

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.

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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