	112
2015/16	31	26	26	83
2014/15	25	36	33	94



The figures for other individual regions across Wales show an upward trend for PO being granted compared to WBAS which shows a downward trend. MWW 43, NWAS 50, SEWAS 95, VVC 105.

Overall across Wales the number of PO reported as being granted by courts in 2017-18 shows a small reduction, 375 to 357 around 4%.

4. Children Placed = 74

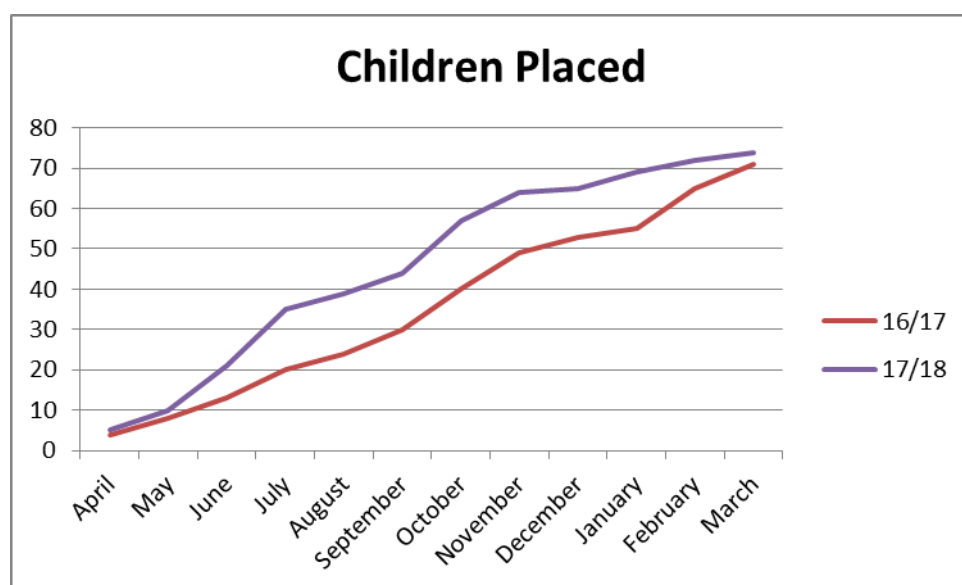
Statistics evidence that during the year there had been a consistent number of children being placed for adoption by WBAS in the first three quarters of 2017/18. Quarter 4 however shows a decrease in the number placed. Those being placed are a combination of children that represent harder to place and

Appendix A

more straight forward children. Overall there was a slight increase in the numbers placed by the region compared to 2016/17.

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
2017/18	21	23	21	9	74
2016/17	13	17	23	18	71
2015/16	20	25	21	27	93

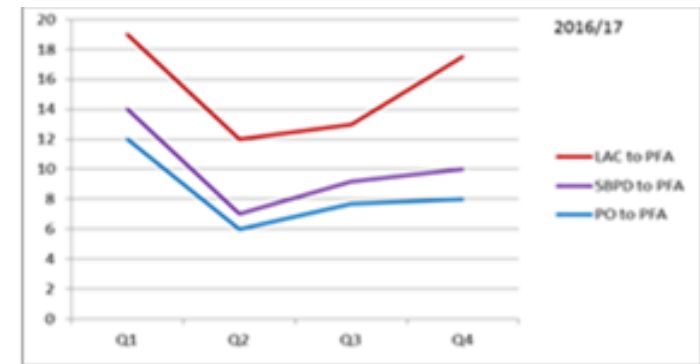
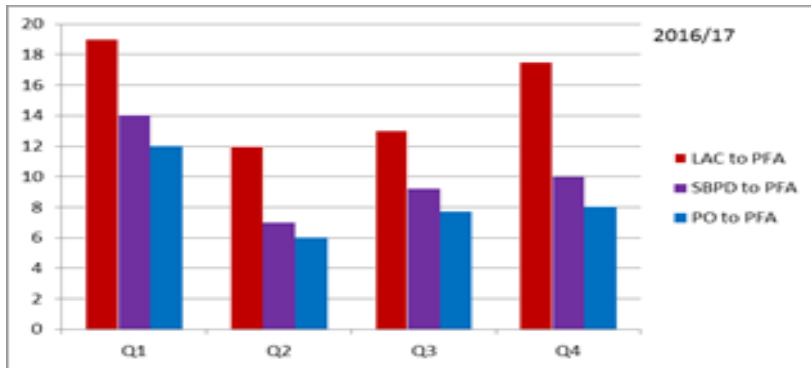
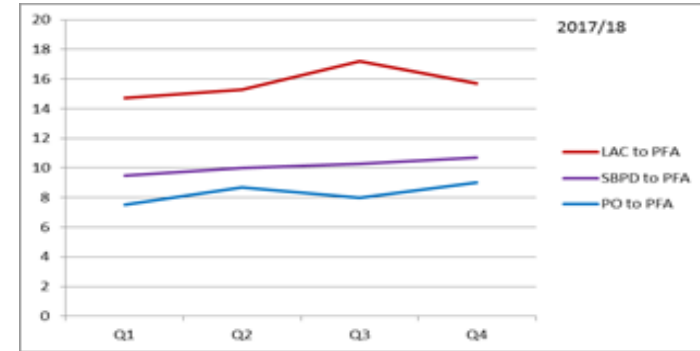
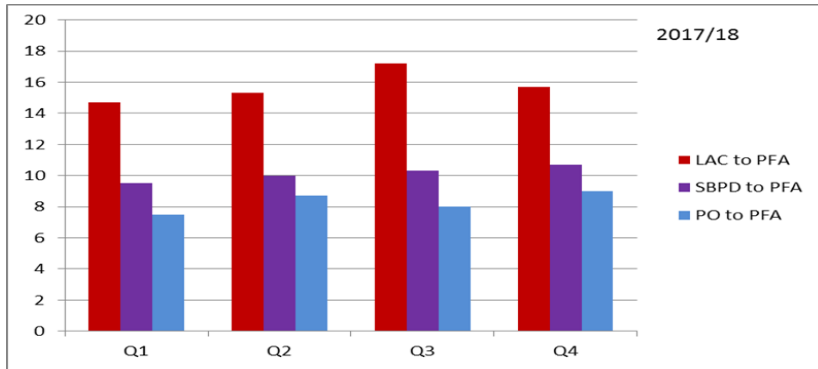
Children Placed	BCBC	NPT	SWAN	TOTAL
2017/18	24	22	28	74
2016/17	24	17	30	71
2015/16	24	40	29	93
2014/15	28	28	37	93



Performance in other regions across Wales is as follows, MWW 35, NWS 41, SEWAS 71, VVC 86.

The National figures show the number of children placed overall was 307 in 2017-18 slightly more than the previous year.

5. Average Time (in months) Taken for Children to be Placed.



Average Time in Months (days) Taken for children to be placed

	16/17					17/8				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year Total
LAC to PFA	19.6 (590)	11.6 (347)	13.2 (396)	17.6 (527)	15.1 (453)	14 (421)	15.3 (460)	17.3 (518)	15.6 (469)	15.7 (470)
SBPD to PFA	14 (417)	7 (222)	9.2 (281)	10 (312)	10 (283)	9.1 (272)	10.1 (303)	10.3 (309)	10.7 (321)	10 (299)
PO to PFA	12.4 (373)	6 (17)	7.7 (235)	8 (240)	8.4 (255)	12.4 (373)	6 (17)	7.7 (235)	8 (240)	8.2 (246)

LAC to Placed for Adoption (PFA) – 15.7 months (Average)

The average length of time taken from 'becoming looked after' (LAC) to placement for adoption is 15.7. This has not met the national benchmark of 13 months and further work is needed within the Local Authorities (LAs) to address this.

Some of the delay in this area however, will remain out of the control of the service, for example, 3 children who all took over 900 days each were the result of a delay in care proceedings. One of these children took over 900 days from LAC to placement, however, proceeded from PO placement in only 104 days.

There were 19 children who were deemed 'harder to place' due to them being in a sibling group, having complex needs or were older children. Of these 1 child who took 917 days from LAC to placement had a high level of need and 1 child who took 1152 days was an older child –7 years.

The National Average overall for the year was 14.5 months. This figure has reduced in 2017-18 demonstrating that regions are placing children more quickly from a child becoming looked after to being placed for adoption.

Of the number of children placed across all regions 56% were placed within the 13 month benchmark. Two regions (SEWAS & VVC) were within the 13 month benchmark.

SBPD to Placed for Adoption (PFA) – 10.2 months (Average)

The average time it takes for children from Should Be Placed Decision (SBPD) to placement for adoption (PFA) is 10.2 months. There have been considerable successes with a number of children placed in very short timescales. The shortest time being 102 days, (3.4 months). This is attributed to the close working between Recruitment and Assessment (R&A) and Family Finding (FF) teams to identify early the needs of children and adopters so that where suitable the link can be progressed without delay. This measure has been interrogated and it is clear that whilst there is a slight drop in performance, there are more complex children being placed which has necessitated increased social work activity and as explained above there were 3 children who took considerably longer to place who impact on these timescales.

Comparative data for this measure across other regions was not available at the time of completing this report.

Placement Order to PFA – 8.3 months (Average)

The average time it takes for children from PO to placement for adoption has increased marginally from 8.2 month to 8.3 months. This is not within the national benchmark of 6 months or under. 43% of children were placed within the 6 month benchmark with the shortest time being 85 days (2.8 months).

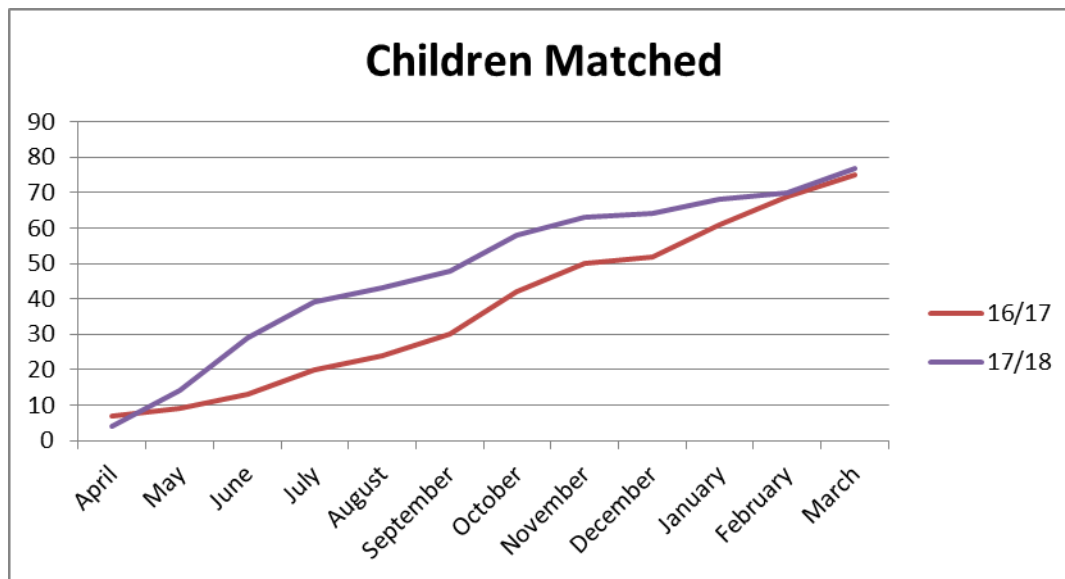
National performance in relation to Placement Order to Placement across the regions is encouraging with the average being 7.9 months. Reaching the benchmark of 6 months remains a challenge throughout the regions, although 49% of children placed in Q4 were placed within the 6 month benchmark.

Figures for other regions are, MWW 7.4 months, NWAS 8.6 months, SEWAS 7.7 months & VVC 7.7 months.

6. **Children Matched = 77**

This is slightly higher than the performance achieved in 2016-17 which was 75 but remains fairly consistent over the two years.

Matched	BCBC	NPT	SWAN	TOTAL
2017/18	26	23	28	77
2016/17	26	17	32	75
2015/16	25	39	30	94
2014/15	28	27	36	91



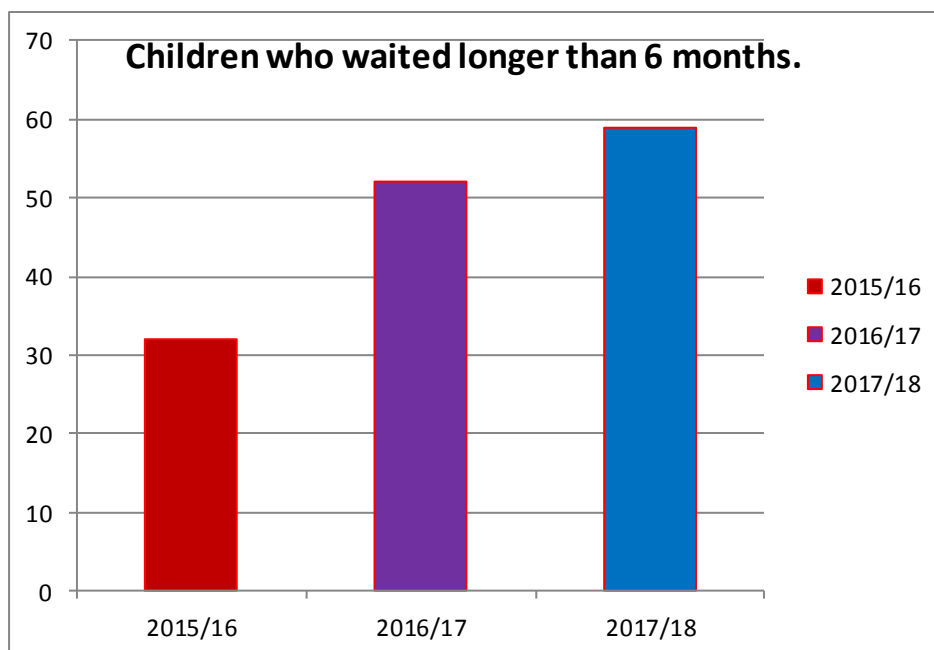
Performance in other regions is, MWW 38, NWAS 38, SEWAS 73, VVC 89.

7. Number of children matched who have waited longer than 6 months to progress from SBPD to agency decision to approved match = 59

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
2017/18	24(83%)	15(79%)	12(75%)	8(61%)	59(77%)
2016/17	7 (54%)	12 (71%)	12 (55%)	21 (91%)	52 (67%)
2015/16	12 (50%)	8 (32%)	8 (31%)	4 (21%)	32 (34%)

The number of children who waited longer than 6 months was 59, this shows a slight increase in the number of children who have waited longer than 6 months from SBP compared to 2016-17 which was 52.

At 77% we remain above the benchmark of 40%. Other regions across Wales have also seen an increase in the number of children who wait longer than 6 months. Figures are, MWW 19 (50%), NWAS 24 (63%), SEWAS 48 (66%), VVC 60 (67%)



A number of factors have played a part in this drop in performance this includes:

- An increase in complex and harder to place children
- Adopters to meet the needs of those children are not readily available both within the region and wider afield resulting in delays

Whilst strategies in WBAS have been very successful, for example, identifying potential adopters earlier and working with adoption support to explore what packages of support are needed to enable a placement to proceed, more systematic work is needed on harder to place children.

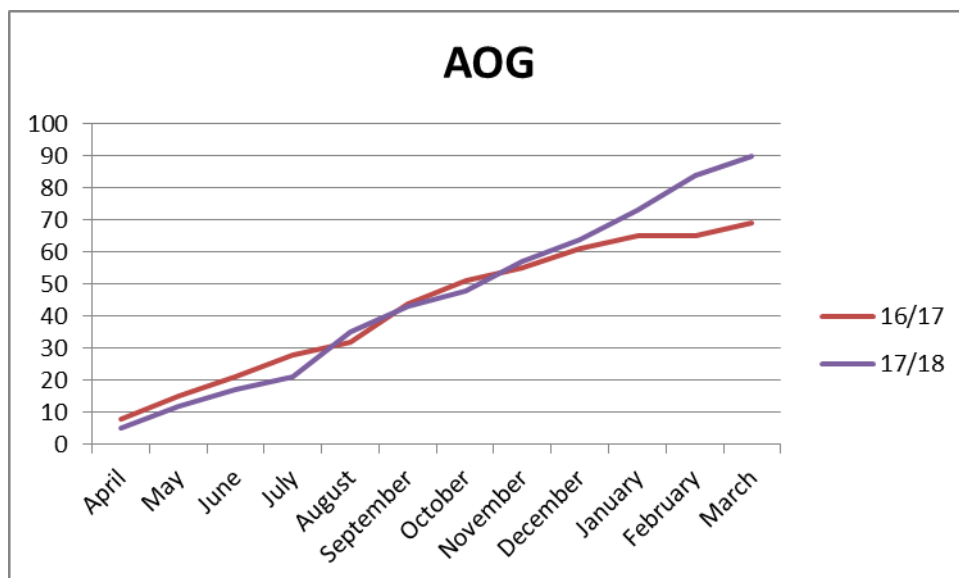
This is reflecting the national picture, whereby we know that the number of children waiting longer than 6 months nationally has increased. Due to these concerns we are currently participating in a national campaign to try and combat this problem, if this campaign is successful and we place some of these children we would anticipate this figure will continue to be high in the coming year.

In addition the region has agreed to participate in the pilot for the 'Adopting Together Project' and have identified 8 children who have waited longer than 12 months that can be considered for referral to the new scheme. This will hopefully assist in reducing the numbers who wait longer.

8. Adoption Orders Granted (AOG) = 90

This figure has demonstrated a significant increase with 21 more adoption orders being granted in 2017-18 compared to 69 in 2016-1. This increase has been achieved despite the increased number of contested adoption applications by birth families during the year.

AOG's	BCBC	NPT	SWAN	TOTAL
2017/18	28	28	34	90
2016/17	12	27	28	69
2015/16	24	36	34	94
2014/15	21	34	40	95



There are currently 16 Adoption Order applications submitted to court and are at various stages of the process.

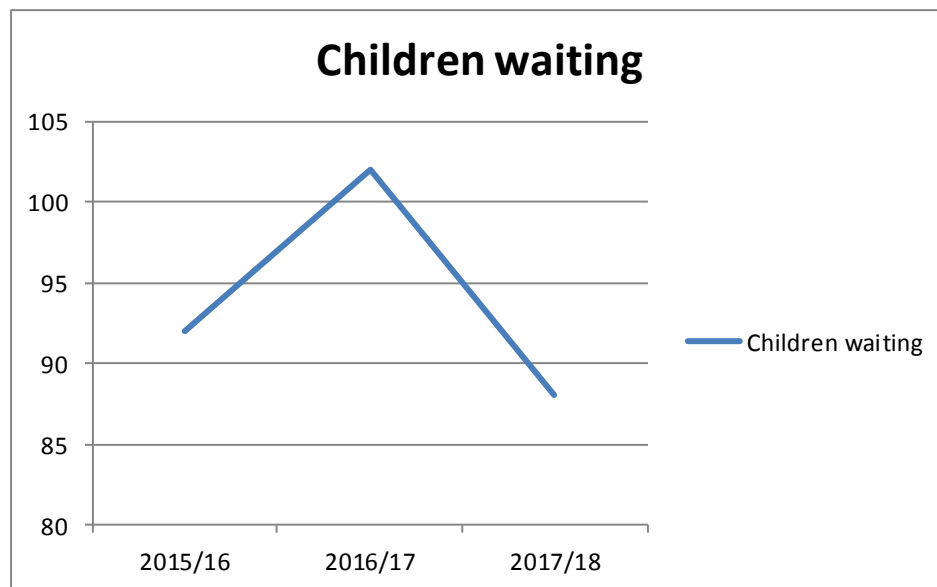
In comparison with other regions across Wales WBAS is the highest achieving with MWW 22, NWAS 34, SEWAS 73, VVC 71. Only WBAS and VVC showed an increase with other regions achieving less than the previous year.

9. Children Waiting = 88

The number of children waiting overall has decreased by 14 compared with the figure for the previous year 2016/17 - 112. Of the 88 children waiting at year end 2017/18, 74 (84%) of those had a SBPD decision and a PO but have not yet been matched, 6 (6.8%) children had SBPD and a PO and were matched.

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	End of year
2017/18	96	83	82	88	88
2016/17	97	100	100	102	102
2015/16	105	111	74	92	92
2014/15	101	94	100	92	92

Of the 74 children with SBPD and PO still waiting at year end we had 22 links identified, 22 matches identified and 12 children where a change of plan was being considered. Family finding/searching continued for the remaining 18 children.



The data for other regions is MWW 34, NWAS 46, SEWAS 76, VVC 117.

The National figures show that the level of children being placed is not keeping pace with the levels of new children being made subject to placement orders. All regions except Western Bay have seen an increase in the number of children waiting with some regions having a significant increase over the period of this data.

At the end of March 2018 two regions reported that some children had firm links or matches that were proceeding but had yet to be formally agreed, WBAS being one of these regions.

This amounted to 22% of all children waiting across Wales and exemplifies the fluid nature of the service. It is likely that some children in other regions would be at a similar stage. Nonetheless adopter recruitment is not keeping pace with the level of children waiting or those becoming subject to PO.

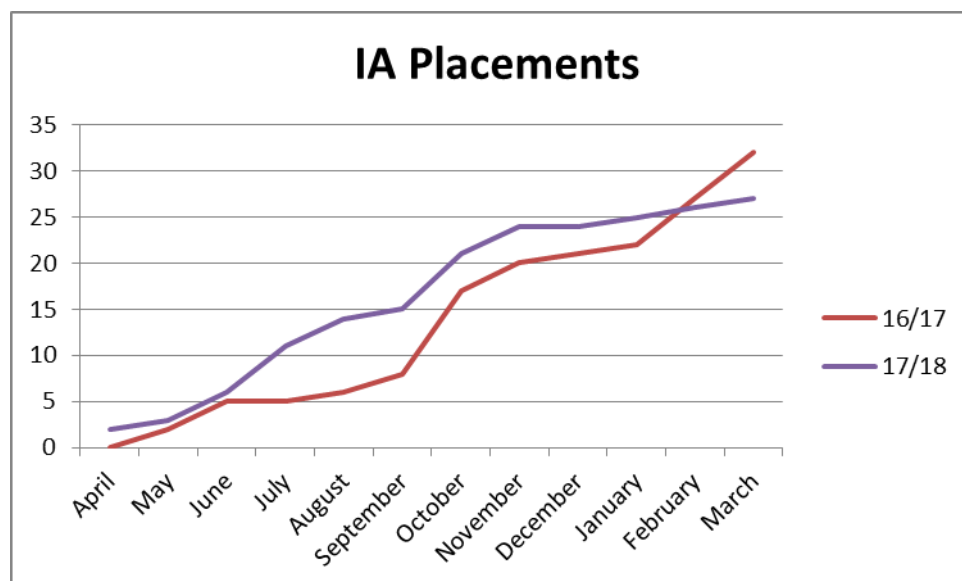
10. Number of Inter-Agency Placements = 27

Of the 74 children placed with approved adopters in the period, 27 (36%) were placed in IA placements, this is lower than in 2016-17 and is positive that we continue to place more children within the region.

The majority of our IA placements were in respect of sibling groups and children with complex needs. Of the 10 sibling groups placed (22 children) 8 were placed outside of WBAS in interagency placements (18 children), and of the 8 harder to place children that were placed in single placements 4 were placed in interagency placements. Of the 30 children who were identified as harder to place 73% were placed in IA placements.

The regional/local picture is outlined in the table and graph below.

IAs	BCBC	NPT	SWAN	TOTAL
2017/18	5	10	12	27 (36%)
2016/17	11	6	15	32(45%)
2015/16	8	20	7	35(38%)
2014/15	24	20	15	59 (63%)



11. Number of WBAS Placements = 47

We continue to place more children within the region than externally, 47 children this year compared to 39 in 2016-17.

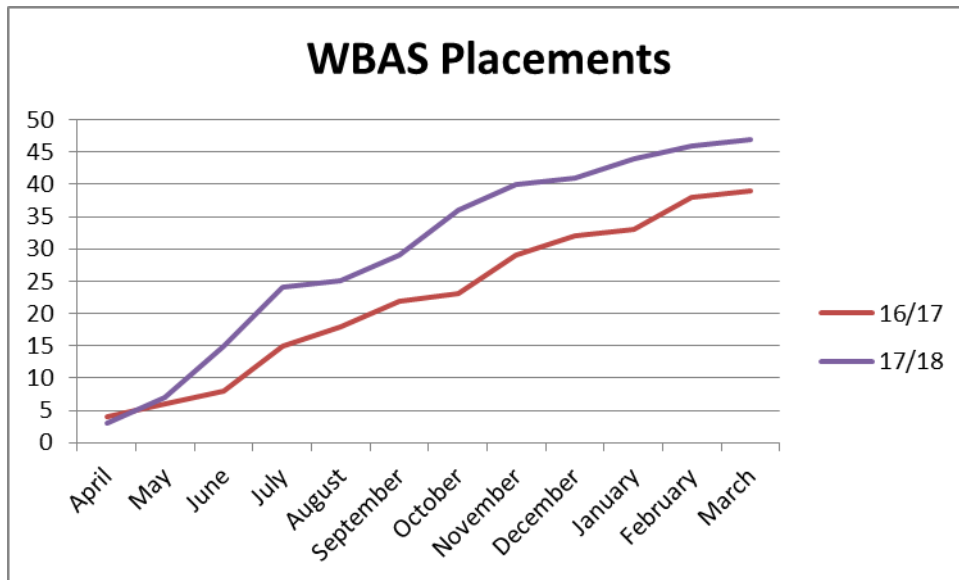
The arrangements/processes in place that contribute to achieving this are:

- Continued close liaison between FF and R&A through the monthly linking meetings remains a strong and effective activity in WBAS to identify children and adopters locally
- Links made locally have the potential to be achieved in a very timely manner given that early information is available and access to adoption support is within the service
- Adapting marketing and recruitment activity to prioritise adopter enquiries who can meet the needs of children waiting
- Development of robust assessment, marketing and information materials
- Training and use of adoption support has resulted in a number of adopters taking more complex children
- Use of the Welsh Register and Link Maker to assist adopters to see in detail a range of children, usually with complex needs who are waiting for placements
- The 'Profiling' event contributed to success in linking and matching adopters to children who had not previously been considered within the normal linking processes.

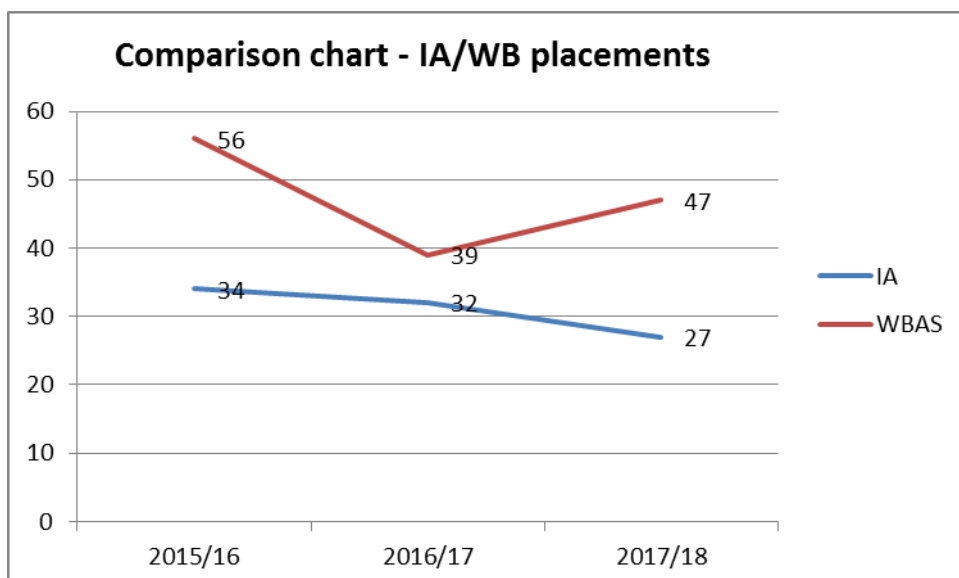
Due to the success of the regional profiling event in 2017-18 there is a plan to hold at least 2 events a year as part of the recruitment strategy, with an event taking place on 20th June 2018.

The regional/local performance of children placed within WBAS is outlined in the table and graph below.

WBAS	BCBC	NPT	SWAN	TOTAL
2017/18	19	12	16	47 (64%)
2016/17	13	11	15	39 (55%)
2015/16	14	18	22	56 (62%)
2014/15	7	9	18	34 (36.5%)



The comparison chart below for the last 3 years demonstrates that the trend in the use of IA placements has continued to decrease. While at the same time placements found within WBAS has increased showing a positive widening in the gap.

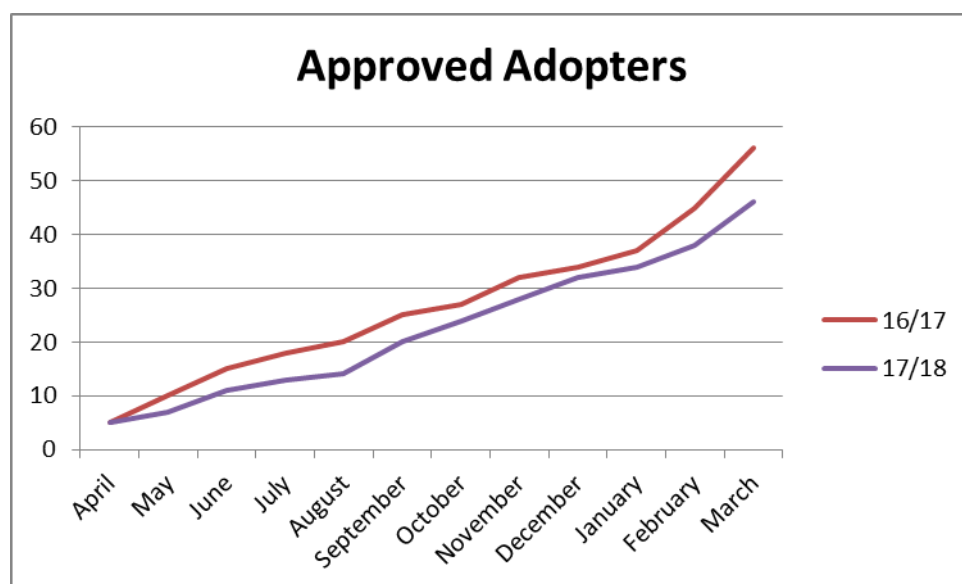


12. Number of Adopter Approvals = 46

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
2017/18	11	9	12	14	46
2016/17	15	10	9	22	56
2015/16	18	16	15	4	53
2014/15	6	12	19	8	45

We have seen an 18% decrease in performance for 2017-18. This is in part due to an increase in adopters with complex issues, delay in assessments being completed due to the applicant's circumstances but mainly reflects a sustained period of staff absence in excess of 30% at times during the year.

In the 2016-17 56 adopters were approved generating 64 placements. Performance for 2017-18 was lower than anticipated with 46 adopters approved, generating 51 placements. (Projected figure for approvals for the year was 50).



Western Bay is working towards the aims of the revised national marketing and recruitment strategy to explore ways of not only increasing our adopter numbers but looking at how to recruit the right adopters for our children waiting. This has included a radio campaign launched by NAS that featured across Wales - Heart in South Wales and Capital in North Wales. We

have also been engaging with a Marketing company- Cowshed, commissioned by NAS with the aid of Welsh Government grant money to work with 3 of the regions WBAS, VVC and SEWAS, using their expertise to enhance and build on our local marketing/recruitment plan.

Performance in other agencies which includes regions and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VVAs) within Wales is as follows, MWW 29, NWAS 31, SEWAS 39, VVC 46, St Davids 16, Barnardos 5.

Overall 212 adopter approvals were achieved across Wales in 2017-18. The numbers seen in the last two years are lower than the first two years of regional services within NAS being operational, 236 in 2016-17 and 266 in 2015-16.

Current analysis by NAS of the current adopter gap indicates that at least 459 placements will be needed across Wales to place those children with PO'S, showing that there is a considerable gap to bridge through National and Regional recruitment activity.

13. Average Time to Approve Adopters = 7.9 Months

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	AVERAGE
2017/18	7.2 Months (217 days)	9.9 Months (296 days)	8.4 Months (251 days)	6.7 Months (200 days)	7.9 Months (236 days)
2016/17	9.7 Months (294 days)	10.7 Months (324 days)	9.5 Months (286 days)	9 Months (270 days)	9.7 Months (293 days)
2015/16	10.2 Months (294 days)	10.6 Months (320 days)	10.8 Months (326 days)	8.8 Months (264 Days)	10.1 Months (313 days)
2014/15	10.2 Months (232 days)	8.6 Months (305 days)	12.3 Months (255 days)	8.8 Months (310 days)	9.8 Months (275 days)

Despite pressures within the service, and a decrease in approvals we have seen an overall improvement in the average time taken to approve adopters

within the region which has fallen from 9.7 in 2016-17 to 7.9 months in 2017-18. The chart clearly demonstrates that this has been a continued area of improvement over the last 3 years showing success in our average performance and surpassing the national benchmark of 8 months.

The Service and NAS also collect performance in respect of the total length of time and average time it takes to approve adopters from the formal application to Agency Decision to Approve. Performance in respect of this is also good. Welsh Government guidance indicates that this stage should take 6 months. Western Bay were slightly over this at 6.6 months with the national average being 6.2 months.

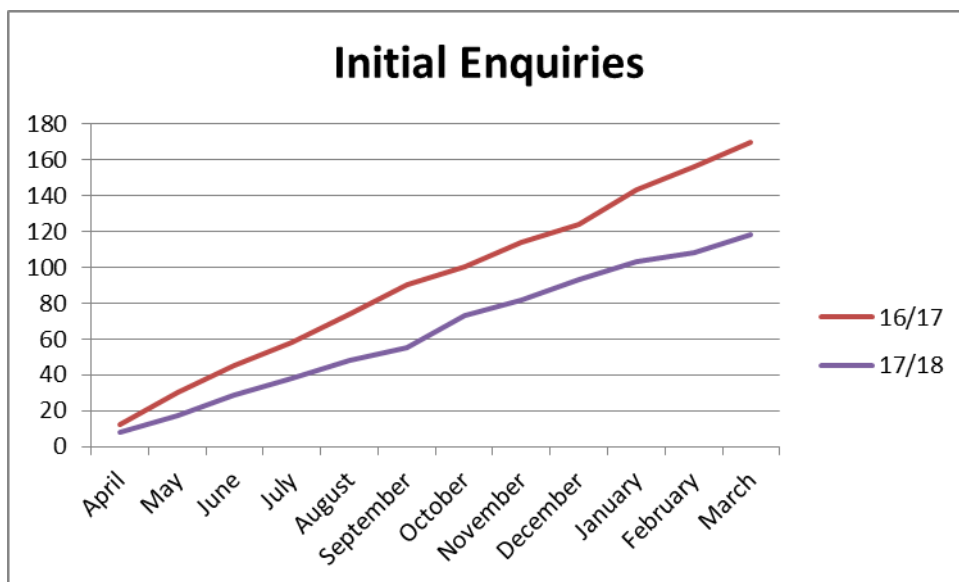
14. Numbers of Initial Adopter Enquires - 118

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
2017/18	29	26	38	25	118
2016/17	45	46	37	47	175
2015/16	41	59	34	42	177
2014/15	44	35	26	33	138

There has been a significant decrease in the number of enquiries in 2017/18 falling from 175 to 118 despite NAS running an extensive campaign which WBAS were actively involved in. It is fair to say that despite this campaign, holding events locally and actively participating in national adoption week, the number of enquiries has continued to decline.

Even with these efforts we are aware that nationally as well as locally those wishing to adopt still wish to be considered for younger and less complex children. From our close working relationship within the service it is evident to see that there remains a need to approve adopters for young children alongside those deemed to be the harder to place.

We have this year invested in developing our website and this will be launched by the end of July 2018/19. Our new website will be more user friendly, easy to navigate, and will provide information for adopters to access and the option to request further information at the push of a button. We have also looked at how to get us to the top of any search engine when potential adopters are searching 'Adoption', and how to direct more traffic through our website. In the coming year with our new website we will also be able to access website analytics which will give us information to further scrutinise.



Overall enquires across Wales increased by 20% during 2017/18 indicating that improved marketing is starting to have an impact.

Response times to enquiries, within 5 working days, remains good with most agencies and regions achieving 100% over the year.

National data analysis shows that the conversion rate of enquiries into application has varied across the year by region/agency. The average conversation rate for enquiry to assessment in 2017-18 was 20% a similar level to the previous year. Conversion rates in regions are generally higher than in the voluntary sector which may indicate that targeted recruitment is beginning to have an impact for regional services. This is positive; we need to increase interest and approvals from more prospective adopters who can meet the needs of our children as well as understanding the changing pattern of enquiries and ensuring we have the capacity to assess and support more adopters.

The number of adopter assessments that had commenced in Western Bay during 2017-18 was 64, slightly lower than 2016-17 at 69.

Overall across Wales 277 assessments were commenced in 2017-18 compared to 246 in the whole of 2016-17 demonstrating a positive step in increasing on this measure. This increase will make a contribution to closing the gap but bigger increases are needed. The figures for other agencies /

regions were; MWW 29, NWAS 31, SEWAS 67, VVC 47, WBAS 64, St Davids 26, Barnardos 13.

15. Life Journey Material

Table 1.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
No. of children presented to panel for matching	28	16	13	11	68
No. of children where evidence of LJM materials undertaken.	5	10	11	8	34
Direct Work	7	3	6	2	18

Table 2.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
No. children who had a 2 nd adoption review in the quarter.	13	20	32	21	86
No. children placed for adoption in the quarter where life journey material has been provided to adopters by the time of the 2 nd adoption review.	3 (23%)	14 (70%)	20 (63%)	13 (62%)	50 (58%)

Performance has improved in this area with an average of 58% of materials provided at the second adoption review compared to 30% in 2016/17. The national benchmark for this performance measure in 2017/18 was for 75% of children to receive life journey material by the 2nd adoption review, therefore the region fell short of this. A variety of measures/actions have been undertaken across the region in partnership with the 3 local authorities to continue to influence improvements to performance related to life story work.

- Within two Authorities life story work project groups have been established
- Standards for life journey work are being developed and will be shared with WBAS and the three LAs
- Briefing events on the National Life Journey Framework have taken place for managers and staff involved in undertaking life journey work with children

- Training has been commissioned on the transition model and is being rolled out in the first half of 2018 for social workers and foster carers with children who have a Placement Order
- 'Champions' have been identified within each Local Authority to act as links with WBAS for life journey work and Fostering
- Measures are being put in place to capture the number and for the first time quality of materials at matching panel and aim as good practice for these to be provided by time of placement
- The need to ensure life journey materials and evidence of preparing children age appropriately for adoption is being fed back to the LAs to ensure where materials are not available this is being addressed
- Development of an audit tool which is being considered within the Principal Officer group for use across the region.
- Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) in each LA have been advised they are to cover this matter in adoption reviews and to ensure it is being undertaken and captured as part of the process

Comparative table.	MWW	NWAS	SEWAS	VVC	WBAS
No. children who had a 2nd adoption review in the year.	26	46	42	72	86
No. children placed for adoption in the in the year where life journey material has been provided to adopters by the time of the 2nd adoption review.	24 (92%)	21 (46%)	25 (60%)	49 (68%)	50 (58%)

Overall across the regions we have during 2017-18 begun to see improvements in the availability of life journey materials for children and their families which could be linked to the implementation of the Life Journey Framework development project and the focus on this across Wales. The national average across all regions for children placed during the year that had their life journey materials by the 2nd adoption review was 62%. Nationally we have continued to see improvement from the baseline year of

2014-15 which was 24%; with the following years showing 49% in 2015-16 and 45% in 2016-17.

For the coming year 2018-19 the benchmark for this measure has been increased to 100%, which will prove challenging for all regions.

Adoption Support

16. Number of Birth Parents referred and who were offered a service.

2017/18	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Referred.	102	81	62	118	363
Offered a service.	97	81	60	113	351

2016/17	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Referred.	63	80	68	63	274
Offered a service.	63	80	67	56	266

The numbers of birth parents referred to the adoption service has increased in 2017-18 which is in keeping with the child referrals. Good performance has been maintained in the offer of a service being made; with 97% of birth parents referred being offered a service. There were a number of birth parents whose whereabouts were not known at the time the service received the referral and this impacted on the figures shown above.

Our performance in relation to those birth parents who take up a service within the same period as being offered a service is particularly low at 2%. Take up within 2017-18 was also low nationally at 21% similar to previous years. We know however that many birth parents choose to take up offers of support at a later stage. WB has identified that this will be a focus within the region for the coming year to improve the work with birth families and the take up of the service offered.

The number of birth parents who took up a service during 2017-18 that were referred and offered in a different period was 54, and as above suggests that more birth parents make contact with the service at a later stage.

17. Number and Percentage of children placed for adoption that have had an assessment for adoption support and the plan has been discussed with adopters.

2016/17	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
No. who have had an assessment.	13	15	23	18	69
Plan has been discussed.	13 (100%)	15 (100%)	23 (100%)	18 (100%)	69 (100%)

2017/18	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
No. who have had an assessment.	21	23	21	9	74
Plan has been discussed.	21(100%)	23(100%)	21(100%)	9 (100%)	74 (100%)

For this measure, 100% of children placed have an adoption support plan in place at the time of matching panel, in preparation for the placement for adoption. In every case, the support plan is shared with adopters and they are consulted on the content

17. Adoption Support Referrals

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total 17/18	Total 16/17
Number of other birth parents who took up a service in quarter	17	19	11	7	54	21
Number of requests for an assessment for post adoption support from birth siblings in quarter	4	2	0	0	6	8
Number of requests for an assessment for post adoption support from other adults (relatives/former guardians) affected by the adoption of a particular child in quarter	4	3	0	9	16	22



Western Bay

ADOPTION SERVICE

GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU

Bae'r Gorllewin

Comparative Chart	MWW	NWAS	SEWAS	VVC	WBAS
Number of other birth parents who took up a service in year	25	5	34	1	54
Number of requests for an assessment for post adoption support from birth siblings in year	6	5	9	2	6
Number of requests for an assessment for post adoption support from other adults (relatives/former guardians) affected by the adoption of a particular child in year	8	5	6	0	16

In the coming year the AS function will continue to work more closely with FF and neighbouring regional services to improve the amount of services and information for birth parents. This will include:

- WB to consider playing a role in completing the birth parent referral and medical forms to improve timeliness, information gathered and birth parent engagement at the start of the adoption process
- Consider an early referral meeting to identify the key tasks, adoption support needs and to improve quality
- Improving the information for birth parents to ensure the wording is more inviting on all communications
- Working with colleagues in two neighbouring regions to explore the feasibility and viability of birth parent support groups.
- Training and process redesign in matching children to ensure sibling attachments are given greater credence, considered on a case by case basis and there are mechanisms in place to preserve and promote sibling relationships.
- Of particular focus will be the development and improvement in work completed around sibling attachments.

There continues to be evidence of rising adoption support needs, with an increase in referrals across some aspects of adoption support particularly requests for assessment of need including direct work/therapeutic intervention and letterbox work. Letterbox is showing approximately a 14% increase in active letterbox cases within the last year. Interventions have taken longer with more complex needs being identified. In 2016/17 the numbers of new assessments for post adoption support were 23. For 2017/18 the numbers increased by more than half to 53, with the highest increase being in assessments completed for adoption allowances.

18. Birth Records and Intermediary Services Referrals

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total 17/18	Total 16/17
Number of requests for access to birth records in quarter (BRC)	10	14	6	6	36	45
Number of requests for Intermediary Services (IS) in quarter	3	8	2	5	18	18

During 2017-18 there has been almost a 25% decrease in requests for Birth Record Counselling (BRC), requests for Intermediary Services (IS) has remained consistent with the previous year 2016-17. Alongside this the service has improved how BRC and IS cases are monitored and allocated, with priority being given to pre 1975 cases.

A comparison of adoption support requests with other regions is demonstrated in the table below

	MWW	NWAS	SEWAS	VVC	WBAS
Number of requests for access to birth records in year	36	40	32	49	36
Number of requests for Intermediary Services (IS) in year	32	37	9	51	18

In relation to access to birth records the national trend is showing a reduction in the number of requests for this service, however, the national trend for intermediary services shows that there has been an increase in requests in 3 of the regions and a decrease in 2 regions which includes WBAS.

Date of report update 14th June 2018
Val Jones

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BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING

10th JANUARY 2019

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

CARE INSPECTORATE WALES

INSPECTION OF WESTERN BAY ADOPTION SERVICE – ACTION PLAN

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present the Committee with an overview of the Inspection findings and recommendations relating to the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Inspection of Western Bay Adoption Service (November 2017).
- 1.2 To update the Committee on the progress made in addressing the recommendations and the action plan that had been developed in response.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priority/priorities:-
 1. **Helping people to be more self-reliant** – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.
 2. **Smarter use of resources** – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities.

3. Background

- 3.1 In March 2016, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW (previously CSSIW) required that all regional adoption services complete a self-evaluation of their regional adoption service. This was the first phase in implementing the revised adoption framework for inspection following the introduction of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) 2015. Following the analysis of the evaluations the Inspectorate decided to pause the inspection programme to allow services time to implement their plans.
- 3.2 In August 2017, CIW notified all regional adoption services that they would be required to update their self-assessments, this only required information about the progress in the development areas identified in the previous assessment along with the most recent adoption data for the year 2016/17. At the same time regions were advised that CIW's intention was to identify one regional adoption service that would be inspected before the end of 2017 to pilot the revised methodology. Alongside this there would also be a review of the regional and national adoption arrangements. The outcome of this work would be reported on and the remaining regional services and independent adoption services would be inspected during 2018.

- 3.3 In September 2017, Western Bay Adoption Service was notified by CIW that the region had been selected as a pilot for the revised inspection methodology. The inspection was to focus on how the service 'promotes the wellbeing and safety of children and young people through the provision of services and placements with families who can safely meet their needs and improve the likelihood of them achieving best possible outcomes'.
- 3.4 The inspection would also evaluate the quality of leadership, management and governance arrangements in place to develop and support service delivery.
- 3.5 The dates of the inspection were as follows:

28 November-1 December 2017

In advance of the fieldwork, the Service was required to submit a range of advance information/documentation in the following areas:-

- Policy and Procedures
- Strategy and Structures
- Key Documents and Operational Protocols
- Blank Templates
- Cabinet/Committee Reports
- Development Work
- Performance Data and Quality Assurance
- Workforce

This required the coordination and provision of 386 documents/items in total from within the service, from the three local authority partners and from health, education and the Voluntary Adoption Agency partners.

- 3.6 The Inspection team consisted of three Regulatory Inspectors and one Lead Inspector. During the fieldwork, CIW inspected the work by assessing a sample of 25 from 445 cases, these included children referred to the service, adopters pre-approval, adopters waiting a match for more than 12 months, adopters post approval where matching had begun, children placed for adoption, post adoption services, intermediary services, access to birth record, and adoption disruptions. Six of the 25 cases were tracked and this included interviewing the allocated case worker and their manager. In addition, CIW also sought the views of service users through interviews with children and young people and adopters both individually and in groups; and also those people who had received an intermediary service
- 3.7 In addition to the case related interviews the inspection team also conducted interviews with:-
- Representatives from: Children & Young Persons Scrutiny Committee, including the Lead Member for Children
 - Chairperson and members of the regional board
 - Heads of Children's Services (from each authority member)
 - Manager with responsibility for Quality Assurance & Performance
 - Regional representatives from education and health
 - Service manager
 - Adoption panel chairperson and panel representative.

- 3.8 Surveys were also conducted with adopters and the regional adoption panel members along with observations of adoption panels and visits to support groups for adopters and adopted children and young people.
- 3.9 CIW published a report of the findings in respect of Western Bay Adoption Services on their website in May 2018 and the Review of the National Adoption Arrangements in June 2018.

4 Current Situation/Proposal

- 4.1 The CIW inspection reports are attached at **Appendices 1 & 2**.

Summary of Findings

- 4.2 This report will be supported by a presentation which provides details of the summary of findings and recommendations as per **Appendix 3**.

Recommendations and Actions Taken

- 4.3 An action plan in respect of the Western Bay was developed in response to the recommendations made by CIW and can be found at **Appendix 4**.
- 4.4 The Action Plan is monitored by Regional Adoption Management Board.
- 4.5 **Appendix 4** provides updates against each recommendation and demonstrates the progress achieved since the Inspection report was published.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

- 5.1 There is no impact on the Policy framework and Procedure rules.

6 Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications

- 7.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) (SSWBA) 2014, in turn, supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 within the County Borough of Bridgend. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances, the wellbeing goals of a Healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.
- 7.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver wellbeing outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the relevant well-being goals have been considered in this report:

- **Long Term** – Social Services is demand led and the SSWBA focusses on sustainable wellbeing outcomes for the future. There is a requirement to meet the needs of people in the longer term and, because of rising demographics and increasing complexity, the transformation of services continues to be a priority.
- **Integration** – the implementation of the SSWBA and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 requires local authorities to work with partners, particularly the NHS and Education, to ensure care and support for people and support for carers is provided. The report evidences work with partners to enable children to be placed in permanent arrangements.
- **Collaboration** – The collaborative approaches described in the report, are managed and monitored through the regional collaborative management board and the National Adoption Service Advisory Group and Governance Board where there is local authority and sector stakeholder representation.
- **Involvement** – the key stakeholders are the people who use social care. There is considerable engagement including surveys, stakeholder meetings, feedback forms and the complaints process. The provision of accessible information and advice helps to ensure that the voice of adults, children and young people is heard.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 Whilst there are no direct financial implications, the report highlights that the authority is working hard to transform services at a time when there are medium term financial savings to be delivered.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the CIW report on the inspection of Western Bay Adoption Service and comments on the associated Action Plan along with noting the CIW report on the Review of the National Adoption Arrangements.

Susan Cooper
Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing
December 2018

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11. **Background Documents**
 None



Inspection Report on Western Bay regional adoption service

**Mae'r adroddiad hwn hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg
This report is also available in Welsh**

Date of Publication

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Description of the service

Western Bay Adoption Service is one of the five regional adoption collaboratives which together with the Voluntary Adoption Service collaborative delivers adoption services across Wales. Western Bay regional adoption service comprises of a collaboration of three local authorities Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot (NPT) and Swansea and was developed in response to a change in guidance as outlined in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) 2015 which followed new legislation.

The functions of the three local authorities' adoption agencies are mainly delegated to the Western Bay Adoption Services through the establishment of a regional interagency partnership agreement. There is a regional management board in place and a governance structure is established. The service is hosted by the City and County of Swansea with a lead head of service from that authority, but all workers are co-located in Neath Port Talbot. There are three distinct but related functions, twin tracking and family finding for children; recruitment and assessment of adopters and adoption support. The service is still relatively recently established and the staff remain employed by the authority where they previously worked. The staffing structure of the service includes a regional manager; three team managers and the equivalent of 21 full time social work posts. The service is supported by 6.5 business support staff and their manager.

Summary of our findings

Overall assessment

Children; adopters and people receiving adoption support receive a good service overall. The quality of adopters' assessments was mainly good and some best practice was noted with regards to direct work with children and their adoptive parents. In the past year there was a timely response to adoption enquiries with a slight increase in the numbers of adopters approved. Timeliness has improved for the period children wait to be placed for adoption, with every child placed being assessed for adoption support. Average time taken to assess adopters increased slightly, but this was influenced by circumstances outside the control of the service. The quality of adopter's assessments was mainly good but the recording of challenge was underdeveloped. There are issues around being able to recruit sufficient adopters prepared to accept sibling groups and children with additional needs and numbers of children with a 'should be placed for adoption' decision and a placement order waiting to be placed increased significantly in the past year. This is a national issue; managers were well informed of the profile of the service and have supported strategies to try to address the deficit.

Feedback from adopters about the service was mainly positive with some people expressing a high level of satisfaction. Training for adopters was reported to be of

good quality and a number of support services have been developed. Medical officer support through the adoption panel was particularly valued by adopters.

There is a central adoption panel which operates geographically to meet the needs of the three authorities and these are consistently operation to a good standard. Service users are well supported by an appropriately qualified, experienced and skilled workforce. The working environment and issues around the integration of staff from three separate services with differing terms and conditions had affected morale and sickness absence. Staff had not received refresher safeguarding training in the previous two years. Regional management arrangements are well established with effective performance management in place but quality assurance is inconsistent and still under development. Scrutiny arrangements are not consistent across the service as each authority reports differently to elected members.

Improvements

This is the first inspection of the service.

Requirements and recommendations

There were no areas of non compliance with the regulations.

Section four of this report sets out the recommendations to improve the service.

1. Well-being

Summary

Children receive a good service and placements are made to promote their well-being. The quality of adopters' assessments was predominantly good and supported clear and well reasoned matching decisions for children to be placed with adopters. Every child placed was assessed for adoption support. The service values diversity.

Our findings

Information about children referred to the service was comprehensive and allowed consideration of the key factors that would assist the finding of placements that would promote the child's well-being and maximise keeping them happy, healthy and safe.

We saw that the service responded promptly to referrals received and that consideration was given to identifying the family finding tasks for each child. Together with ensuring timely referral to the Welsh or National Adoption Register children had been placed safely, appropriately and without avoidable delay. Children had been visited in their adoptive placements in line with statutory requirements and reviews of placements had taken place.

The care, education and health needs of children and the potential impact of their earlier life experiences of attachment and trauma, were identified and shared with adopters, who were offered training and support to understand these. Children who were old enough had been helped to know and understand why they have been adopted. We learned that children had been supported to cope with difficult life events, transitions to new placements and experiences of loss. Foster carers had been involved in preparing children for moving to their adoptive placement, the intensive introductions and supporting the adopters to get to know the child. Adopters reported their appreciation of the role of foster carers in preparing children for the transition to their adoptive placement. Social workers working with both the child and adoptive family had worked as a team around the child to make introductions and placement a thoughtful, measured and positive experience. Although some life journey work had been undertaken with children and later life letters had been written in good time, not all had been shared with adoptive parents in a timely way. We saw examples where the information had not been available until after the adoption order had been granted.

The quality of adopters' assessments (PAR's) was predominantly good. The required statutory checks had been undertaken on prospective adopters and children were safeguarded by these and the comprehensive assessments of adopter applicants. The recording of challenge within the assessment is an area for improvement. Panel members reported that the quality of PAR's was generally good. Overall the depth of

information in the assessments supported the making of clear and well reasoned matching decisions for children to be placed with particular adopters. As a result children have been matched and placed with adoptive parents whose assessment evidenced that they were most likely to meet their needs.

The majority of adopters who responded to Care Inspectorate Wales questionnaires reported they had received good information about the service and what adoption entailed. They had found the assessment process to be timely, balanced and fair. They also felt that when matching and placement decisions were being considered the service had taken into account their family composition and circumstances.

We learned that people involved with the service were treated fairly, without prejudice and with respect. There was evidence of respect and inclusiveness in assessments and contacts with adopters. We saw that in some cases birth parents had been involved in giving their views about the kind of people who would adopt their child and that their views had been listened to. People with particular health or communication needs had been responded to sensitively and compassionately. In a number of cases there had been pre-assessment consideration of particular issues so that if an assessment was not likely to be viable applicants did not engage only to be disappointed at a later stage. We found that when adopters had given their views about the service they had been listened to although they may not always have been agreed with. We saw that lessons learned from feedback about the service had been considered with a view to improving future practice. An example of this was the issue of life journey work not always being made available to adopters in a timely way. Children experience enhanced well-being because the service ensures that they have good quality information about them and their needs, and strive to provide for their needs to be met. Children's support needs are considered as part of the matching considerations of a placement. Children have their individual identities and cultures recognised and valued and placements had been made to support these being met. The Welsh culture and language, or other heritage, is considered as part of adopter assessments and prospective placements and we saw that children from Welsh speaking homes had where possible been placed with adopters who spoke Welsh.

Children's individual and diverse needs are recognised and catered for, their rights are protected by the decision making processes and children who are old enough, have a voice and are encouraged to speak up. We read for example that children had been consulted by adopters about a possible change to their first name and that children had been listened to and their wishes respected.

We saw records that reflected that children experienced warmth, attachment and belonging in their adoptive homes. Children had made progress developmentally, emotionally, socially and in education since placement for adoption. Children had remained healthy because their needs were known and anticipated and they were able to have access to relevant specialist or medical support. Their health needs

were being monitored and addressed and many of the children were reported to be thriving.

A number of placements had been made of sibling groups. There was evidence of decision making regarding placement decisions for siblings and the considerations of retaining attachments with siblings where appropriate. If this was not possible or appropriate there was clear reasoning recorded and evidence of each child and their needs being considered individually as well as part of the sibling group. Financial support had been provided for some placements to support siblings to be placed together.

Children and young people are able to live with loving supportive adoptive parents who are committed to understanding and meeting their needs. Children are supported to have positive understanding of their journey to adoption and as agreed on an individual basis, arrangements had been put in place if contact was to be maintained with their birth family. The well-being of children is prioritised in this service which is child focused and attuned to children's needs. Children have been able to experience stability in their adoptive homes as within the period considered only one placement had been disrupted.

2. Care and Support

Summary

The panel arrangements mainly comply with legislative requirements, a designated professional advisor and decision maker are in place. However, some areas were identified as needing to be developed such as introducing business meetings and panel member appraisal and training.

Careful consideration is given to matching children and prospective adopters with appropriate processes in place to do so.

A range of appropriate support is in place to promote successful placements of children with adopters/prospective adopters. We identified some examples of good practice support and some areas where improvements could be made. Support plans were consistently put in place at the point of matching but robust arrangements for their review were not consistently in place.

The adoption service had effective mechanisms to provide good quality intermediary services that met people's needs and promote their wellbeing. However, the demand for the service could not always be met in a timely way although priority was given to do so for those adoptions pre November 1975.

Our findings

Good adoption panel arrangements had been developed. The adoption service had allocated both team managers to be Adoption Support Service Advisors (ASSA's) with each having designated roles within the service, for example one is panel advisor.

The panel membership and the way it operates had been developed since the restructure of the adoption service and the panel chair came in post in January 2015. The panel chairperson is the same for all three panels thus promoting consistency and rarely misses a panel meeting. There are usually three panels a month, which is geographically located in each of the local authorities. An adoption panel protocol was in place that sets out how the panel operates.

The service has established a central pool of panel members, a core of who attend regularly and some who only attend in their geographical area. The panel chair and ASSA told us that it was not difficult to ensure that panel meetings were quorate. Panel members were described as dedicated and committed which was evidenced by the care taken in their preparation for panels and their levels of attendance and participation at the meetings. This was observed at panel where members were seen to actively engage in the process and in the discussions held.

Whilst the panel members were seen to function well and show consideration to relevant issues, there was a lack of representation at a strategic level to influence policy and wider decision making. For example there was a retired teacher as a panel member and a LACE's coordinator was also a panel member, however, the LACE's coordinator told us they did not attend panel meetings and therefore did not have a sense of the operation of the panel or wider issues arising.

The medical advisors work well at sharing relevant information and to ensuring information is shared with prospective adopters. They are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Similarly each local authority has a legal advisor who provides information and guidance when needed.

Panel minutes are processed promptly and the chair told us there was good business support to administer the panel. The agency decision makers are effective at completing their roles in a timely manner. Records of panel meetings were suitably detailed.

The panel was described as working well with an open and honest culture. The panel chair promotes opportunities to explore issues and encourages questions and an open honest exchange of views from panel members. Acknowledgement of good quality reports and assessments by panel members was observed and also the identification of concerns about the quality of some reports and request that they be updated (usually the CAR B). Questionnaire responses indicated that the CAR B provided sufficient information about the child but often did not reflect the wishes of birth parents.

Panel members identified areas where improvement was needed. Panel members do not receive appraisal or training; this is identified in regulation 8(b) as the responsibility of the adoption advisor. The adoption advisor told us that when one team manager left there had not been time to undertake this work. Similarly, (Regulation 8(d)) panel have requested occasional business meetings and information regarding placement breakdowns to be brought to panel but this has not happened. The panel protocol indicates that business panel meetings will take place every six months but this has not taken place. This was confirmed in comments made in questionnaire received from panel members. Questionnaire responses also indicated that panel members had not received relevant policies and procedures. Steps need to be taken to address these issues.

Clear matching processes were in place to ensure that children and adopters needs are considered at the point of matching and placement. Consideration is given to the suitability of the match and any support needs the child or adopters may have. This process also monitors life story work and later life letters for children being placed. Whilst we saw some examples of good quality life story work, there was also examples of delays in this work and later life letters not being provided until very late

into placement and sometimes after the adoption order had been made. The ASSA told us that there were plans from April 2018 to drive forward a framework around life story work with independent reviewing officers (IRO's) taking on the responsibility for ensuring there is a named person responsible for this work and panel monitoring this with an expectation that it will be completed at the point of matching.

Arrangements were in place to ensure that information about children, their families and any health implications are shared with adopters. The medical advisors filled a positive role in this process.

Placements are supported through adoption support arrangements and plans. Support needs are considered at the point of matching and a support plan was consistently put in place at the point of matching/placement. However, the reviewing arrangements at the point of adoption order were not consistently taking place and there was a lack of monitoring process to identify these short falls. If the need for a support service is identified post placement, processes were in place to ensure these are subject to appropriate monitoring and review.

Efforts have been made to develop staff skills in order to provide good quality support to adopters and children. The support arrangements provided by the team include:

- Therapeutic social work;
- Theraplay techniques;
- Task centred/solution based;
- Attachment assessment;
- Therapeutic life story;
- Post approval training for adopters;
- Support groups;
 - Adopters – 2 groups, 1 in the east and 1 in the west. Includes a guest speaker and opportunity for adopters to meet and chat. A social worker from the team supports each of the groups.
 - Talk Adoption – 2 groups children a younger group and older group including children who have been adopted up to the age of 25. A social worker from the team attends. These were described as successful and provide an opportunity for children to talk about their experiences of adoption.
 - An adopter and child group – young children under 8 years of age. Three groups, one in each authority. A social worker attends each group and an adopter leads in one of the groups.

Where specialist therapeutic support has been identified for children and funding agreed, it can be difficult to locate/source. An example was seen of a worker who went to great lengths to find the right support for a child but this had the inevitable result of taking time to find.

Financial support: An adoption allowance policy has been developed for the three local authorities. Where arrangements are in place under the old arrangements, these will be honoured. An annual means test is undertaken for people in receipt of financial support. A means test is carried out initially and to ensure continued eligibility each year.

Letter box arrangements have been a challenge as there are very high numbers to manage. There is a dedicated business support officer to assist with the task and they ensure that everything is logged and scanned into the system. The work has now been shared across team members so everyone has some letterbox on their work load. The ASSA told us that efforts had been made to make dormant cases live and where necessary to investigate to ensure the legitimacy of the contact. It was described as being a lot of work but was seen as successful with greater clarity of the arrangements in place.

The team has a specialist worker to undertake intermediary work. However, efforts were being made to build up other team member's skill base in order to increase capacity in the team to meet the demand. This service had previously been regarded as low priority. Specialist training around this area of work was described as hard to find.

There had been a high number of unallocated cases for birth record counselling and intermediary services, inherited following the restructure of the adoption services. The cost of commissioning the service was prohibitive so there are plans for the one worker to take the lead for the next year with a view to developing staff skills and knowledge in this area of work. When work has been undertaken we saw examples of good work, one was a lengthy piece of work and the other a short focused piece of work. They showed that attention was given to follow correct procedures with sensitive and respectful consideration given to the specific communication needs of people.

Priority was given to provide a timely service to people adopted before November 1975 in line with regulation. An example of this was seen, but lack of capacity may impact on overall; timeliness of this service.

The service is planning to develop guidance for people to help to keep them safe if using social media and other processes to undertake their own searches.

We therefore found that the quality of work to help people with birth record counselling and intermediary work was very good although the overall demands of the service resulted in a lack of routine timeliness.

3. Leadership and Management

Summary

Leadership and governance arrangements comply with statutory guidance. All stakeholders were satisfied with the partnership agreement which was finalised in January 2017. The working arrangements are echoed in the statement of purpose for the regional service. There is good routine reporting on performance into the regional management board and members report positive partnership working. However, it would appear that the process can impact on the agility to implement decisions and quality assurance is relatively undeveloped.

Lines of accountability to elected members are not consistent or entirely clear across the three authorities. This is an area particularly influenced by a regional model. There is annual reporting on the performance of the regional service but there was little opportunity for members to scrutinise the outcomes of the children from their own authority for whom they have corporate parenting responsibility. Members acknowledged that this was an area for review.

There is good regional representation on the national advisory group and an elected member from the region had been chairing the national governance board promoting good communication. Western Bay had been identified as a progressive region with regard to innovative and creative practice. However, the two significant issues of recruitment of a sufficient number and range of adopters and the increase of children waiting to be placed for adoption remain a challenge.

The integration of the workforce from the three partner authorities had presented some difficulties. A number of issues had impacted on team morale and there was still progress to be made in developing a whole service ethos. The decision not to recruit into one of the team managers posts had an impact on capacity. This decision had been reversed but it was unclear how timely recruitment would be. There were some local management issues within the service which the regional management board acknowledged had been difficult to address.

Management were aware that the inter dependency which could impact on timeliness and quality of information between the local authority child care teams and the regional adoption service could impact negatively on practice. For example improvement life journey work had been made but the ensuring capacity to achieve consistent quality and timeliness, which would be a challenge.

Our findings

There had been a great deal of effort made by the region to set up what essentially is a new service. The establishment of a national adoption service with the regional structure being crucial in delivering the aims and intended improvements; required a

high level of commitment from all involved. The national service aims and objectives are incorporated into the working agreement. The multi tiered arrangements are well understood and work effectively although the requirement to report on an increasing number of performance indicators was proving challenging. There was some evidence of a drift between decisions being agreed at board level and actions being implemented. The chairperson's role was vacant for a period which could have influenced timeliness.

Representation on the regional management board from other agencies has taken longer to achieve. There was little evidence that the involvement of partner agencies in the regional management board is currently making a difference to adoption support in the longer term. Although individuals were committed and there were examples of good working relationships and good quality support particularly from health. It is difficult to see what influence is being exerted across the health board and education directorates to embed improvements in adoption support. Third sector involvement is strong with good links into national structure. Board members were confident that progress in meeting national standards and improving quality is being made. There was a level of optimism about the potential benefits of national initiatives such as a scheme to support the adoption of children with additional needs 'Adoption Together' and national framework /training for life journey work. There was an acknowledgement that increasing the availability of sufficient adoption placements and improving long term support for adopted children remain problematic.

Heads of service from the three local authorities are very positive about the working arrangements of the regional management board. The lead head of service has additional responsibilities, supervises the regional manager and also represents the region nationally. Although the management board were able to scope service provision as data and trends were reported systematically the variability in the numbers of children with a plan for adoption being referred and little control over the number of potential adopters who could be recruited made planning a challenge. It was reported that there had been a surplus of adopters in recent years but a subsequent increase in children with a plan for adoption led to a deficit which it was not possible to make up in the short term. There was also a rise in the numbers of older children with a plan for adoption and those with additional needs which had contributed to an increase in the numbers of children waiting to be placed. i. e. from 86 in 2015/16 to 102 in 2016/17. There was a systematic process in place to ensure children were registered with the Welsh Adoption Register in a timely manner and additional initiatives such as 'exchange days' are attended in an effort to find suitable adopters.

There were some examples of good commissioning with training for prospective adopters and therapeutic services. The availability and range of post adoption support was less consistent. The board are aware that there is a need to develop a

more regional or even national approach to developing an appropriate range of services. There are plans for working in partnership with CAMHS to develop better psychological support to those affected by adoption across the region.

A quality assurance framework is being developed and while there was evidence that work was being reviewed this was not consistent across the service. Authorities have their own quality assurance processes in place but the regional service needs to establish systems to ensure continuous improvement of its work. There had only been one adoption disruption in the previous year for any children in the period between the adoption placement and the adoption order being made. However, there had been no review or quality assurance of the disruption nine months later; this was reported to be because of staff sickness. Plans were in hand to complete this piece of work and share the learning.

All heads of service expressed confidence in their knowledge of the effectiveness of the regional adoption service and their ability to track the progress of children from their own individual authorities. All were the designated 'agency decision makers' (ADM) for their own authority which gave them the opportunity to gain an overview of the quality of work being carried out. This work can demand a high level of capacity although it is variable. The arrangements are not consistent across authorities for example it was reported that there is local quality assurance of Children's Adoption Reports; however, documents recorded fairly routine criticism from the adoption panel. It would appear that that the link back to improvement in practice is not working effectively. Support for the ADM process was also variable which could impact on quality assurance although this did not appear to impact on outcomes. Practice opportunities to share learning could be improved.

There is a pooled budget for the running costs of the service which includes adoption support costs, each partner expressed satisfaction with the funding arrangements. The agreement for the provision of both one off and on-going adoption allowances had declined in the previous year. There did not appear to be any clear explanation for this change. This is an area which would benefit from review by the regional management board. Examples were seen of good therapeutic support packages being provided in preparation for adoption although these are funded by each local authority. Children could benefit further from consistency of provision of pre adoption support in an effort to ensure the best outcomes. Good efforts had been made to improve 'letter box' contact for example and the managers are proactive in driving forward improvements across the service.

There is a wide breadth of experience and skill mix in the workforce. All workers are suitably qualified, and registered with Social Care Wales. Turnover of staff is low, but there had been some long term sickness absence. There was a range of relevant training available but staff had not completed any refresher safeguarding training in the previous two years. There is a high level of commitment to supporting the best

outcomes for children and adopters. The arrangements for the running of the service were well organised but the team manager vacancy, the inherent challenges of bring three separate service together with differing terms and conditions for staff carrying out the same work and cramped working environment had impacted on staff morale. Work loads had been high due to sickness and vacant posts; some staff reported feeling unsupported at times. Staff supervision had not been routinely completed and there is mostly a case focussed approach. Better recording of supporting staff development and well being is needed. This was in the process of being resolved at the time of the inspection.

4. Improvements required and recommended following this inspection

4.1 Areas of non compliance from previous inspection

This was the first inspection of this service.

4.2 Recommendations for improvement

- The regional management board should review the arrangements relating to the implementation of agreed actions and ensure there are vice chairing arrangements in place.
- Consideration should be given to how improvements in adoption support can be more systematically developed across partner agencies.
- A quality assurance framework should be implemented across the service and consideration given to linking into the associated functions which are completed by children's services. i.e. CAR/B; life journey work and later life letters.
- All operational regional adoption service staff should complete relevant safeguarding training every two years.
- The process for assessing and agreeing financial support for adopters should be reviewed to ensure the system is working appropriately.
- The timeliness and quality of supervision should be reviewed to ensure there is a consistent approach to case management and staff support and development.
- Consideration should be given to how staff can be provided with a more suitable working environment.
- Panel members should be provided with an appraisal and training opportunities.
- Consideration needs to be given to provide the panel members with occasional business meetings and bring information and reports about placement breakdowns to panel. Panel member need to be provided with relevant policies and procedures.
- Monitoring arrangements need to be put in place to ensure review of support plans.

5. How we undertook this inspection

This was a full inspection and the first for this regional adoption service since its inception in 2015.

The inspection took place between 28 November and 19 December 2017 with an additional interview taking place on 8 January 2018.

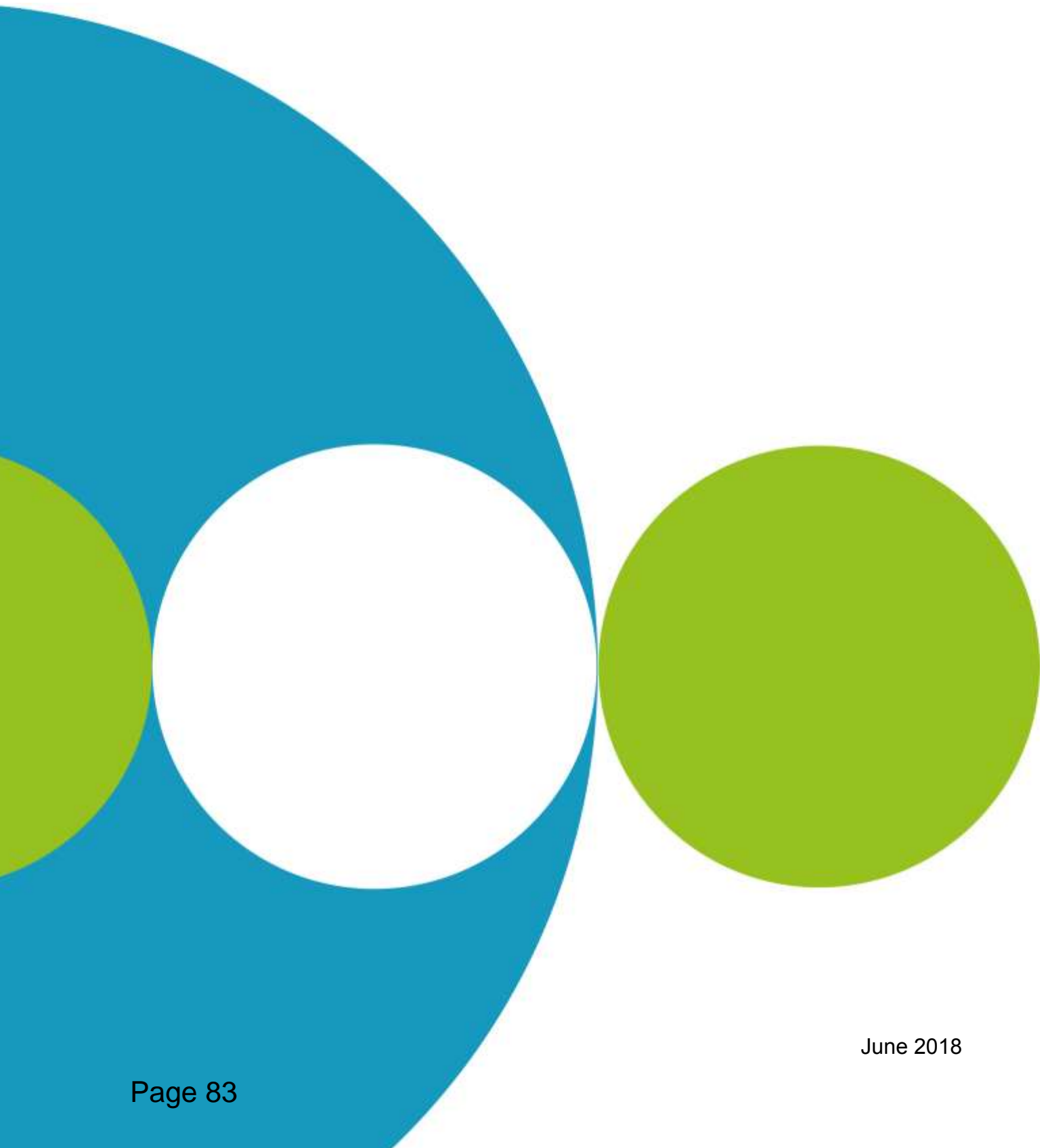
Information for this report was gathered from:

- The service completed a self evaluation and data return.
- Inspectors reviewed a number of policies and procedures and workforce data.
- Read 21 case files including case tracking 8 files; interviewing social workers, team managers and adopters (where available)
- Interviews were held with:-
 - 3 Elected members (one from each partner local authority)
 - The head of children's services from each of the 3 partner local authorities.
 - The chairperson and members of the regional management board representing Voluntary Adoption Agencies and partner agencies.
 - Members of staff individually and as a team.
 - The regional team manager.
 - Two team managers and ASSA's.
 - One of the medical advisors.
 - The foster panel chair person.
 - A group of panel members.
 - The legal advisor for NPT, Principal Officer for Swansea and the LACE's coordinator for NPT as a group.
- Meetings with 4 adopters and adoption support group.
- Attendance of adoption panel.
- Questionnaires were completed by seven adopters and eight adoption panel members.

Further information about what we do can be found on our website
Careinspectorate.wales Arolygiaethgofal.cymru

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Review of national adoption arrangements



Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

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1. Introduction

Why was the review carried out?

To establish the extent to which:

- a) The leadership and management arrangements of the national adoption service:
 - Have established a clear strategic direction, that meets the expectations and aims of the National Adoption Service
 - Demonstrate a clear vision and ambition for those affected by adoption.
- b) Each local authority has a clear, shared understanding of which elements of The adoption service:
 - It continues to carry out individually;
 - Are carried out collaboratively as part of the partnership functions (regional adoption service);
 - Link with the broad aims of the joint adoption arrangements in Wales.
- c) The adoption service has negotiated and defined its working relationship with relevant education departments, health boards and voluntary adoption agencies, with regard to adoption support and commissioned services.
- d) The regional adoption arrangements have effective mechanisms in place, in line with the nationally agreed framework, to ensure children, young people and their families are supported to achieve best possible outcomes.

Evidence to support the key findings outlined in this national report was gathered from:

- The findings from two self evaluations completed by the 5 regional services reflecting the progress of the implementation of Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015.
- The analysis of the adoption service data collected by the national adoption service for the periods 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Interviews with:

- The Chairperson of the National Adoption Service Governance Board;
- The Independent Chair, National Adoption Service Advisory Group;
- Members of the National Adoption Service Governance board;
- Members of the National Adoption Service Advisory Group;
- Heads of children's services from all local authorities in Wales;
- Director of Operations and staff from the National Adoption Service.

2. Background to the review

The National Adoption Service was developed following recommendations from Welsh government committee and ministerial advisory group to comply with requirements under the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014. Accordingly the Adoption Act 2002 section 3(1) was amended to require local authorities in Wales to enter into specified arrangements with each other in relation to the provision of adoption services. This review focuses on the progress made in implementing the resulting Joint Adoption arrangements (Wales) directions 2015. The aim of the arrangements is to ensure consistent delivery of high quality adoption services across Wales. The arrangements are specified at national, regional and local level. Collectively these joint arrangements are referred to as the 'National Adoption Service'.

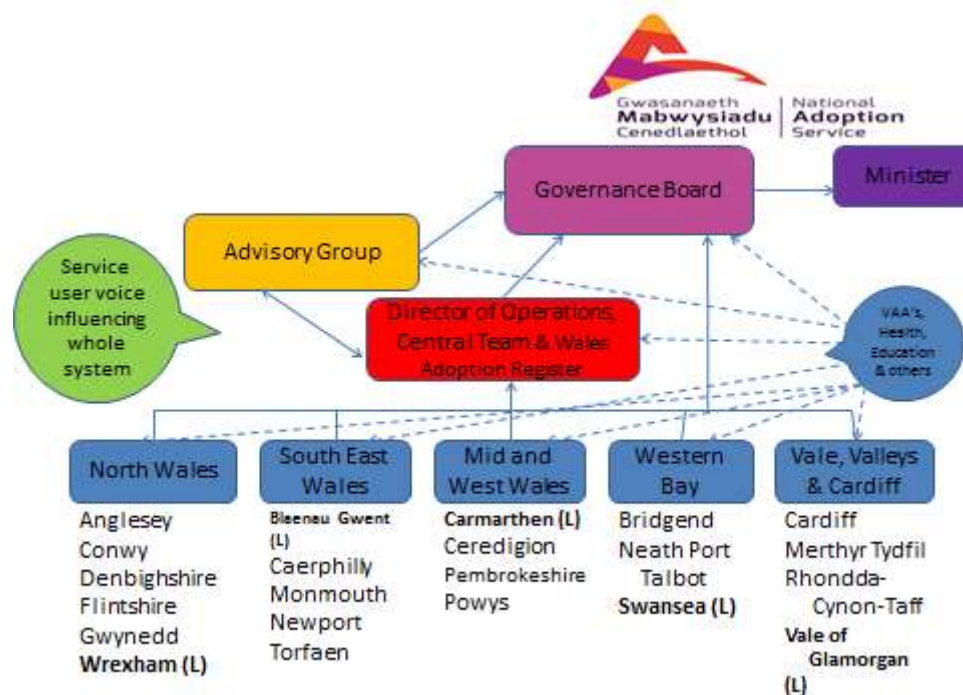
The duty to provide an adoption service under the legislation remains with the individual local authorities. It is a requirement for local authorities to:-

- Collaborate with each other regionally as specified in the guidance ;
- Make arrangements for establishing a national Governance Board and an Advisory group;
- Appoint a national Director for Operations.

The functions of the three tiered structure are specified in the guidance. The national director of operations and the national governance board have responsibility for the monitoring and oversight of the five regional collaboratives but have no powers to implement changes in the policies or practice nor to direct how regional resources are utilised.

The arrangements came into force in March 2015, but some work had already been completed enabling the launch of the national service in November 2014. Three years later the governance arrangements are well established and understood. However they are complex particularly with regard to the interface between the local, regional and national functions. Care Inspectorate Wales has no powers to inspect the national arrangements but has a responsibility to inspect the regulated adoption services at the point of delivery. NAS agreed to facilitate this review of the national elements of the service so that this could be seen alongside the pilot regional review. This review aims to look at the impact that the national adoption service has made on the improvement of adoption services across Wales.

Structure of the national adoption service



© National Adoption Service

Locally, each local authority identifies and meets the needs of looked after children, including those where a decision has been made that the child should be placed for adoption.

Regionally, local authorities work together within five regional collaboratives. They have strong links with voluntary adoption services, health and education.

Nationally, the local authorities collaborate to provide central services; the Governance Board and Advisory group and voluntary adoption agencies collaborate as the Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership.

The arrangements are underpinned by a range of comprehensive documents which outline the terms of reference; protocols; and partnership agreements for the service. The communication and links between the different layers are well defined and understood by the stakeholders. However it is not always easy to track how the recommendations made at national level impact on service delivery.

The functions of each level of the service are specific but the complex nature of adoption and the lack of control over numbers of children subject to a placement order and numbers of adopters coming forward present a challenge to the agility of the service in responding to changing demands.

Overall conclusions

The clear direction and intent of the National Adoption Service for Wales has benefited the children and families affected by adoption. There has been a high level of investment in terms of officer time expended in formulating the arrangements which are the basis of the national service. The governance mechanisms are well understood, but complex and can be a barrier to implementing a national framework.

There is a shared strategic direction and stakeholders have committed time and resources to work creatively to address the challenges of providing a consistent, high quality adoption service. This has raised the profile of adoption across the social care and public sector.

The unpredictability of the numbers of children being made subject to adoption orders, combined with their varying and complex profile of needs, inevitably impacts on the agility of the service to recruit sufficient suitable adoptive placements.

The arrangements to deliver the service across Wales remain inconsistent. While this may be a response of local circumstances it can impact on the timeliness of the implementation of national strategy and makes the effectiveness of quality standards challenging to implement.

The arrangements have supported productive partnerships with third sector organisations which have resulted in improved sharing of good practice and creative and promising initiatives for the future.

Improvements in the national collection and analysis of performance data have supported the development of an accurate profile of adoption services in Wales. This highlights regional differences and identifies areas for improvement.

There is a common understanding of barriers to better outcomes and what resources are needed. While timeliness in placing children for adoption has improved the numbers of children waiting for an appropriate adoptive placement has fluctuated, beginning to rise again in 2016-17.

Progress has been made in improving consistent standards for the service with initiatives such as developing a 'Best Practice Guide for Family Finding' and implementing a national framework for adoption support.

Some elements of the service which have been identified as in need of improvement such as life journey work and later life letters depend partly on the capacity within children's services for elements of the work.

3. Summary of findings

Question

Have the leadership and management arrangements of the national adoption service:-

- established a clear strategic direction that meets the expectations and aims of the National Adoption Service;
- demonstrated a clear vision and ambition for those affected by adoption

Summary of findings

- A strong strategic direction for the service has been established which is evidenced by the shared acknowledgement of the heightened profile of adoption across Wales combined with overall agreement on the improvements needed.
- Stakeholders demonstrated a high level of commitment and expertise to support the ambition to provide the consistent delivery of high quality services. Stakeholders are realistic about the challenges to achieving their aims.
- Strong efforts have been made to develop national initiatives to address key issues such as the recruitment of adopters to meet the needs of children who have a plan for adoption and increasing the availability of timely and effective adoption support. However there is currently a re-emerging increase in the numbers of children waiting for an adoptive placement.
- There is an inclusive approach to demonstrating the vision for adoption services in the future. This includes supporting co –production and enabling adopters and their families to share their experiences to inform better practice.
- Much effort has been made to establish an accurate data profile of performance which can inform future strategy and service improvement.
- It is difficult to evidence how the national initiatives can impact directly on improving consistency across some areas of the service. Therapeutic support for example continues to be described as a postcode lottery.
- Work which has been carried out nationally to improve access to advice and information for adopters and publicising support for adopted children in schools promotes shared responsibilities and increases understanding.

Question

Does each local authority have a clear, shared understanding of which elements of the adoption service?

- It continues to carry out individually;
- Are carried out collaboratively as part of the partnership functions (regional adoption service);
- Link with the broad aims of the joint adoption arrangements in Wales.

Summary of findings

- Each of the five regional services has a partnership agreement in place which outlines the responsibilities and functions it is responsible for. Some agreements have been reviewed but it is not clear whether the effectiveness of any particular approach is being routinely shared.
- The governance arrangements are not consistent across the regions, for example not all heads of service sit on regional management boards. This can impact on the timeliness of implementing decisions and changes in strategies.
- A shared understanding of the complexity of the service and the areas for improvement was clearly evidenced.
- There is a common understanding of how the improved data profile of the service has shaped the national strategy. There is less clarity around how local analysis of data is shaping service provision or recruitment of adopters according to children's needs.
- All agreements incorporate the broad aims of the joint adoption arrangements in Wales. There is wide understanding of the challenges of meeting these aims given the unpredictability of the demand and the inability to impact on the availability of prospective adopters.
- The multi-layered management arrangements could be a barrier to improving the effectiveness of seamless support for a child's transition between children's services and the regional adoption service.
- There is a lack of clarity about how regional strategies for driving improvement work along side the national approach.

Question

Has the adoption service negotiated and defined its working relationship with relevant education departments, health boards and voluntary adoption agencies, with regard to adoption support and commissioned services?

Summary of findings

- Progress in this area has been inconsistent; it has been difficult for regional boards to achieve routine attendance from some partner agencies.
- There are positive working relationships between voluntary adoption agencies and regional and national boards. There is joint working and shared ownership of planning and shaping services.
- Individual partner members of regional and national boards provide good support for the development of the adoption service which can be seen to have impacted positively on practice. The mechanisms for influencing health boards or education services to adopt recommendations for improvements across Wales are in their infancy. There have been some encouraging cross sector developments such as regional links with CAMHS.
- The arrangements for commissioning adoption support are variable. Only one regional service has a pooled budget but this was reported to be working effectively provided the appropriate service was available. There are issues around availability of the range of services needed and accessibility in some localities. One regional service has negotiated direct access to a psychological service which provides timely and effective support.
- It is difficult to evaluate the effect of positive national initiatives on local practice. For example the promotion of 'adoption aware' training and literature is aimed at improving support in education. Progress in engaging schools is reported in some regions but it is difficult to capture how this is impacting on outcomes for adopted children.
- All regions are engaging with CAMHS but again it is not evident that this work is leading to any definite improvements for adopted children and families in need of support.

Question

Do the regional adoption arrangements have effective mechanisms in place, in line with the nationally agreed framework, to ensure children, young people and their families are supported to achieve best possible outcomes?

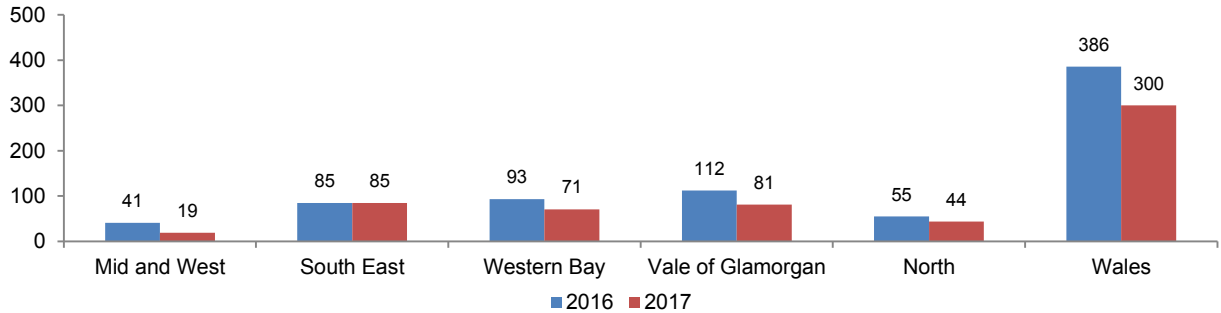
Summary of findings

- Much effort has been made to develop effective mechanisms across the regional structure. Good progress has been made with business planning and data collection in line with nationally agreed frameworks. Areas for development vary across the regions some of which are due to differing levels of resources which are available.
- Work which had been carried out has been very clearly focused on improving the quality of adoption services. A number of creative initiatives have been piloted and there are good opportunities for effective communication to share good practice between regions.
- More work is needed on how the interface between children's services and how the regional adoption services can be better supported to consistently impact on the timeliness and quality of life journey work. NAS has an active project working on this.
- Heads of service expressed a high level of confidence in their ability to track the progress of individual children and monitor the performance of the regional services. Collaborative working is valued but there are regional differences such as terms and conditions for staff and separate support services budgets.
- Agility to reshape resources to manage presenting demands is a challenge: nationally they cannot be directed and in most cases this does not happen at regional level either. . The changes in the profile of children with a plan for adoption and the availability of suitable adopters are not predictable enough to allow timely changes in recruitment strategies. The availability of a sufficient number of suitable adopters cannot be guaranteed.
- Nationally there has been a major effort to include those affected by adoption in planning and improving services. Ensuring that service users are engaged, and participate in assessing and improving the quality and development of the service at a regional level was identified as most in need of improvement by all the regional services.

Data charts

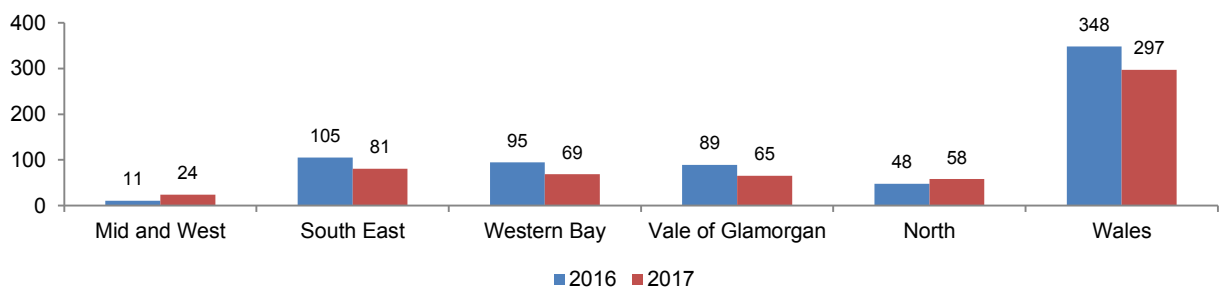
This data covers the periods 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 and 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. It has been reported by the regional adoption services and is not validated.

Figure 1: Number of children placed for adoption



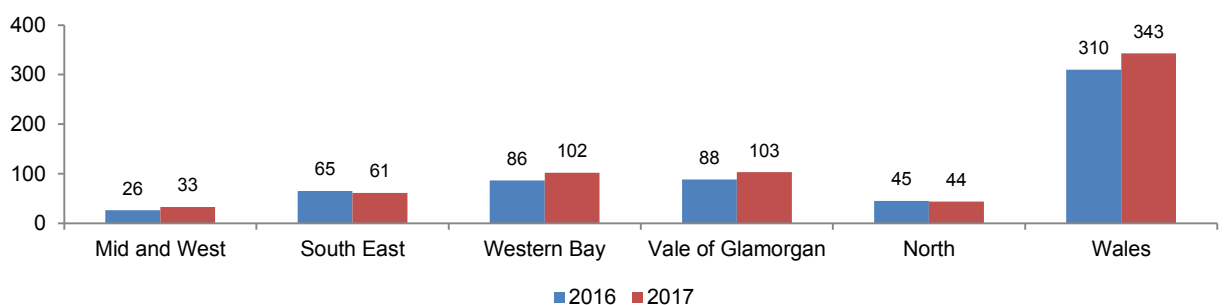
The reduction in the number of children placed for adoption in 2016/17 is reported to be due to a decrease in Placement Orders made; a combination of an increase in sibling groups and children with additional needs, and the impact of recruitment targeted to the needs of children which led to a reduction in the number of adopters being recruited.

Figure 2: Number of adoption orders granted



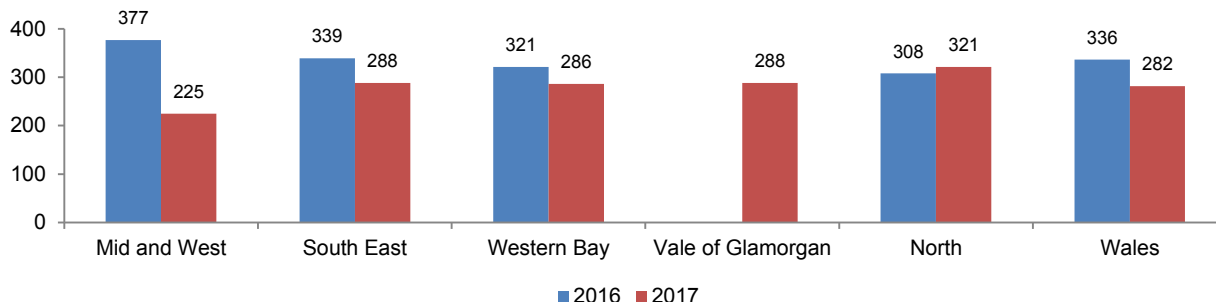
This decrease in numbers illustrates the challenge of planning recruitment around changing demand.

Figure 3: Number of children with a should be placed decision who have not yet been placed for adoption



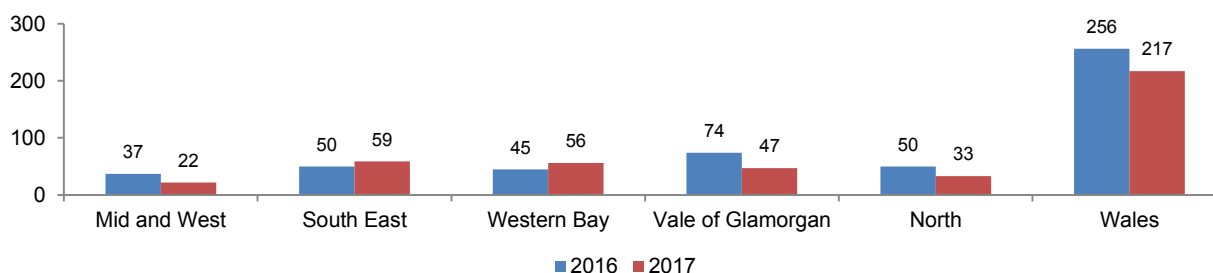
The increase in numbers of children waiting to be placed is the result of a lack of sufficient suitable adoptive placements for sibling groups, older children and those with complex needs.

Figure 4: Average (arithmetic mean) length of time in days it has taken children placed for adoption to progress from date of 'Should Be Placed for Adoption' Decision to date of placement for adoption



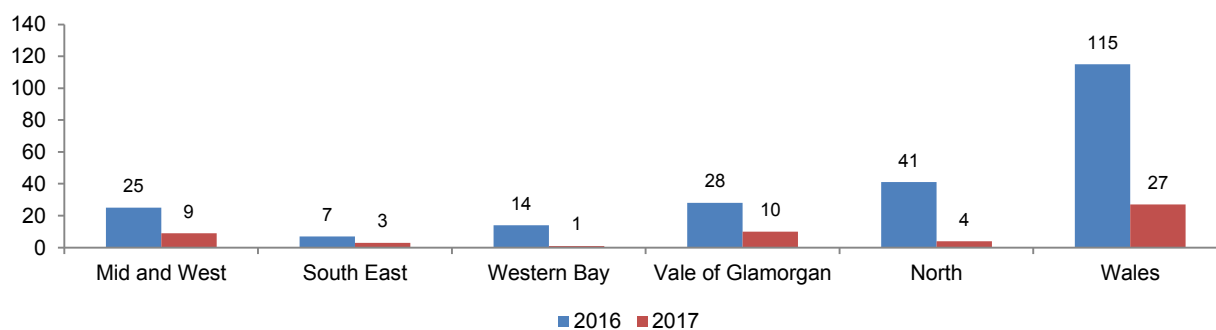
These figures illustrate the progress being made nationally to improve timeliness for placing children.

Figure 5: Number of prospective adopters receiving an agency decision to approve as suitable to adopt



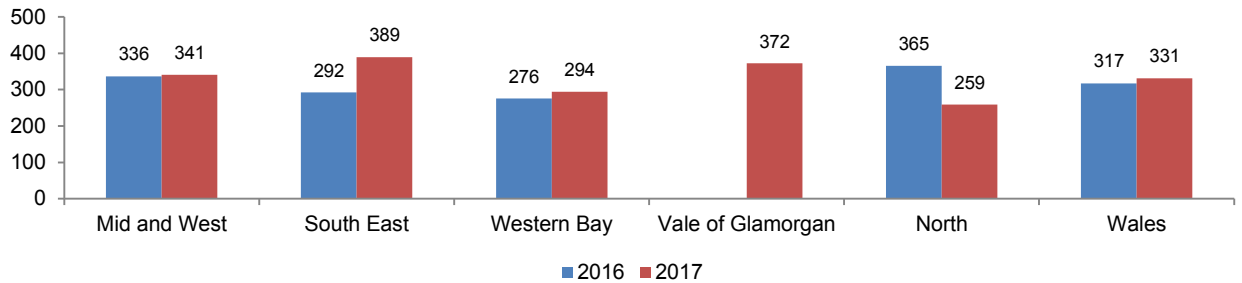
There was a lack of clarity as to the reasons fewer adopters were approved in 2016/17. The NAS ascribe this to a more targeted approach to recruitment. In previous years there had been a surplus of people wanting to adopt babies. These placements have been filled but the number of people wanting to adopt babies or sibling groups has declined.

Figure 6: Number of prospective adopters who do not proceed from initial visit to application to adopt



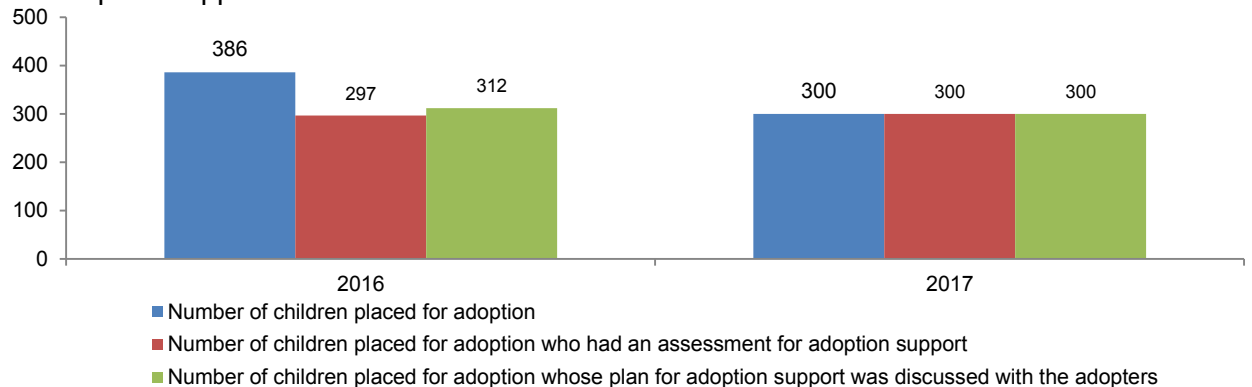
The decrease in the numbers of prospective adopters who do not proceed from an initial visit could indicate the better quality of information available to help people decide about proceeding with an application.

Figure 7: Average (arithmetic mean) length of time in days it takes for a prospective adopter to progress from initial enquiry to agency decision to approve as suitable to adopt



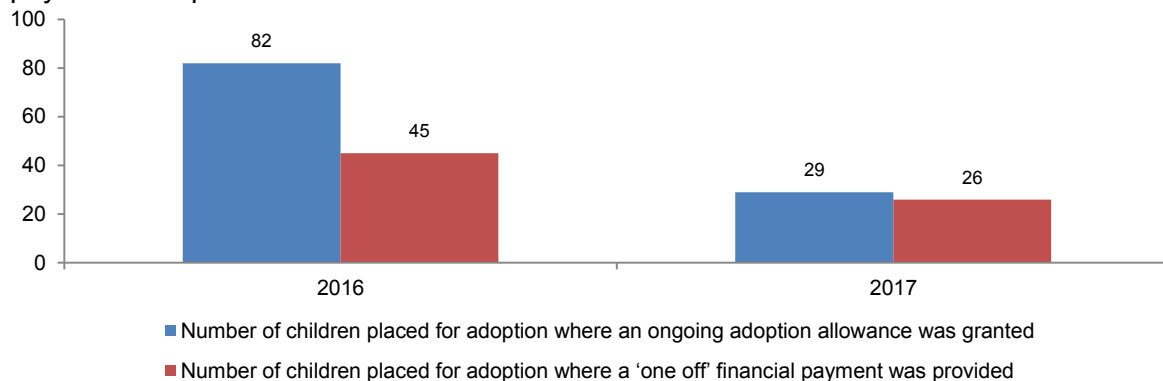
It has not been possible to report on the time from formal application to approval due to differing regional processes. Evaluation and analysis of performance is completed regionally.

Figure 8: All Wales comparison of number of children placed for adoption, the number of children placed for adoption who had an assessment for adoption support and the number of children placed for adoption whose plan for adoption support was discussed



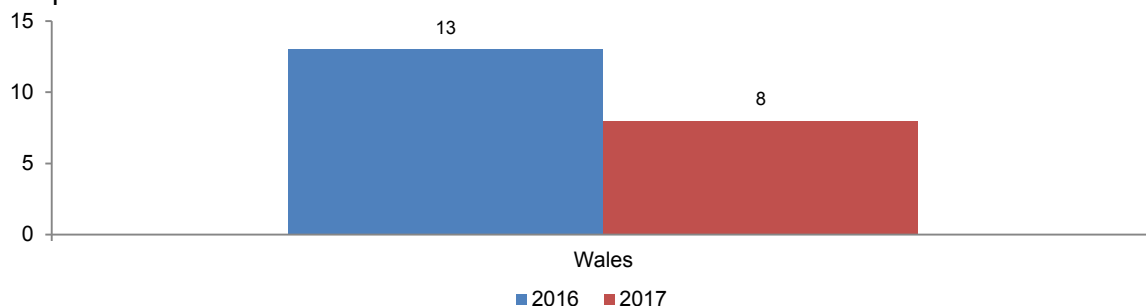
The chart above indicates a consistent improvement in the arrangements for offering adoption support. More work is needed to evaluate the outcomes.

Figure 9: All Wales comparison of the number of children placed for adoption where an ongoing adoption allowance was granted and the number of children placed for adoption where a 'one off' financial payment was provided



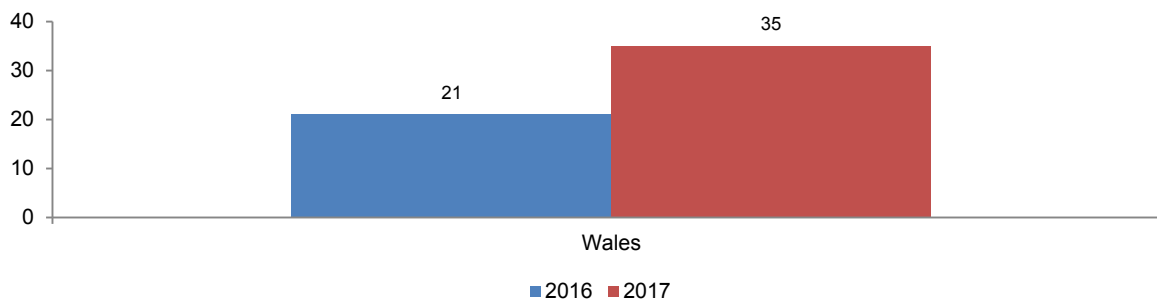
Not all regions had collected data about the number of adoption allowances agreed in 2015/16 so this is not an accurate picture but it still represents a decline in the agreement for allowances in 2016/17. There was no information available about why this was the case. (N.B these numbers do not include those already receiving support before 2016/17)

Figure 10: Number of children whose placement for adoption permanently disrupts between date of placement for adoption and before adoption order



All disruptions are reviewed and lessons learned are shared across regions but not nationally to date.

Figure 11: Number of children Looked After in financial year who are known to have been previously adopted



These numbers represent children who have been adopted in previous years as reported to the regional adoption services. This data is also collected by Welsh Government as part of the data set. The outcomes for children who return to the looked after system is monitored through the national outcomes framework.

Acknowledgements

The inspectorate would also like to thank the following participants listed below for all their help and co-operation with this review.

- The Independent Chair, National Adoption Service Governance board;
- The Independent Chair, National Adoption Service Advisory Group;
- Members of the National Adoption Service Governance board;
- Members of the National Adoption Service Advisory Group;
- Heads of children's services from 22 local authorities;
- Director of Operations and staff from the National Adoption Service.

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**Care Inspectorate Wales Adoption Inspection
2017-18
Western Bay Regional Adoption Service
&
NAS Central / National Elements**

Western Bay Regional Adoption Service



- Children, adopters and people receiving adoption support receive a good service overall .
- Timeliness has improved for the period children wait to be placed for adoption, with every child placed being assessed for adoption support.
- Some best practice was noted with regards to direct work with children and their adoptive parents.
- In the past year there was a timely response to adoption enquiries with a slight increase in the numbers of adopters approved.
- Average time taken to assess adopters increased slightly but this was influenced by circumstances outside the control of the service.
- The quality of adopters' assessments was mainly good but the recording of challenge was underdeveloped

Western Bay Regional Adoption Service



- Feedback from adopters about the service was mainly positive with some people expressing a high level of satisfaction.
- Training for adopters was reported to be of good quality and a number of support services have been developed
- There are issues around being able to recruit sufficient adopters prepared to accept sibling groups and children with additional needs and numbers of children with a 'should be placed for adoption' decision and a placement order waiting to be placed increased in the past year. This is a national issue; managers were well informed of the profile of the service and have supported strategies to try to address the deficit

NAS Central / National Elements



- Benefits to children and families of enhanced profile, clear strategic intent and sector engagement are clear.
- Productive partnerships with third sector organisations have resulted in improved sharing of good practice plus creative and promising initiatives for the future.
- Improvements in some but not all key areas of performance e.g. timeliness / numbers waiting.
- Ability to collect and analyse data enable areas for improvement and regional differences to be identified.
- There is a common understanding of barriers to better outcomes and what resources are needed.
- Progress made in improving consistent standards e.g. initiatives such as a 'Best Practice Guide for Family Finding' and implementing a national framework for adoption support.

NAS Central / National Elements



- NAS governance is well understood but complex and may impede or slow down the implementation of national approaches across Wales.
- Service control and agility is challenging e.g. some things NAS needs to respond to / manage are unpredictable (court decisions) and / or not directly within the ambit of the service (things that rely on mainstream children's services e.g. matching, elements of life journey work).
- There is ongoing inconsistency in service delivery across Wales

Recommendations



- The regional management board should review the arrangements relating to the implementation of agreed actions and ensure there are vice charring arrangements in place.
- Consideration should be given to how improvements in adoption support can be more systematically developed across partner agencies.
- A quality assurance framework should be implemented across the service and consideration given to linking into the associated functions which are completed by children's services. i.e. CAR/B; life journey work and later life letters.
- All operational regional adoption service staff should complete relevant safeguarding training every two years.

Recommendations (Continued)



- The process for assessing and agreeing financial support for adopters should be reviewed to ensure the system is working appropriately.
- The timeliness and quality of supervision should be reviewed to ensure there is a consistent approach to case management and staff support and development.
- Consideration should be given to how staff can be provided with a more suitable working environment.
- Panel members should be provided with an appraisal and training opportunities.

Recommendations (Continued)



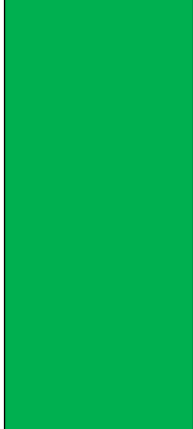
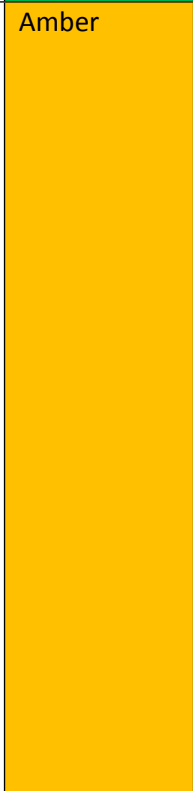
- Consideration needs to be given to provide the panel members with occasional business meetings and bring information and reports about placement breakdowns to panel. Panel member need to be provided with relevant policies and procedures.
- Monitoring arrangements need to be put in place to ensure review of support plans.

Recommendation	Progress /Action	Completed	RAG Status
<p>The regional management board should review the arrangements relating to the implementation of agreed actions and ensure there are vice chairing arrangements in place.</p>	<p>Arrangements for implementing actions reviewed and New Chair and Vice Chair appointed at Board meeting on 14.5.18.</p>	<p>14.5.18</p>	<p>Green</p>
<p>Consideration should be given to how improvements in adoption support can be more systematically developed across partner agencies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with three LA intake teams to be planned. This will help with a common approach, signposting and sharing (both ways) what universal services are available. Nov 2018 update still to be completed • Joint work with VAA's around support groups, training opportunities to be further developed. Nov 2018 Update-AUK providing support groups in the region some have been funded by the region. The region has contributed to development of the Tessa Big Lottery Bid which is aimed to develop and improve support across Wales and will assist in further development/improvement in the provision of support services. Discussions continue on Joint work re support groups • Access for adopters to a secure members page on the new website will aid access, improve consultation and feedback on what is needed and what is working. Nov 2018 Update-New Website went live during NAW October 2018 members page delayed due to security issues which are in process of being resolved. Access to members secure page on website has been designed and content ready. Have notified adopters that this is ready but awaiting technicalities outside of our control – ie contracts 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Amber</p>

A quality assurance framework should be implemented across the service and consideration given to linking into the associated functions which are completed by children’s services. i.e. CAR/B; life journey work and later life letters.	Draft QA report is in process of being developed with the Senior Manager Group representing each LA. QA checklists are to be developed to help managers undertake, in line with the QA framework, regular QA audits.	Ongoing	Amber
	<p>Nov 2018 Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A checklist has been developed for CAR/B quality and has been rolled out to all three LA’s as part of workshops • LJW quality framework launched and includes workshops for S/W’s, Adopters and manager briefings 	Nov 2018 Oct 2018	Green
All operational regional adoption service staff should complete relevant Safe guarding training every two years.	<p>Majority of staff have now completed this training and this is included in the TNA each year. Each member of staff will have an individual learning plan developed which will include safeguarding training. This will then be monitored in their personal supervision of staff on a monthly basis and explored in appraisals.</p> <p>Nov 2018 Update- Those outstanding and any new staff starting are tasked with completing by 31.03.18</p>	May 2018	Green
The process for assessing and agreeing financial support for adopters should be reviewed to ensure the system is working appropriately.	<p>The process for assessing and reviewing allowances is now robust and all on Oracle. This also enables early notifications of reviews and enables detailed recording of decision making and budget monitoring. There have BEEN and continue to be challenges due to manager capacity but this will be rectified with the appointment of the 3rd manager for Adoption Support.</p> <p>Nov 2018 Update-This has been completely reviewed and all processes are in place. All cases are now on Oracle, the NPT computer system which enables monitoring of allowances to ensure applications for new assessments are progressed in a timely manner and reviews are dealt with in advance of the end date for payment. The issue</p>	Jul 18	Green

	of manager capacity had been problematic but this will change in early 2019 with the new manager for AS taking up post		
The timeliness and quality of supervision should be reviewed to ensure there is a consistent approach to case management and staff support and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervision frequency and process has been reviewed and is required to take place monthly for all social work staff. Supervision templates have also been reviewed and updated. All staff have both personal and case supervision and have opportunity to comment on the supervision process. <p>Nov 2018 Update -Templates for personal supervision have been kept under review. These have been updated to reflect GDPR/ training/ and data issues as well as developments and any capacity pressure / ideas to improve services thus ensuring staff are able to feed into manager group ideas for continuous improvement.</p>	Completed Jan 2018 and updated again September 2018	Green
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervision is monthly for all SW staff and managers. In order to monitor this more closely there are two proposed developments. Firstly all supervision and appraisals will be logged on central register in order to provide management board with analytics re number of completed supervision both cases and personal and secondly, a QA framework for supervision so manager can dip sample staff supervision. Will be refined and launched in early 2019 	Spring 19	Amber
Consideration should be given to how staff can be provided with a more suitable working environment.	<p>Raised and discussed at Management Board in May 2018. Also raised at the PTCC Accommodation group. Matter is being considered.</p> <p>Nov 2018 Update – Desk dividers have been ordered to test whether this will assist in reducing the noise levels but they have yet to be installed</p>	Ongoing	Red

<p>Panel members should be provided with an appraisal and training opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Panel training scheduled in for the year. Training undertaken on 25.4.18 & 18.6.18 covering quality assurance, panel’s roles and responsibilities, evidenced based practice and considering two disruption reports and the lessons that can be learnt from these. Joint training is proposed for the autumn term and this will include panel members, family finding workers and recruitment workers. Aim of this will be to review the matching process and consider evidenced based practice, analysis and the impact of the LJF and Transition process. <p>Nov 2018 Update-Training has been provided to panel members. This has been around roles, responsibilities, evidenced based practice and inviting panel to consider the matching paperwork and how this could be improved. All recommendations have been implemented and the new forms have been completed and are being used. Panel feedback is that they are excellent and much improved</p>	<p>Completed April 2018</p>	<p>Green</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appraisals will be rolled out in the Autumn Manager capacity has delayed these being undertaken <p>Nov 2018 Update-Appraisals will be rolled out from January 2019 now that the manager / panel advisor capacity has been addressed</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Red</p>
<p>Consideration needs to be given to provide the panel members with occasional business meetings and bring information and reports about placement breakdowns to panel. Panel member need to be provided with relevant policies and procedures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business meetings now scheduled in for the year. In both training events (April and June) a business meeting component was added to the training. Panel members have agreed that, given the way panels are convened across the region and with a fluid attendance, business meetings will be managed in two ways. Updates on children’s cases and disruptions will be quarterly and shared in 	<p>Completed May 2018</p>	<p>Green</p>

	<p>each of the three panels in a specific month (next one is September) and , where a panel has a number of cases pulled, the time will be used to hold business meetings.</p> <p>Nov 2018 Update-A formal business meeting has been held and panel have been consulted on how to manage these. It has been agreed that where there are training events, a portion of the event will include business issues. Secondly, where a panel is shorter due to pulled cases, the time will be utilised with business meeting issues. This has been the case this year and has enabled panel consultation on documents and QA issues.</p>	<p>Completed September 2018</p>	
<p>Monitoring arrangements need to be put in place to ensure review of support plans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In adoption support, support plans to be reviewed when an assessment of support needs has been completed, when interventions are completed or when there is long term work they are reviewed by social worker and manager on a quarterly basis. • For family finding, it was agreed that every support plan should be reviewed by the FF manager on granting a placement order and as part of the case closure / transfer process. Transfer protocol to be updated to reflect this latter point <p>Nov 2018 Update-Open cases within adoption support – support plans are reviewed as part of supervision/reviews of cases at key times such as change of provision/completion of assessment or intervention. This is not as robust as it could be due to manager capacity and the absence of a system on Oracle to aid with this task. It has been discussed with ICT who can set up a ragging system however; capacity of manager has meant this has not been progressed. This will be a key focus when the new manager is in post at the end of the calendar year.</p>		<p>Amber</p> 

	<p>Support plans are not being reviewed formally on a routine basis with each application to court or granting of the adoption order. Discussions have taken place on how this will be undertaken. In addition, the court are now increasingly requesting an updated support plan is provided with the application / annex A and this has meant considerable changes to how the process works. Initial discussion have taken place to examine how to ensure this is completed and it has been agreed that the case closure / transfer process is to be reviewed so that, where there are identified needs a referral will be made for adoption support prior to application for the adoption order so that the named adoption support worker and letterbox co-ordinator can be adequately prepared. This will significantly improve with the appointment of the adoption support manager. The review of closure/transfer process planned for January 2019 if not sooner.</p>		
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