

# Public Document Pack

## Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr

### Bridgend County Borough Council



Swyddfeydd Dinesig, Stryd yr Angel, Pen-y-bont, CF31 4WB / Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB

*Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg.  
Rhowch wybod i ni os mai Cymraeg yw eich  
dewis iaith.*

*We welcome correspondence in Welsh. Please  
let us know if your language choice is Welsh.*



#### **Cyfarwyddiaeth y Prif Weithredwr / Chief Executive's Directorate**

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

Gofynnwch am / Ask for: Democratic Services

Ein cyf / Our ref:

Eich cyf / Your ref:

**Dyddiad/Date:** Thursday, 25 January 2024

Dear Councillor,

#### **CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING**

A meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting will be held Hybrid in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB/Remotely On Microsoft Teams on **Thursday, 1 February 2024 at 09:30.**

#### **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 05/10/2023
4. Corporate Parenting Development Update 7 - 30
5. Monitoring The Performance And Progress Of The Western Bay Regional Adoption Service 31 - 120
6. 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.

Note: This will be a Hybrid meeting and Members and Officers will be attending in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Angel Street Bridgend / Remotely via Microsoft Teams. The meeting will be recorded for subsequent transmission via the Council's internet site which will be available as soon as practicable after the meeting. If you have any queries regarding this, please contact [cabinet\\_committee@bridgend.gov.uk](mailto:cabinet_committee@bridgend.gov.uk) or tel. 01656 643148 / 643694 / 643513 / .643696

**By receiving this Agenda Pack electronically you will save the Authority approx. £2.40 in printing costs**

Yours faithfully

**K Watson**

Chief Officer, Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy

Councillors:

F D Bletsoe  
JPD Blundell  
RJ Collins  
HJ David

Councillors

N Farr  
J Gebbie  
W R Goode  
M Lewis

Councillors

J E Pratt  
JC Spanswick  
T Thomas  
HM Williams

Present

Councillor N Farr – Chairperson

F D Bletsoe  
M Lewis

JPD Blundell  
J E Pratt

J Gebbie  
T Thomas

W R Goode  
HM Williams

Apologies for Absence

JC Spanswick, J Gebbie and HJ David

Officers:

Steve Berry  
Alex Fitzpatrick  
Stephen Griffiths  
Ryan Jones  
Carys Lord  
Claire Marchant  
Jade Jones  
Oscar Roberts

Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer  
Team Manager Placements  
Democratic Services Officer - Committees  
Strategic Housing Commissioning Manager  
Chief Officer - Finance, Performance & Change  
Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing  
Contracts and Contract Management Officer  
Democratic Services Business Administrative Apprentice

Declarations of Interest

Councillor F D Bletsoe declared a personal interest in item 5 due to section 3.1.2 on the second report  
Councillor T Thomas declared a personal interest in item 5 as he is employed with a membership body that represents the interests of property agents.

**34. Approval of Minutes**

Decision Made	<u>RESOLVED:</u> That the Minutes of a meeting of Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting dated 20 July 2023 be approved as a true and accurate record.
Date Decision Made	5 October 2023

**35. Corporate Parenting Development Update**

Decision Made	<p>The Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer for Bridgend County Borough delivered this report that detailed BCBC's progress and development in terms of corporate parenting focused around examining outcomes socially and educationally for young people. Credit was given to external stakeholders as well as the children who have achieved these outcomes.</p> <p>Questions were raised about the efficiency of services, engagement with young people over celebrating their achievements and costs associated with future projects. These questions were answered by the Deputy Leader, the Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing and the Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer. In addition, a discussion was had around methods of engagement and celebration for milestones of looked after children in comparison to other children.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u> The Committee noted the progress made, identified within the report.</p>
Date Decision Made	5 October 2023

**36. Housing Pathways for Care Experienced Children and Young People**

Decision Made	<p>The Contracts and Contract Management Officer delivered this report to update the Committee on progress from a previous Housing report from March 2022, and informing the Committee about the pathway for care leavers. Emphasis was placed on capacity shortages for the demand currently in the system and the possibility of care leavers eventually becoming homeless due to housing stock shortages. Monthly meetings of the area planning group have been planned to address these issues and ensure it receives further attention.</p> <p>Councillors posed questions surrounding the extrapolation of data to future needs, increasing the appeal of care leavers as tenants and caring for unaccompanied asylum seekers tracking young people/care</p>
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	<p>leavers. Additionally, queries were raised regarding numbers of young people accessing the supported service and housing grants/UBI being tailored towards care leavers' needs.</p> <p>These questions were addressed by the Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing, Strategic Housing Commissioning Manager, Contracts and Contract Management Officer and the Chief Officer - Finance, Performance &amp; Change. The difficulties of the rising cost of housing and the council's financial position were also discussed.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b> The Committee noted the information contained in the report and the further work required; and considered the priority given to care experienced children in line with the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities when reviewing the Social Housing Allocation Policy.</p>
Date Decision Made	5 October 2023

**37. Foster Wales Bridgend Update**

Decision Made	<p>The Team Manager for Placements gave this report focusing on placements and engagement with foster carers and the Care experience team. There were no questions given.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b> The Committee noted the contents of the report.</p>
Date Decision Made	5 October 2023

**38. Urgent Items**

Decision Made	None.
Date Decision Made	5 October 2023

**CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING - THURSDAY, 5 OCTOBER 2023**

To observe further debate that took place on the above items, please click this [link](#)

The meeting closed at 10:42.

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>1 FEBRUARY 2024</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>CORPORATE PARENTING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES &amp; WELLBEING</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>STEVE BERRY CORPORATE PARENTING &amp; PARTICIPATION OFFICER</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There are no implications for the policy framework and procedure rules.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<b>An update report to inform Cabinet Committee of progress in relation to the Corporate Parenting activity. Particular points to note are the First Year Overview Report of Specialist Participation Service and the request for Cabinet Committee to make the pledge to sign up to the All-Wales Corporate Parenting Charter on behalf of Bridgend County Borough Council.</b>

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting with an update on the development of Corporate Parenting in Bridgend and to request that the Cabinet Committee sign up to the All-Wales Corporate Parenting Charter.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting has received an update report on Corporate Parenting Development at each meeting since the commencement of the Corporate Parenting & Participation post. Each of the reports have provided progress on the following areas:

- Establishing a shared vision for Corporate Parenting Responsibilities.
- Establishing a governance structure that supports the strategic and operational approach to Corporate Parenting.
- Establishing a Corporate Parenting Performance Framework.
- Establishing care experienced forums to provide our children and young people with a collective voice.

2.2 It is proposed that update reports on these areas will continue to be presented to the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting until these areas have been fully established.

### 3. Current situation / proposal

#### 3.1 Establishing a shared vision for Corporate Parenting Responsibilities

3.1.1 The Corporate Parenting Board's sixth meeting took place on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023. The Board received several presentations for Board members to consider their Corporate Parenting responsibilities as single agencies and as a collective body.

3.1.2 One of the main aspirations of the Board is to have member agencies working to an agreed set of commitment and principles. On a local level, Board members have made a shared commitment through the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Strategy.

3.1.3 The work of Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board, especially in relation to meaningful involvement of care experienced children and young people to inform strategy, has been recognised by Welsh Government.

3.1.4 Welsh Government have also taken the approach of seeking 'commitment' from those responsible for care experienced children and young people by publishing "Corporate Parenting Charter – A Promise from Wales A Shared Parenting Pledge" (**Appendix 1**). The pledge document is underpinned by a list of principles published within "Corporate Parenting Charter – A promise for Wales – What does that mean for you" (**Appendix 2**). This provides agencies with a point of reference for a shared understanding and expectation for parenting our care experienced population. It must be noted that the Charter embraces a manner of working and there is no specific expectation for a change or demand in resources or financial implications.

3.1.5 At the last Corporate Parenting Board meeting it was proposed that member agency representatives would seek the commitment and approval of their respective agency leaders to sign up to the 'Corporate Parenting Charter – A Promise for Wales'.

3.1.6 It must be noted that Board members stated an ambition for all Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board member agencies to be signed up to the pledge by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 as this would maintain the positive momentum of the commitment to the children and young people they are individually and collectively responsible for.

3.1.7 As lead examples of the Board, both Awen Cultural Trust and Bridgend College have already signed up to the pledge. Bridgend have promoted their commitment to our children and young people on their webpages and social media:  
<https://www.bridgend.ac.uk/bridgend-college-signs-corporate-parenting-charter/>

3.1.8 By signing up to the Charter, Bridgend County Borough Council pledge the following to our care experienced children and young people:

- "We recognise our part as a parent in the largest family in Wales!
- We fully support the principles set out in this Charter and will live up to the common behaviours.



- We will ensure everything we undertake for care-experienced children and young people is underpinned by empowerment, equality, non-discrimination, participation, and accountability and protection and fully respects, protects and promotes your human rights under the UNCRC.
- We will engage with children and young people to measure our success and commitment to the charter.
- We will work to deliver a better offer of help for you and all care-experienced children and young people in order for you to thrive and reach your potential.
- Help you gain access to and make the best use of our services.
- Act in your best interests and make you feel secure and well in our relationship with you.
- Encourage you to express your views, wishes and feelings and, where needed, provide you with support to promote these.
- Ensure your voice is heard and actively considered in all decisions about you and explain why decisions have been made.
- Provide you with information and resources that you need, in a way you understand.
- Make sure we are accountable to you for the decisions we take and the outcomes that affect your life.
- Help you to reach your potential.
- Prepare you for leaving care and support you to thrive independently.
- Ensure all staff are made aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities during their induction.” – *[Welsh Government 2023]*

3.1.9. Therefore, it is requested that, as lead agency for the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board, the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting agree on behalf of Bridgend County Borough Council to sign up to the ‘Corporate Parenting Charter – A promise for Wales A Shared Parenting Pledge’

### 3.2. Establishing a governance structure that supports the strategic and operational approach to Corporate Parenting

3.2.1 Board member agencies are currently working on their own Individual Corporate Parenting Action Plan under the agreed aims directly relating to the priorities of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

3.2.2 It has been agreed that once the individual Corporate Parenting Action Plans are completed a master action plan will be pulled together for agreement. The master action plan will be monitored and reviewed on regular basis by the Board.

### 3.3. Establishing a Corporate Parenting Performance Framework

3.3.1 As part of producing individual action plans, Board member agencies have been invited to consider information to evidence progress and performance on parenting responsibilities.

3.3.2 The performance data from all agencies will be discussed at the March 2024 meeting to agree a dataset for the following financial year.

### 3.4. Establishing care experienced forums to provide our children and young people with a collective voice

3.4.1 The Specialist Participation Service, contracted to TGP Cymru, has produced an overview report for their first year of contract, **Appendix 3**. This is being provided as information to enable Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee to be aware of the work undertaken.

3.4.2 The overview report highlights the engagement of children and young people, objectives of the Participation Service and the Youth Forum it supports along with activities and achievements of the Bridgend Youth Forum facilitated by TGP Cymru.

3.4.3 Whilst there are a range of activities undertaken and projects underway, the greatest achievement for the Participation Service and the Youth Forum has been their instrumental involvement in the development of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the launch of the strategy.

3.4.4 The report provides an insight into how our young people have felt about being involved in the forum:

- “We are the experts and the ones in care or leaving care so should be fully involved.”
- “I feel we are taken seriously and not just a tick box”.
- “Other young people coming into care will be happy and reassured I think that children and young people have been fully involved and not just the adults sorting this stuff out”.

3.4.5 It must be noted that the Participation Service and the Youth Forum have recently been involved in a national campaign in partnership with Foster Wales to dispel misconceptions about young people in care. With the aid of former Welsh Children’s Poet Laureate a mural has been produced in Brackla, Bridgend. The campaign has been covered on the Foster Wales website:

<https://bridgend.fosterwales.gov.wales/teens-in-care>

## 4. **Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

4.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, or socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

## 5. **Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

5.1 Long term – the establishment of the Corporate Parenting Board will address how agencies can address their responsibilities for Corporate Parenting in a strategic manner to make robust plans for the future.

5.2 Prevention – the proposals that have been made mean that the responsibilities we all have for Corporate Parenting are identified and established into what we need to

report on. Measuring and reporting on these responsibilities through the Corporate Parenting Board will enable us to take early action on any issues identified.

- 5.3 Integration – the Corporate Parenting Board has a multi-agency membership, along with an extended multi-agency membership through its 5 sub-groups. This membership is intended to provide sufficient representation to cover who has specific responsibilities for our children and young people in particular circumstances. The purpose of the next Board meeting and the sub-group meetings being held in this quarter, is to identify where professionals and agencies need to work together in the future to forge a coherent approach to the care of our children and young people.
- 5.4 Collaboration – the success and effectiveness of our Corporate Parenting in Bridgend is dependent on how well agencies work together to achieve shared goals and aspirations for our children and young people. These goals and aspirations are cited within the ‘Bridgend Corporate Parenting Strategy – Our plan for you....’
- 5.5 Involvement – due consideration has been given to how different ‘providers of care’ are involved in the proposals around Corporate Parenting. Specific attention and proposals are given to enabling the voice and lived experience of our children and young people.

## **6. Climate Change Implications**

- 6.1 There is no direct impact on Climate Change through the implementation of this report.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

- 7.1 All safeguarding implications have been fully considered within Corporate Parenting development. No safeguarding issues were raised within the work cited in this report.
- 7.2 The subject matter of this entire report relates directly to corporate parenting and any implications are discussed within it.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 Corporate Parenting development does not have a specific allocated budget. Where costs have arisen to support participation of children and young people, engagement, meetings and training of professionals the costs have been met from within the Children’s Services core budget.

## **9. Recommendations**

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting, on behalf of Bridgend County Borough Council, sign up to the ‘Corporate Parenting Charter – A promise for Wales A Shared Parenting Pledge’.

- 9.2 It is also recommended that Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting notes the progress made by the Specialist Participation Service that supports our care experienced Youth Forum as identified within this report.

**Background documents**

None



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Corporate Parenting Charter – A Promise from Wales

“A SHARED PARENTING PLEDGE”

[gov.wales](http://gov.wales)

## What is Corporate Parenting?

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- Corporate parenting promotes the collective responsibility of local authorities to safeguard and promote the rights and life chances of care-experienced children and young people. Children can find more information about their rights here: [Children’s Commissioner for Wales – UNCRC Childrens Rights](#).
- Supporting care-experienced children and young people through their childhoods and as they leave care should be the responsibility of all public sector bodies.
- We want these bodies to understand and develop their responsibilities towards care-experienced children and young people, and to ensure they have the same life chances as all children living in Wales.



## Why a Charter? What’s it for?

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- A Charter is a set of principles and promises. This Charter has been developed in collaboration with care-experienced young people.
- This Charter is a set of promises that can be adopted by any public sector body when engaging with care-experienced children and young people.
- It also sets out shared principles that all bodies and their leaders should follow when providing services to care-experienced children and young people.
- We want all public sector bodies and senior leaders to sign up to this Charter as a good Corporate Parent. This Charter is not exclusive to local authorities and public bodies, and we would welcome any members of the third sector and private sector to sign up and become a Corporate Parent.
- The development of this Charter takes into account the overarching duties laid out in Part 2, General Functions of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Specifically, that a person exercising functions in relation to an individual for example a looked after child must have regard to the characteristics, culture and beliefs of the individual (including, for example, language). [www.law.gov.wales/social-services-and-well-being-wales-act-2014-further-legislation-codes-and-guidance-made-under-act](http://www.law.gov.wales/social-services-and-well-being-wales-act-2014-further-legislation-codes-and-guidance-made-under-act)
- The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children) will be revised to include additional guidance on the Charter. The updated Code of Practice will be published in 2024 and Charter will be reviewed as part of this process.

## Which kind of public sector body, public service or professionals do we mean?

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This charter is for any public sector body or individual who engages with or is responsible for care-experienced children and young people to adopt. For example:

- Politicians – Welsh Ministers, Members of the Senedd, (**United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 4**).
- Independent Bodies – The Children’s Commissioner, The Future Generations Commissioner and The Welsh Language Commissioner.
- Local Authorities – councillors, chief executives, directors of social services, local authority commissioners and procurement teams, housing and education, Foster Wales and National Adoption Service.
- Local Health Boards.
- NHS Trusts.
- Regional Partnership Boards.
- Social Care Providers – Local authorities, residential children’s homes and independent foster agencies.
- Social Care Professionals and practitioners – social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), personal advisers, youth and support workers, residential children’s home staff, foster carers, kinship carers and adoptive parents.
- Housing Providers – housing associations.
- Education – schools, governors, universities, colleges and Qualifications Wales.
- Transport for Wales.
- Third Sector Organisations and voluntary adoption agencies or services.
- Inspectorates – Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), Estyn and Health Inspectorate Wales (HIW).
- Cafcass Cymru.
- Department for Work and Pensions.
- Police – youth justice teams and those supporting individuals in custody.
- Employers/Apprenticeship/Traineeship providers.
- Other public bodies: National Resources Wales, National Park Authorities, The Arts Council of Wales, Sport Wales, National Library of Wales and National Museum of Wales. (**As listed in Section 6 of the Wales Future Generations Act 2015**).

## Shared Principles for Corporate Parents

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- **Equality** – We will support care-experienced children and young people to have the same life chances as every other young person in Wales. This is because all children have rights, no matter who they are (Article 1. UNCRC)
- **Eradicate Stigma** – We will recognise care-experienced children and young people for who they are, not just by their experience of being in care. This is because all children have a right not to be discriminated against (Article 2)
- **Togetherness** – We will work alongside care-experienced children and young people to ensure their views, feelings and ideas are integral to, influence and inform the services they receive and the way they receive those services. This is because all children have a right to be listened to and taken seriously (Article 12).
- **Support** – We will ensure professionals working with care-experienced young people understand their care experiences children and young people’s needs and/or have access to information an training.
- **Ambition** – We will ensure every care-experienced child and young person reaches their potential and can enjoy a wide experience of leisure, cultural, sport and social activities. This is because all children have a right to be the best they can be (Article 3 and 29) and have the right to relax and play (Article 31).
- **Nurture** – We will make all care-experienced children and young people feel valued, respected, cared for and loved. This is because all children have a right to be safe and protected from harm (Article 19) and because all children who are not living with their families should be checked on regularly to make sure they are okay (Article 25).
- **Good Health** – We will provide support to access the right health care and advice needed to support the best physical, mental health and general well-being for all care-experienced children and young people. This is because all children have the right to the best possible health and support (Article 24 and 39).
- **A Stable Home** – We will seek out and provide stable places to live that are right for all care-experienced children and young people. This is because all children have a right to special protection if they don’t live with their family (Article 20). This is because any adoption must be overseen by Government to make it supports the young person in their growth and development, is lawful and that it prioritises children’s best interests (Article 21).





- **A Good Education** – We will provide opportunities and support for all care-experienced children and young people to learn/develop and help them become who they want to be. This is because all children have a right to an education (Article 28 and 29).
- **Thrive** – We will ensure all care-experienced children and young people are prepared for the future and are able to make positive choices for independent living and adulthood. This is because all children have a right to reach their potential (Article 3 and 29).
- **Lifelong** – We will work to provide access to and raise awareness of the support and information available after leaving care. This is because adults have a duty to act in children's best interests (Article 3).

## Our Promises as Corporate Parents

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Set out below are the promises all Corporate Parents should fulfil when working with care-experienced children and young people:

- We will take time to listen to all care-experienced children and young people and ensure their views, wishes and feelings are heard and actively considered in all decisions made about them.
- We will treat all care-experienced children and young people with respect.
- We will involve all care-experienced children and young people in decisions that are made about them.
- We will keep all care-experienced children and young people informed about our involvement with them and explain our actions to them.
- We will use straightforward language when we communicate with all care-experienced children and young people.
- We will show compassion when considering the needs of all care-experienced children and young people.
- We will work with all care-experienced children and young people to help them achieve their goals.
- We will advise all care-experienced children and young people of the process to make a complaint should they feel we are not adhering to this charter.
- We will advise all care-experienced children and young people that they have a right to access independent advocacy to make sure their views, wishes and feelings are heard during decisions being made or when they are unhappy and want something stopped, started or changed.



## References

Reference	Description
UNCRC Article 2	The Convention applies to everyone whatever their race, religion, abilities, whatever they think or say and whatever type of family they come from.
UNCRC Article 4	Governments should make these rights available to children.
UNCRC Article 12	Respect for children's views. Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.
UNCRC Article 19	Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for, and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.
UNCRC Article 20	Children who cannot be looked after by their own family must be looked after properly, by people who respect their religion, culture and language.
UNCRC Article 21	Adoption. Government must oversee the process of adoption to make sure it is safe, lawful and that it prioritises children's best interests.
UNCRC Article 24	Children have the right to good quality health care and to clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment so that they will stay healthy. Rich countries should help poorer countries achieve this.
UNCRC Article 25	(Review of treatment in care). If a child has been placed away from home for the purpose of care or protection (for example with a foster family or in a hospital they have a right to a regular review of their treatment, the way they are cared for and their wider circumstances.
UNCRC Article 28	Children have a right to an education. Discipline in schools should respect children's human dignity. Primary education should be free. Wealthy countries should help poorer countries achieve this.
UNCRC Article 29	Education should develop each child's personality and talents to the full. It should encourage children to respect their parents, their own and other cultures and the environment.
UNCRC Article 31	All children have a right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of activities.
UNCRC Article 39	Children who have been neglected or abused should receive special help to restore their self-respect.

## UNCRC

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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international agreement that protects the human rights of children up to the age of 18. It recognises not only their basic human rights but gives them additional rights to protect them from harm as one of the most vulnerable groups in society. In 2011 the Welsh Government made the UNCRC law in Wales, with the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. The Measure places a duty on Welsh Ministers to have a due regard to the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols when making their decisions. Altogether there are 54 articles in the convention. Articles 1-42 set out how children should be treated.

For further information on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child please visit: The Welsh Government's UNCRC website [Children's rights | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES](#).

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# Corporate Parenting Charter – A Promise from Wales



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## Becoming a Corporate Parent – What does that mean for you?

**Corporate Parenting is about supporting care experienced children and young people to have the same opportunities in life as all children and young people in Wales.**

By signing up to be a corporate parent, you are agreeing to consider the following principles when delivering your existing services and support, planning new services and/or engaging with care-experienced children and young people:

## The Principles

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### Principle 1

**Support care-experienced children and young people to have the same life chances as every other young person in Wales.**

**Example:** Support a care experienced child or young person to find a stable home with provides them with the opportunity to access education and fulfil their potential.

### Principle 2

**Recognise care-experienced children and young people for who they are, not just by their experience of being in care.**

**Example:** Treat all children and young people the same no matter their background.

### Principle 3

**Work alongside care-experienced children and young people to ensure their views, feelings and ideas are integral to, influence and inform the services they receive and the way they receive those services.**

**Example:** Ensure forums or stakeholder groups are in place or established to develop new services includes care-experienced representatives.



### Principle 4

**Ensure those working in your organisations working with care-experienced young people understand their care experiences children and young people's needs and/or have access to information and training.**

**Example:** The needs of care-experienced children and young people are referred to in induction training of new staff.

### Principle 5

**Ensure that every care-experienced child and young person reaches their potential and is able to enjoy a wide experience of leisure, cultural, sport and social activities.**

**Example:** Can concessionary and/or discounted access be made available for sport, leisure and cultural activities to care-experienced children and young people.



## Principle 6

**By making all care-experienced children and young people feel valued, respected, cared for and loved.**

**Example:** By actively listening to all care-experienced children and young people you engage with.

## Principle 7

**By providing support to access the right health care and advice needed to support the best physical, mental health and general well-being for all care-experienced children and young people.**

**Example:** Ensuring care-experienced children and young people are supported to attend appointments and are directed to the right service to meet their needs.

## Principle 8

**By seeking out and providing stable places to live that are right for all care-experienced children and young people.**

**Example:** By ensuring that the needs and wishes of the child and young person is central to any foster or adoption placement being considered.

## Principle 9

**By providing opportunities and support for all care-experienced children and young people to learn/develop and help them become who they want to be.**

**Example:** Offering care experienced children and young people work experience placements, work shadowing opportunities, internships, traineeships and apprenticeships.

## Principle 10

**By ensuring all care-experienced children and young people are prepared for the future and are able make positive choices for independent living and adulthood.**

**Example:** Can you provide one-to-one mentoring on how to manage their finances, their career/ employment guidance and further education opportunities.

## Principle 11

**By working to provide access to and raise awareness of the support and information available to care experienced young people after leaving care.**

**Example:** Providing access to support and information through a variety of channels – websites, apps, social media and meetings.

**First Year Overview of Specialist Participation Service  
2023 – 2024**



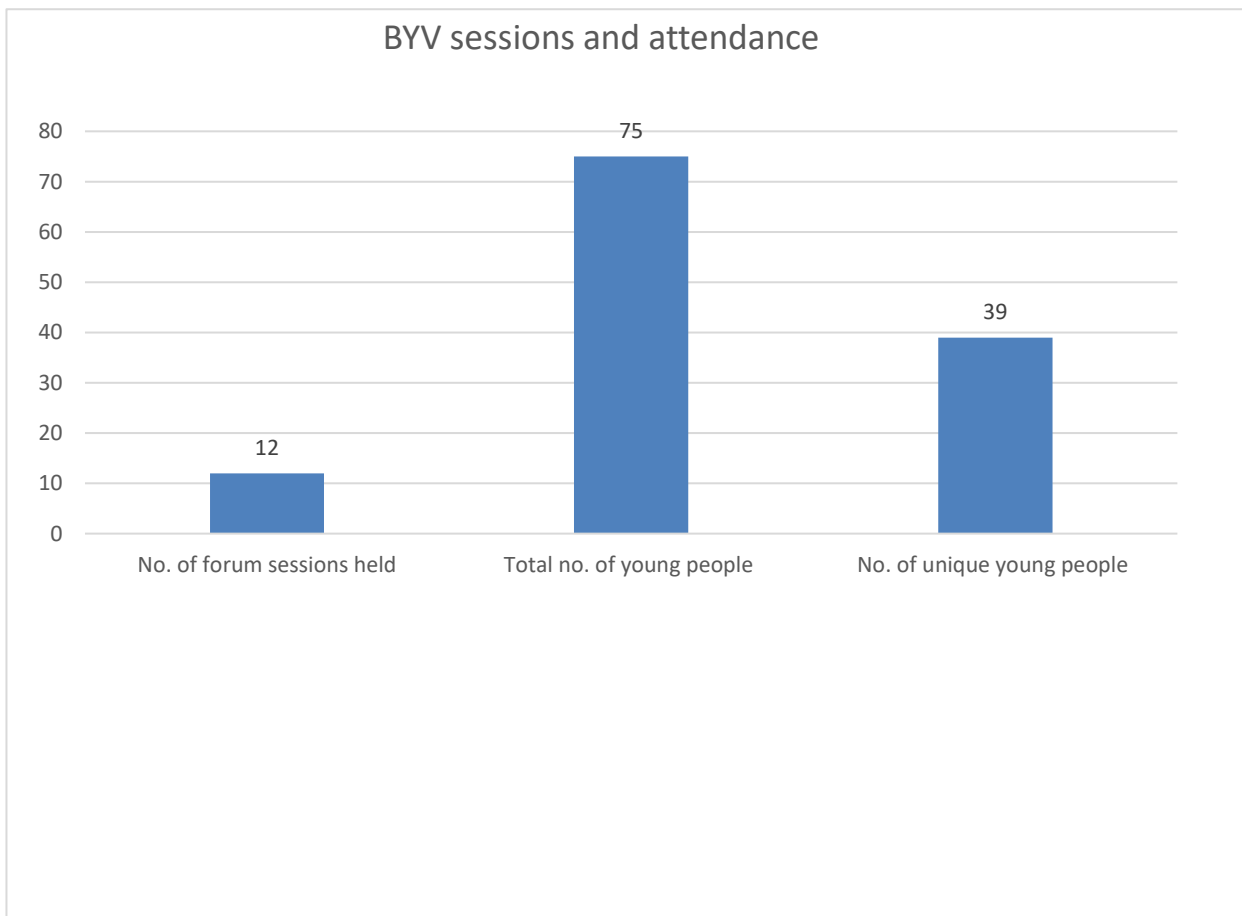
## Scope

TGP Cymru is commissioned by Bridgend to deliver specialist participation support to gain the views of care experienced young people and care leavers on a range of themes identified by the Corporate Parenting Operational Group, Children’s Social Care, Bridgend’s independent advocacy provider and the forum members themselves.

## Activity Overview

Between December 2022, and October 2023 12 participation sessions have been held with Bridgend care experienced young people. There are two more sessions scheduled before the end of the year.

The sessions have been attended by 75 young people overall. A total of 32 unique young people in attendance, 17 male, and 15 female.





## **Objectives/Achievements**

The aim of the service is to establish a way to collectively gain the voice and experiences of our children and young people to inform how all children and young people could have a better experience from the care that is provided to them in the future.

Young people in sessions discussed a wide range of topics and subjects including: Education, Independent professional Advocacy (IPA), letterbox contact, letterbox parcel scheme, communication with social workers, rights and entitlements, fostering recruitment, CLA reviews, IRO's, accessible information, leaving care, housing, life story work, subject access requests, mental health support, corporate parenting, residential care, independent visitors, compliments and complaints, life skills checklist, contact/family time, appropriate language for those in and leaving care, behaviour, stereotypes, safeguarding, family, what makes a good worker, assumptions, placement moves, lack of information and importance of friends.

So far, achievements of the forum include:

### **The Naming of the Bridgend Youth Forum (Bridgend Youth Voice BYV)**

The group worked with together to pick a name for their forum.

### **Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board logo**

BYV met with another care experienced young person who is currently studying design to come up with a new logo design for the newly launched Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board.

### **Naming of new community home (Meadows View)**

BYV used part of one session to pick the name for the new community home, recently opened in Bridgend.

### **Consultation on birthday cards instigated by Cllr Gebbie.**

Young people were asked their views on birthday cards being sent to all care experienced young people and to give their opinions on the design of cards being sent. Young people also shared YPA's should ask individuals if they want to continue receiving cards post 18.

### **Consultation on complaints**

Forum members were asked to share their opinions on current complaint and consultation literature. This was then shared with Dan B

### **Corporate Parenting Strategy Development**

Forum members shared their views on what they felt should be incorporated in the CPB strategy.

### **Launch and Promise Event**

Forum members led and facilitated the Launch event held in the Heronston Hotel in April and they were also consulted, and their words were shared before professionals made their promises at the promise event in March.

BYV forum members said the following about the promises:

*"The promises were all good and are real and can be done"*

*“All achievable so no excuses”*

*“let’s see if the promises are kept and if not, we know we can challenge this and will happily raise in forum with Zoe”*

### **Voice recording work For Childrens Rights animation**

We are hoping to support the forum to develop a animation to be used by Bridgend on their CPB page.

### **Q & A with Claire Marchant**

The forum had the opportunity to ask Claire Marchant questions about her role and any ideas they had on improving services.

### **Consultation on feedback forms for children and young people in foster placement**

PO Bridgend Placements Team, consulted with them about feedback forms and what will be needed on new ones.

### **Fostering Campaign for Teenagers**

BYV were supported to spend a day with young people’s poet Laureate Connor Allen, along with the Fostering Network and We are Cowshed where they took part in a workshop and came up with a unique poem reflecting their feelings about being care experienced. The plan is for the poem to be displayed publicly in Bridgend.

### **Supported Housing consultation**

Some BYV forum regular members along with other young people known to the PA service took part in a session to explore what is needed in supported housing etc.

### **Consultation re; Achievement Awards**

Forum members have been fed into plans for a celebration event for those in care and leaving care and ideas shared with CPO Steve.

### **What makes a good parent voice work**

Forum members recorded what they felt makes a good parent as they felt professionals and carers had their say and they wanted to share their views also.

### **Young Person Interview Panel**

Forum members have taken part in interview panels for various Social Care roles in BCBC.

## What has worked well?

Despite some challenges in relation to engagement at the beginning of the period, we now have an established group of young people attending the forum, helped hugely by having HALO Bridgend as a permanent venue.

### Group facilitators and relationship with BCBC

Zoe Morgan, the facilitator of the BYV for TGP Cymru, has an excellent and supportive relationship with Steve Berry, and they meet regularly to discuss the progress of the forum. It was decided that discussion topics would be chosen using a three-pronged approach. Topics are chosen by young people themselves, are chosen from themes arising from the independent advocacy service contract, also held by TGP Cymru and from BCBC themselves. This approach is supported by regular attendance to the forum by advocacy staff, including the advocacy team manager, and by BCBC via Steve Berry. We have also experienced positive engagement from some social work staff and personal advisors who have also assisted in some sessions.

This is what some BYV forum members said about their involvement in the forum:

*“We are the experts and the ones in care or leaving care so should be fully involved.”*

*“I feel we are taken seriously and not just a tick box.... Zoe wouldn't let that happen anyway!!!”*

*“Other young people coming into care will be happy and reassured I think that children and young people have been fully involved and not just the adults sorting this stuff out”.*

Information about the advocacy service is always available to young people in the group, and several have used or are currently using the service.

Zoe has recently taken on the role of independent visiting advocate for the two local authority community homes. Part of Zoe's role will be to share information about BYV with the young people in residence, and we are hopeful this will encourage more attendance in the forum and offer an even wider perspective of being care experienced in Bridgend.

### Forum sessions and attendance

BYV forum members have commented they are happy with both the venue and the times of the sessions, and this is evidenced by improved attendance in recent months. The young people in attendance have also commented on feeling ownership of the group and a sense of identity as BYV forum. This has resulted in the establishment of trusting relationships between the young people and the forum facilitator who is also care experienced, and created a space in which they can have open, honest, and sometimes difficult conversations. All staff have enhanced DBS checks and have been able to respond appropriately when they have concerns. One child protection referral was made by following a disclosure by a forum member. Concerns are discussed fully with social workers and carers, with knowledge of the young person.

Attendance is also supported by BCBC by taxi transport etc.

Young people have responded well to incentives to be involved in some events, and we are pleased to be able to offer this, but we are also pleased that the group is well attended by established members without any monetary incentive to attend.

We are also pleased by the consistent membership of some young people who have had difficulty in engaging and remaining engaged with professionals and groups in the past.

## Challenges

- **Getting a fully representative group of children and young people and ensuring any work that is completed is based on a wider collective voice.**  
Although recent group attendance has improved, we have not been able to hold two separate sessions, for two different age groups as planned. We are hopeful recruitment of young people and promotion of the group will be supported by social services staff moving forward as despite information and future dates of forums via myself and the Corporate Parenting Officer we get very few new enquiries about new young people attending.
- **Unknown young people turning up on the day of forum.**  
It's important that potential new group members are known the forum facilitator before they attend to ensure any issues, including safeguarding are known.
- **Large age range of forum members.**  
There are occasions when having a mixed age group works well, however there are occasions when the range of ages within the group are difficult to manage because of the topics discussed etc. We have been unable to split the forum into a younger and older group because of low numbers and the expression of some young people that they do not want to attend if there is not more than one or two other young people also in attendance.

## Future objectives

- Longer term funding and ensuring this forum is seen as an expert group.
- Guest speakers have been identified to attend forum because of consultations with young people and so far, the following have been agreed in the next few months- IRO Team, Police, Education and Adoption Team
- Regular attendance at ICE events and coffee mornings by TGP Cymru
- 2024 dates to be set and booked in with Halo.
- Team Meeting attendances to raise awareness.
- Develop Childrens Rights Animation in partnership with BCBC.
- Young people are keen to be involved in Foster Carer training so to explore how this can become a reality.
- TGP Cymru to make use of their social media regarding BYV Forum whilst respecting young people's identity and confidentiality.
- Clear expectations to be agreed by group re, behaviour and consequences.
- Regular flyers with dates sent to all teams and in format to send to young people.
- Liaise with Designated teachers in all comprehensives.

- Development of information sheet about young people to ensure forum facilitator is aware of any safety issues relating to new forum members.
- If numbers allow, to split the forum into a younger and older group as planned.
- Develop a more detailed system to record group membership.

### **Conclusion and looking forward.**

As stated above, we are pleased to have established a consistent membership of the group despite some challenges. With the support of BCBC and the independent advocacy service, we aim to increase membership in the coming months and develop partnerships with more children's services teams.

Below are some quotes from a BYV forum members:

*"I love group and the people in it, they all know how hard in can be being in care and leaving care"?*

*"I feel my voice can make a difference".*

*"I always look forward and having this group has saved me from deep depression".*

*"I can be a right pain in the a\*\* and have some behaviour problems but that is never been an issue in group and that's because I am listened too and taken seriously".*

*"I can just be myself".*

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<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET COMMITTEE CABINET REPORT CORPORATE PARENTING</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>1 FEBRUARY 2024</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>MONITORING THE PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS OF THE WESTERN BAY REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR – SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>NICHOLA ROGERS – REGIONAL ADOPTION MANAGER</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>The content of the report does not have any impact on policy frameworks or procedures.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<b>The report is to update the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting of the work of the Regional Adoption Service. The Regional Service is based on the old Western Bay footprint (Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea), and this is set out in legislation. In terms of operational work the service functions well and offers the adoptive families across the region an effective service. The report and its attachments highlight the breadth of work the region now covers and highlights key performance information over the last 12 months.</b>

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 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 Quality of Service Report for Q3 & Q4 2022-23 (**Appendix A**) and the Quality of Service Report for Q1 & Q2 2023-24 (**Appendix B**)

## 2. Background

- 2.1 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 (NAS) 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.
- 2.2 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

- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 The Regional Service is overseen by a quarterly Management Board chaired by a Director (currently the Director from Neath Port Talbot Council). The Board is comprised of the Heads of Children's Services from the three local authorities, a representative from health (currently the Medical Advisor from Swansea Bay University Health Board), education (currently the Team Manager for Pupil Support in Swansea), the National Adoption Service Central team and also a representative from the Voluntary sector (currently the Director of Adoption UK). Twice yearly joint committees are also held which are attended by the three Heads of Service and the three lead cabinet members for children.

### **3. Current situation / proposal**

- 3.1 Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS) became fully operational in April 2015. Prior to this adoption services were delivered locally via the three local authorities.
- 3.2 The regional adoption service provides a range of services and interventions across the five key domains to those affected by adoption, these 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 the Court, in searching for an adoptive placement
  - Birth parent support

#### **Performance and Activity**

- 3.3 The attached Quality of Service reports at **Appendix A and Appendix B** outline the performance for the regional adoption service. These reports are regulatory and have to be completed every 6 months. The attached reports are for the last six months of 2022-23 (**Appendix A**) and for the first half of the current financial year 2023-24 (**Appendix B**).

The reports demonstrate that the service has continued to deliver on both local and national objectives and maintain many aspects of performance.



### 3.4 Key achievements for the year 2022-23 for Bridgend children include:

- The number of children referred for twintracking to the service saw a small rise on the previous year from 44 to 49 children however this is still a considerable decrease from 2019-20 when the number was 62. A higher proportion of these referrals resulted in a placement order (PO) being granted, with 18 Bridgend children having a plan of adoption approved by the Court. The service has seen a downward trend of PO's being granted for children across the three local authorities over the last two years, most likely attributable to the Born into Care work and resourcing of preventative work by the local authorities.
- The number of Bridgend children placed in 2022-23 was 11. Across the Region placements for children were achieved within 9.6 months from the time the placement order was granted until the date of placement. The target is 6 months. We are seeing that children have increasingly complex needs and the work to transition them to placement is hugely complex and time consuming. The data for this year is showing that this length of time to place has reduced to 7 months far closer to the performance target, however it is important to note that the majority of these placed children were children under 12 months.
- 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 24 children within Western Bay and at the same time reduced the number placed in inter-agency placements to only 11.
- 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. The Service is now working hard to implement the Understanding the Child Day meetings which identifies children's likely support needs earlier on.
- The number of Adoption Orders granted (AOG) remained steady with 17 Bridgend children being made subject of an Adoption order compared to 16 the previous year.
- Following a number of strategies implemented by Western Bay Adoption Service, including development of the role of life-journey worker using Welsh Government Grant funding, there has been a significant improvement in this area with all children going to matching panel having a draft life-journey book and later life letter. In relation to final versions being available at the second adoption review performance has steadily improved from 51% in 2018-19 to 77% in 2022-23. Although this figure is below the target of 100%, this is likely to be attributable to the high turnover in social work staff.
- 2022-23 has been a difficult year in relation to the number of enquiries received, which was 164 compared to 224 the previous year. NAS have commissioned a piece of insight work through Cowshed, their commissioned marketing provider, to explore the reasons behind this as this was a trend seen across Wales. It is

likely that the cost of living crisis had a role to play in individuals' considerations. The marketing officer post is now firmly embedded in the service and is working closely with the three local authority marketing teams and Cowshed. There has been a continued marketing presence in the Bridgend area and it is pleasing to note that 14 adoptive families were approved from the area this year compared to 10 last year.

- The reduction in enquiries led to a decrease in adopters being approved, 31 compared to 52 the previous year.
- The additional Welsh Government funding has enabled the adoption support team to grow to meet the demand and be able to focus on early intervention strategies to support adoptive families. The team work creatively to offer all adopters support early in placement e.g. attendance at therapeutic parenting courses in an attempt to reduce later higher cost interventions. It is positive to note that adopters no longer have to wait for an initial assessment which had been the case in previous years.
- The additional resource has also enabled a focus to be given to support birth parents. Three monthly support groups are held; the Bridgend group meets in the Hope Church hall the first Tuesday of every month. Birth parents from across the region also come together every quarter for a wellbeing event. We currently have over 50 birth mothers engaged in the groups across the Region.
- The service has also developed a regional youth group which is held weekly and is attended by 15 young people most of whom have been unable to engage with their peer group previously due to their challenging and additional needs. Members of the youth group have been able to attend the pantomime together, have been surfing, and undertaken bush craft activities.

3.5 The service plan reflects the key priorities for the coming year. The service are very aware that the forthcoming years will be very difficult due to budget pressures facing the local authority. Areas and priorities for future development for the forthcoming year are:

- Further embedding the National Good Practice Guides within current practice.
- Working closely with the three local authorities to consider respite and edge of care support to our most challenging adopted children.
- Re-modelling of the service to align with the available budget, a forward look at the service over the next 1, 3 and 5 years.
- To increase the number of approved adopters to 40 next year. To ensure a continued marketing focus in each of the local authority areas.
- Further implement the Building Undeveloped Sensory Systems (BUSS) model of sensory processing, being able to offer sensory assessments to our adopted children.
- Continue our Partnership with Foster Wales at local and regional level

### 3.6. **Concluding comments**

The current overall position of the regional adoption service remains positive. The overall assessment of the service is good and performance has very much remained on target in the majority of areas. The service has continued to develop significant areas of the service such as post adoption contact and birth parent support and a growing number of adopters are now supporting marketing activity. Morale in staff across the service is good, and staff actively support new service developments. There is a growing community of adoptive families in the region that actively attend support events, playgroups and support groups.

## 4. **Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

## 5. **Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

5.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Well-being 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 well-being goals of a Healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.

5.2 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.

## **6. Climate Change Implications**

6.1 The service strives to work in line with the Councils climate change ambitions.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

7.1 The service works under the BCBC Safeguarding Policy to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children, young people and adults at risk of abuse or neglect and to ensure that effective practices are in place throughout the Regional Adoption Service.

## **8. Financial Implications**

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

## **9. Recommendation(s)**

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

## **Background documents**

None



GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU  
Bae'r Gorllewin  
Western Bay  
ADOPTION SERVICE



# Quality of Service

## Review

*April - September 23/24*





**GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU**  
**Bae'r Gorllewin**  
**Western Bay**  
**ADOPTION SERVICE**



# Quality of Service Review

1 April - 30 September 2023



National  
**Adoption**  
 Service



Cyngor **Abertawe**  
**Swansea Council**



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## 1. Introduction

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The requirement to provide six monthly reviews of the Adoption Service is set out in Regulation 39 of The Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019. The aim of this report is to bring into one document a presentation and analysis of the activity of each of the local authority adoption agencies, operating as a regional service. In addition, Section 15 (c) of The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 sets out the responsibilities of regional collaborative to report to the Director of Operations for the National Adoption Service on a quarterly and annual basis.

The report and information within it will be used for:

- The Review of Service (Regulation 39 report).
- Given the broad content of this report it will be used for informing senior managers, cabinets, scrutiny committees and corporate parenting Boards.
- Quarterly and annual reports to NAS.

This report is in respect of the period 1st April 2023 to 30th September 2023. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information presented is an accurate record of the activity and quality of the Adoption Service and consider targets for the forthcoming year.

## 2. Current Position

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The service has continued to develop its practise in relation to contact and birth parent support facilitating a further workshop for Adoption services in England in London in September. Performance in relation to family finding activity and placements continues to be much lower than historically which is likely due to the Local Authorities Born in to care projects and in the development of preventative/edge of care support services. Enquires and adopter approvals is in line with the national position although a huge presence in the community over the summer months has seen a increased interest being made.



Adoption support continues to see a consistent number of referrals in the number of families needing to access support services and an increase in the complexity of older young people. The additional staff employed as a result of using the income generated from external placements has been hugely beneficial in being able to expand the support available to birth families and adoptive families in the area of contact and the check-ins continue to be hugely beneficial.

Areas and priorities agreed at the end of Q4 for future development for the rest of this year were identified below and the progress on these will be considered under the relevant sections throughout this report:

- One of the future hopes for our service is that we would be able to access respite for our adoptive families.
- Re-modelling of the service to align with the available budget, a forward look at the service over the next 1, 3 and 5 years.
- Further embedding of the GPG's.
- To increase the number of approved adopters to 40 next year. To ensure a continued marketing focus in each of the LA areas.
- Further Implement the BUSS model of sensory processing and start the 10 week sensory course.
- Partnership with Foster Wales at local and regional level.
- High visibility at local and national events.
- To continue to roll out the Understanding the Child Day as part of the transition service, increasing the confidence of the family finding team to grow capacity in the service.





- Review all Letterbox post 18. We will contact all adopters when their child reaches 17 to ask adopters and young person if they would like to continue letterbox post 18, this can continue until age 25.
- Invite all adopters with active letterbox to a workshop to look at contact issues post 18. This will be an opportunity to check in with adopters to see if there are any Life journey issues which need to be addressed.
- Workshop/advice to birth parents when their child reaches 18. There has been an increase in birth parents making contact with the letterbox team to request contact with their child who has reached 18.

### **3. Staffing**

Staffing has remained fairly stable throughout the last two quarters with low absence rates, only two member of staff has remained on long term sickness during this period, a third person has recently returned to work. One business support member of staff is on maternity leave. This post is being backfilled with a temporary arrangement.

### **4. Adoption Panel**

#### **Membership**

The support of both Medical Advisors Dr Peter Barnes and Dr Emily Payne continues with both joining the service in regular interface meetings aimed at improving quality and timeliness of documentation used for panel. This has been an effective venture, utilising the expertise of the Medical Advisors to shape practice in the service. WBAS recognises that the support and service both provide to the service is considerable and the service is fortunate in the flexibility that the MA's provide.



## Panel Training and Development

All Panel members have had an appraisal and the themes from these appraisals will be shared at one of the quarterly Business meetings held with panel members. Panel members have been offered training on safeguarding.

## Adoption Panel Activity

Panel continues to have a central list of members and several new panel members have been recruited to further increase the diversity of panel members. Panel has continued on a virtual basis and discussions are ongoing about a potential move to a hybrid arrangement in the forthcoming months. Work will now start on recruiting Councillors to panel to ensure that panel has representation that can change and shape the future of adoption.

## Number of Panels held

	Period 1st April -30th September 2023
Number of Planned Panels held	20
Number of Panels cancelled due to lack of quoracy	0
Number of Panels cancelled for other reasons*	6 panels were cancelled due to not having cases to discuss





## 5. Children

### Performance in relation to Twin-tracking/matching and Placement

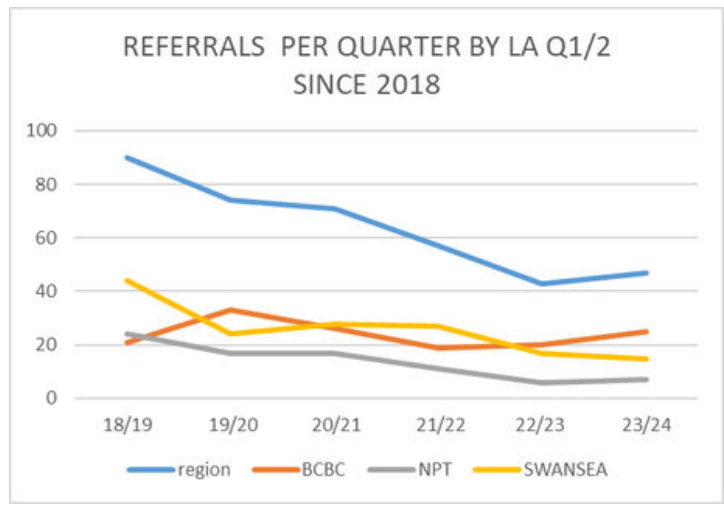
#### Referrals and Placement Orders

Overall trend for twin-tracking referrals and POG comparing Q1 over the three previous years.

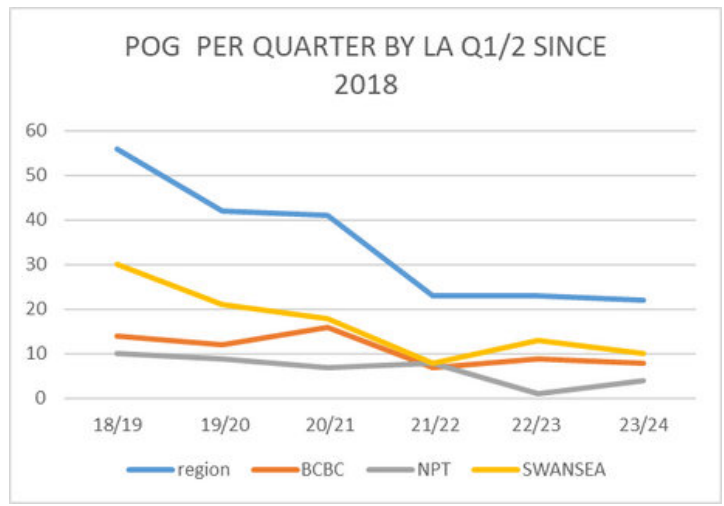
	Q1 - Q2 2018/19	Q1 - Q2 2019/20	Q1 - Q2 2020/21 LOCKDOWN	Q1 - Q2 2021/22	Q1 - Q2 2022/23	Q1 - Q2 2023/24
Number of Referrals	90 BCBC 21 NPT 24 SWN 44	74 BCBC 33 NPT 17 SC 24	71 BCBC 26 NPT 17 SC 28	57 BCBC 19 NPT 11 SWN 27	43 BCBC 20 NPT 6 SWN 17	47 BCBC 25 NPT 7 SWN 15
Number of POG	56 BCBC 14 NPT 10 SWN 30	42 BCBC 12 NPT 9 SWN 21	41 BCBC 16 NPT 7 SWN 18	23 BCBC 7 NPT 8 SWN 8	23 BCBC 9 NPT 1 SWN 13	22 BCBC 8 NPT 4 SWN 10



### Referral Trend



### POG Trend



The reduction in referrals and POG has had a follow on effect in relation to the number of children placed for adoption during this period. The children being referred are increasingly presenting with more complex health, genetic and developmental issues.

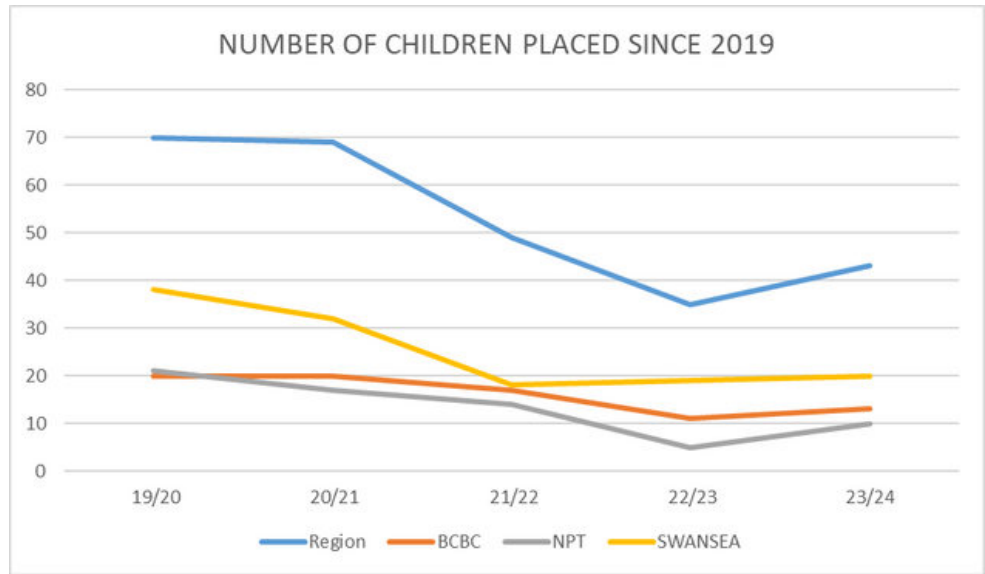
	Q1 - Q2 2019/20	Q1 - Q2 2020/21 LOCKDOWN	Q1 - Q2 2021/22	Q1 - Q2 2022/23	Q1 - Q2 2023/24
Number of children matched	33	34	34	11 BCBC 5 NPT 1 SWN 5	22 BCBC 8 NPT 6 SWN 8
No of children placed	44	32	28	11 BCBC 5 NPT 1 SWN 5	19 BCBC 6 NPT 5 SWN 8



	Q1 - Q2 2019/20	Q1 - Q2 2020/21 LOCKDOWN	Q1 - Q2 2021/22	Q1 - Q2 2022/23	Q1 - Q2 2023/24
Of these children number of children placed with WBAS adopters	20	26	18	6	18
Of these children number of children placed with Non regional adopters	24	6	10 (this was anticipated as 4 of these placements were agreed during 20/21 but placement not achieved until this year)	5 (1 child placed OOC with sibling adopters and 1 sibling group of 2)	1 (marketshare placement with Barnardos in Wales)
Number of AOG	24	25	30	24	17



## Children Placed Trend



NB the figure for 2023/24 is predicted and may change

## Average Length of Time from Placement Order to Placed for Adoption - Q1/Q2 comparison with 2022-23.

	MWW	NW	SE	VVC	WB	TOTAL	Q1/Q2 WB
Placement Order to Placed for Adoption average	11.6	16.7	10.6	7.9	9.6	11.3	7.0
Placement Order to Placed for Adoption shortest	5.3	7.5	4.1	0.6	3.5	0.6	4.75



	MWW	NW	SE	VVC	WB	TOTAL	Q1/Q2 WB
Placement Order to Placed for Adoption longest	24.8	32.3	40.7	31.1	24.6	40.7	11

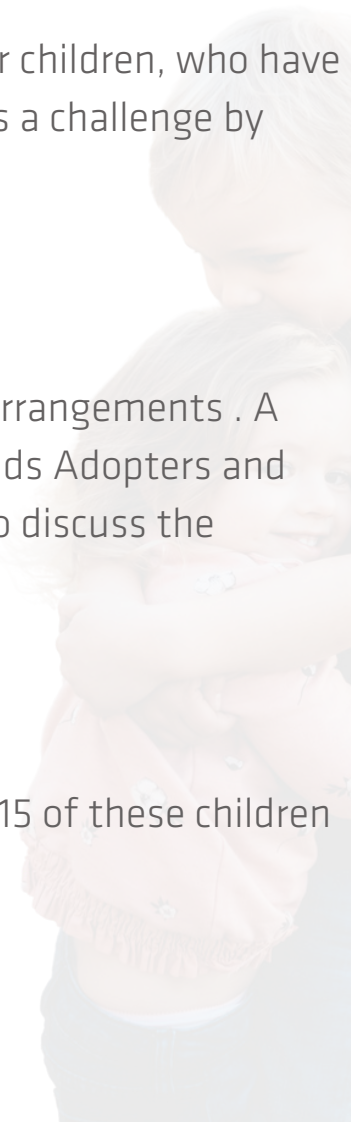
The children placed this year to date have predominately been younger children, who have been placed with WBAS adopters, only in one of these cases there was a challenge by birth parents at matching.

### Marketshare Project

1 child has been placed with Barnardos adopters via the Marketshare arrangements . A positive initial visit has been undertaken for another child with St Davids Adopters and the match is booked into panel. Regular quarterly meetings are held to discuss the projects progress.

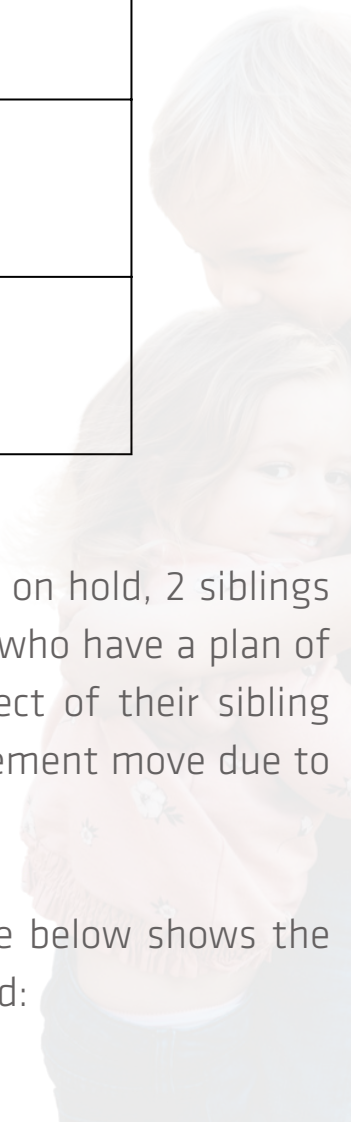
### Children Waiting

At the end of quarter 2 39 children were in the family finding process. 15 of these children did not have a strong link or match identified.





	Total Cases open	Number actively in Family Finding
October 2019	70	25
October 2020	56	23
October 2021	33	11
September 2022	38	7
September 2023	39	12



There are currently 7 children subject to a PO whose family finding is on hold, 2 siblings groups of 2 who have experienced a placement disruption, 2 children who have a plan of adoption where further assessments are being undertaken in respect of their sibling attachment and a single child who has just experienced a foster placement move due to child protection concerns arising.

For the 15 children waiting without a strong link or match, the table below shows the longest time, shortest time and average time since the PO was granted:





<p>Child waiting longest time in Weeks since POG</p>	<p>62 weeks (sibling group of 2)</p>	<p>Comments:</p> <p>The care plan was for the siblings to be placed together, following the FH the children experienced placement breakdowns due to their behaviours, family finding was put on hold for several months whilst a further sibling attachment assessment was undertaken. This has now recommended that the children should be placed separately.</p> <p>There is a further BEM sibling group of three for whom family finding has been ongoing for 40 weeks, and a further 2 sibling groups of 2 these children (42 weeks and 6 weeks) all have identified additional needs with one sibling in each group currently being considered under the ASD pathway.</p>
<p>Child waiting shortest time in weeks since POG</p>	<p>1 week</p>	
<p>Average time children have waited for link since POG</p>	<p>31 weeks</p>	<p>The average is impacted upon by the number of complex sibling groups that we are family finding for.</p>



## Number of Adoption Order's granted

The number of adoption orders granted has is in line with number of children placed and is dealt with in a timely manner.

## Disruptions & Breakdowns of Placement

Within Western Bay in the reporting period there has been one placement disruption post formal placement of a sibling group of two children. The independent review report was commissioned and the report is available and had been shared with professionals involved with the case, adoption panel members and will be shared with regional staff in October.

## Understanding the Child Day Process

Title	Description	Frequency
Review Referral Planning meeting	Member of UtC team attends RRPM to start to gather information about the child and to spot potential gaps in information, understanding, direct work being completed	11
Understanding the Child Day consultations	FF brings every case to consultation to discuss our understanding of the child and to plan what needs to take place as next steps	20





Title	Description	Frequency
Trauma Nurture time line/Circle of Understanding meeting	Map out trauma/nurture timeline with CSW, SSW, FFSW	7
Understanding the Child Day	Prospective adopters attend along with those that know the child and birth family, including foster parent, school, CSW, SSW, FFSW, ASW	6

The UtC team have been involved with 26 sibling groups, 50 individual children.

## Evaluation of UtC Days

All participants of UtC days have completed evaluation forms (60 responses)

Question	Response (Likert 10 point scale 1-least, 10 most)
How useful has the UtC Day been?	100% participants scored 10
Confidence increase in Understanding the child following the day	100% either increased in confidence (or remained at 10 pre and post)





## Prospective adopters

*"Excellent, was really helpful getting to know more about X"*

*"Given me the tools, the knowledge to move forward"*

*"Great to meet everyone in a positive environment to get to know the child and make plans to move forward"*

*"Today has been beneficial in bringing all the information together. We have learned more about the children, things that we were unaware of and feel more confident that we can meet the children's needs"*

*"Really informative day that has helped us to understand the child's lived experiences and how they may continue to impact in the future"*

*"I enjoyed the opportunity to ask more questions that were specific to the child"*

*"Thorough, open and honest, human, caring" I understood a lot of the experiences the children had had, but not the full extent"*

## Foster parents

*"The more I know the better I can care, I found the day really informative"*

*"It is imperative that these days are done to understand the child's behaviour and also the impact of early experiences later on in life"*

## Supervising Social worker

*"This is an excellent presentation. It gives a clear understanding of the children's lived experiences' shared information with great insight and reflection"*

*"I think that bringing all the people together who are involved with the children is really useful. Really good to hear from the foster carers about how the children are doing and good to put the children's lived experiences in to current presentation and future needs"*



## Child care setting/school

*"Solidifies the importance of why these sessions should be done"*

## FF SW

*"I was quite confident (in understanding the child's needs) but always impacts on you harder when the story is shared verbally"*

## CSW/Practice leads

*"We had a greater understanding following the nurture/trauma timeline session so we were prepared for today"*

*"There are many unknowns but I feel we are able to understand them better to ensure plans are all developed with the child's needs at the forefront of our minds"*

*"I think this day would also be helpful after the child is placed with other professionals"*

*"My knowledge of the children was helped by the trauma/ nurture time line and lots of work with my team and WBAS. I do feel more confident and will look at symptoms of survival rather than behaviour"*

*"Today has been invaluable. I am able to take what I have gained today and apply it in understanding families"*

*"Amazing day. I think every child should have an UTC Day!"*

## MAPSS Assessor/ Lead Behaviour Analyst

*"Thanks for the invite-really informative day. Looking forward to being part of future days with children from WBAS working with MAPSS"*





## UtC Day Evaluation

One set of prospective adopters decided, following the UtC day, that they were not the right couple for the child. This was viewed as positive by the UtC team as it was clear that the couple were thinking carefully about the child's needs rather than following the process without reflection. The other prospective adopters have decided to proceed.

The days have continued to be very positively received by all participants. The UtC team spend a great deal of time preparing for the day by researching and writing birth parents' stories as well as the children's stories both at home and in care. Participants are also carefully prepped about what to expect during the day and care is taken during the day to ensure the emotional safety of the participants. The days are more successful when people attend from school, fostering and social services. If one sector is missing we feel that the experience is less powerful.

Members of the UtC team have carried out observational assessments of some children within their home environment in order to obtain more clarity around their needs, observations have been prioritised when there is conflicting information about the child, or children from various sources. The psychologist and play therapist have also carried out therapeutic consultations for families that have found having children placed a challenge. These consultations have been positively received by families and supporting social workers. Our families may then progress to the less than 12 months placed therapeutic parenting course which builds on the themes introduced on the UtC day. The families are encouraged, as part of the TP course, to look back at the UtC day report and Emotional Health plan to help in the parenting of their child, or children. It is stressed that the UtC report and Emotional Health Plans are working documents that should be reviewed throughout the adoption journey.

Families living within our region are also offered a place on LEAPlets, our BUSS sensori motor play group which revisits motor development experiences that a lot of our children have missed out on early movement experiences. The group also support the relationship building with the families.



## Considerations for UtC Day team going forward

The UtC team are due to work on supporting the introductory theory part of the day with visuals such as video clips of intersubjectivity. It is felt that this will help participants gain a better understanding of what is spoken about during the day.

The UtC team will continue to disseminate good practice within WBAS. It is evident that Family Finders involved in UtC consultations, TNTLs /CoU and UtC days have extended and developed their own knowledge and skill base which they apply to all of their cases. As their confidence continues to increase, members of the FF team who are not currently part of the UtC team, will be able to facilitate meetings thereby extending and developing the UtC team.

The psychologist within the team is also liaising with Adoption Support social workers to carry out TNTLs/CoUs and UtC days for families who already have children placed. This is a key area for growth and development going forward.

The UtC team will continue to link in with all functions within the service in order to ensure that WBAS build on consistent themes throughout adopters' journeys.

## 6. Adopters

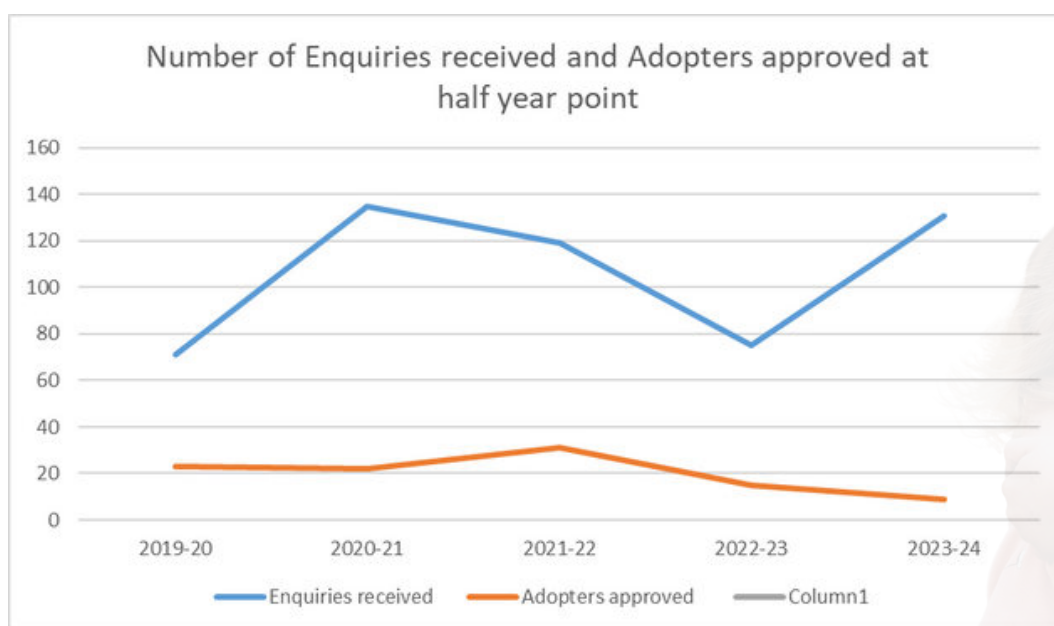
### Enquiries and Adopter Approval

Enquiries are higher than the last two years but conversion of these enquiries to approval remain low, this is discussed below, and the hope is that some of these adopters return in the near future when they have addressed some of the areas of worry.





	Q1/Q2 2019/20	Q1/2 2020/21 Lockdown	Q1/2 2021/22	Q1/2 2022/23	Q1/Q2 2023/24
Number of Enquiries	71	135	119	75	131
Number of adopters approved	23	22	31	15	9 Location of adopters BCBC 2 NPT 1 SWN 5 Tenby 1



The increase in children coming through in this period has of course led to a significant reduction in the adopters waiting without a link. There are currently 11 adopters in the Family Finding Scheme





## Information in respect of the Adoption Assessment process

### In Q1 April to June 2023:

- We received 46 enquiries
  - 18 attended our introduction event
  - This led to 9 initial visits
  - We received 9 ROI's (Registration of Interests)
  - All of the assessments proceeded
  - 4 adopters were approved in this quarter from previous quarters
  - Enquiries are up slightly from this Q1 last year
- 
- We have undertaken 9 initial visits in comparison to 18 last year – however 5 of these did not progress, therefore 4 applications down from the previous year. We have seen a decline in the number of applications proceeding, however we feel the applications we now receive are more likely to progress, more robust and have considered all aspects of the good practice guides. Therefore adopters are entering into this process with a realistic picture of what adoption entails alongside the long term challenges of adoption.
- 
- Introduction to adoption training has saved social work hours due to initial visits only progressing with potential applications that have been well considered and meet regulations
- 
- Some attendees at our introduction to adoption events are not ready to proceed due to;



- being at the early stages of considering adoption
- still undergoing infertility investigations/ treatment/ IVF
- change in jobs/ career
- birth child too young
- moving home
- recent loss/ bereavement

The training introduces prospective adopters to the team, the concept of adoption and the ethos of the service. We have seen attendees return several months following the training. The training also instils early messages around the good practice guides – contact with birth family, life journey work alongside the lifelong challenges of adoption.

## **WEP**

We have 2 prospective WEP carers currently in stage 1 of assessment:

- 1 set of applicants are in stage 1 (checks and references stage)
- 1 set of applicants are in stage 2 due to attend panel in September, they will then need to attend fostering panel within 8 weeks of approval

We have two sets of approved adopters wishing to consider WEP:

- 1 applicant is being assessed by the support of fostering due to attend panel in August/ September (due to updated checks)
- The other set of adopters have been recently matched and withdrawn from considering WEP

We discuss WEP at every introduction to adoption event and preparation training

We hold a separate WEP intro session should applicants wish to consider WEP

I meet monthly with the Swansea fostering manager to discuss allocations, fostering prep training and panel dates.



## **In Q2 July 2023 to September 2023**

We received 82 enquiries (Bridgend 10 NPT 14 Swansea 23)

- 23 attended our introduction event
- This led to 11 initial visits
- We received 5 ROI's (Registration of Interests) – some we are still awaiting
- All of the assessments are likely to proceed
- 5 adopters were approved in this quarter from previous quarters

## **Family and Friends Training**

Two face to face Family and friends training workshops have been run in May and September. A total of 31 siblings, aunts, cousins, parents and friends of our adopters have attended.

Feedback includes:

- Very professional and friendly sessions provided by J & C. Very helpful and sensitive. Reassured us regarding adoption process and possible issues/problems that may arise.
- The presenters were very friendly and professional. Felt able to ask any questions.
- It covered both birth parents, adoptive parents and above all the children
- It was nice to have our eyes opened to what happens in the process, and that the safety of everyone is important
- I used to think adopting was a simple straight procedure, I never realised or thought about the trauma that the child/family may go through
- Fantastic, really explained a lot that I didn't understand before
- Superb presentations, incredible breadth of knowledge
- Very useful and informative day – it triggered questions but Claire and Jodie answered all.



- A very useful day and a sound preparation for my role as an adoptive grandparent.
- Course very interesting (bit intense now and again!). So pleased I was able to attend

## Non Agency – Step Parent/ Non Relative Applications

	2021/22 Q1/Q2	2022/23 Q1/Q2	2023/24 Q1/Q2
Number of Referrals	25 BCBC 2 NPT 8 SWN 11	27 BCBC 11 NPT 9 SWN 7	15 BCBC 3 NPT 7 SWN 5

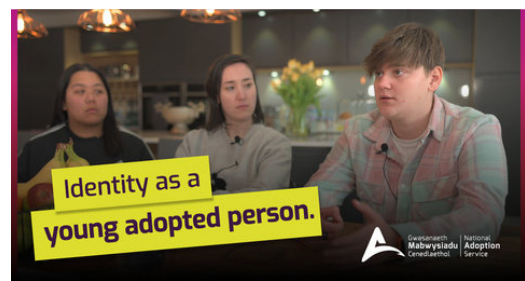
The table above shows a decrease in the number of referrals received. These referrals are dealt with immediately and passed through a triage type system which has been effective in considering early on whether they are appropriate referrals. There are no non agency cases awaiting allocation.

## 7. Advertising and Marketing

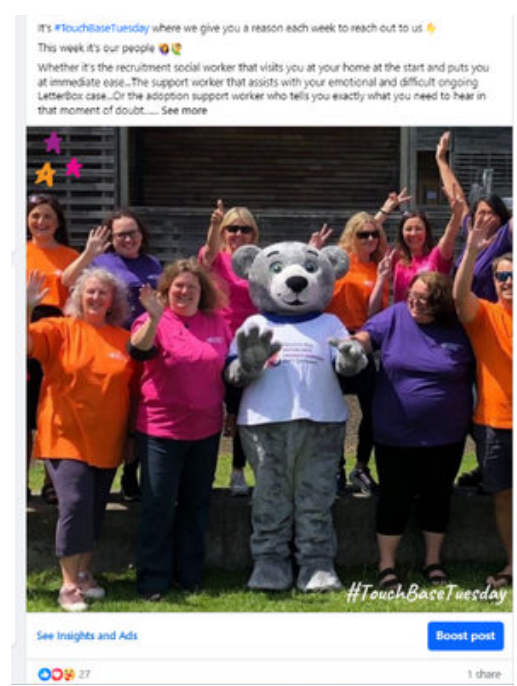
Firmly rooted in Spring our marketing engagement and community work intensified as we entered April. Firstly though we supported the launch of the adopted young person's take-over episode of the Truth Be Told: Adoption Stories podcast. Young people shared their experiences visually and in audio on how adoption has shaped their identity - the podcast generally receiving rave reviews, 1000's of listens and views, and most recently, picking up silver at the prestigious British Podcasting Awards Parenting Category.



WBAS are proud to have played our part in the development of the product.



In-house social media has also been a big focus alongside our physical engagement work with mini-campaigns such as #AdoptionHeartWarmers #TouchBaseTuesday receiving excellent engagement and motivation and creating points of difference in our service - driving visitors to our information events and website. Engagement levels on our social media continue to be the highest in our sector in Wales.



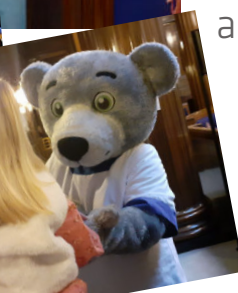
Back to our family community and our Adoption Celebration Hearing Days where we held events for families who missed out on a court hearing due to covid were a massive success. We struggled to deal with the size of the response from families at times, but seeing the tears, emotion and what this meant to parents made all the hard work with it.



We simulated the court environment with a video from the judges being played in council chambers etc and had full support from services heads and councillors etc - making this an extra special occasion. Full media documentation of the events again meant that we had unprecedented levels of engagements on our channels and excellent rates of visitors of to our website. Events like this are key in creating a perception of value in the service and creating invaluable word of mouth marketing. We meanwhile continued being out and about in the community by attending our commercial partners Bridgend Ravens RFC last game of the season against Swansea RFC.



We also took up an opportunity to utilise some new sponsor space on the team jerseys which be seen in the pictures Anecdotally, and as part of a wider marketing mix, the partnership is proving fruitful as enquiries from the county are consistently higher than the previous periods when didn't do this activity. We finished off April at the Swansea Pride Festival – generating enquiries and having great conversations with younger potential adopters with one eye on the future



As we moved into May we were presented with a new framed jersey celebrating our additional commercial partnership with Pen y Bont FC Academies. The jersey is now placed alongside our framed jersey from the Ravens in Tregelles Court. Spreading our presence over our local authority areas we had a great time with local families in the sun at the Margam Park International Kite Festival. June we supported NAS at the Cardiff Pride, this is one of 3 Prides for the service - marking it as a key event in our calendar and a big commitment from us to serve our LGBTQ+ communities across South Wales.



We also continued to create in-house engaging online content during this period such as our First Father's Day Blog. We also updated our branding with a fresh new look which can be seen encapsulated on our well received new information pack.





Summer brought it with the arrival of our long awaited WBAS Summer Party for adopters. Again we had great feedback on this event – with adopters particularly satisfied with how self-contained and safe everything felt with plenty of varied activities on offer. It was such a success that we are returning to the venue for our Christmas Party!

Meanwhile our third and final Pride of the year was the inaugural NPT Pride at Aberavon Seafront!

The height of summer brought our key regional outreach event of the year in the shape of the Wales National Air Show in Swansea Bay. Investment in a newly branded gazebo, merchandise, and clothing paid off with an unprecedented level of engagement and enquiries from the two days! Behind the scenes this brand refresh has expanded and developed. New outdoor advertising in the form of long term roundabout signs and mobile bridge banners has increased our public exposure alongside our event engagement work. Part of a wider integrated marketing mix the website has also been updated in English and Welsh as the centre piece of the mix.

All of these elements and touch points work together in funnelling a constant stream of enquiries and attendees at our information sessions. It's difficult to single out one activity or advert as most effective as each process plays its part in the wider mix. This is modern marketing and our investment in this has paid dividends on the 'front door' this summer in terms of the number enquiries being received.





Continuing the busy summer of outreach work we also attended the Bridgend Country Show – ensuring we spread and maintained our presence across all LA regions.



The start of August we began to build our raft for the Mumbles Raft Race with a lot of help from NPT Building and Lighting Services who are based at Tregelles. The event itself went well, we avoided sinking, getting plastered in eggs and flour and came a respectable 10th out of 16 despite a few snapped oars! We also raised a few hundred pounds for the RNLI in the process. Strengthening the community engagement in NPT we also had a stand and activities for local families at the inaugural NPT Fun Day for National Play Day. We also produced informative and engaging in house blog content for the day featuring a WBAS Play Therapist.

Another high profile partnership in the form of the Castles in the Sky Wales Air Ambulance Art Trail was launched on a ‘teaser’ basis during the month too. The full art trail which features an installation of high impact, eye-catching artist designed castles placed in famous Swansea landmarks has actually been delayed until next summer due to external issues – but to build for this we did a ‘mini trail’ with the organisers, with our castle being placed in the high foot fall area of the Parc Tawe Retail Park in Swansea City Centre.



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.We then finished off July with our WBAS Sports Day for families at the Dunraven Brewery Field. This formed part of our commercial package with the Ravens and Pen y Bont FC. It was again great to our families enjoying a range of activities in a safe and inclusive environment. We had semi-professional players and coaches on hand to work with the children and had support from Laura Kinsey BCBC Head of Family Services, the BCBC County Mayor Cllr William Kendall and Cabinet Member for Children and Family's Services Cllr Sian Harris.



During September the events and outreach continued at the Margam Food Festival, the first home game of the season for the Ravens and Teulu's game attempt at the Swansea Bay 10k Mascot Race!



Looking ahead to the next period, outreach work will slightly decrease with the winter season but we will aim to launch new additional engaging online campaigns, support national adoption week and refine our website offering.



# #TEAMWBAS





## 8. Adoption Support Performance and Development work

### PATHways

There are currently 33 AUK PATHways cases open to WBAS. Between April and September 2023 there were 15 new referrals made to Pathways and there is one further case currently in the assessment process. Of the new referrals, 6 were referred to Pathways following Virtual Hub Consultations, 5 were referred through the duty system, 2 were known to and referred by social workers in the adoption support team, 1 referral was identified during an adopter check-in and 1 was referred by Barnardo's (assessing agency for the adopters).

Of the 15 new referrals, none were re-referrals to Pathways and, during the period April – September, no cases were closed by PATH without the family having accessed support. All referred adopters accessed the consultation with the psychologist, however engagement with Parents Support Partners and the Pathways Reflective Group is more variable. It has been identified that those who take up all three aspects of Pathways (psychological consultation, parents support partner and reflective group) appear to achieve the most benefit and adopters being referred to Pathways are encouraged to access all three areas.

Many parents are attracted to Pathways by the prospect of having a consultation with a psychologist, however attending the Reflective Group and meeting with the Parent Support Partners provides the opportunity for adopters to consolidate and extend the learning and insight they develop during the Psychological Consultation.

As previously reported, feedback from adopters who access the PATHways programme remains positive. Many adoptive parents report that the Pathways programme has helped them to understand their child's difficulties in relation to their early development



It continues to be a common theme that adoptive parents are concerned that their child may also have a Neurodevelopmental disorder and they are often seeking diagnosis via the school, GP or CAMHS with limited success and subsequent frustration. Frequently parents report frustration that other agencies (such as health or education) do not fully appreciate the impact of developmental trauma as their children do not have a recognised diagnosis of their difficulties and having the Pathways Psychological report has helped them to discuss their child's needs with the schools or health.

## **Schools work**

Further schools training has been completed with a 3 schools attending the online workshop, 5 additional schools received onsite training, with 71 school staff attending the workshop and one whole school staff group. The workshop covers:

- What developmental trauma
- Brain development
- How it affects the brain and the body
- What school will see in school - over responsive stress (response/fight/flight/freeze/fawn)
- What to do when children flip into fight/flight/freeze/fawn
- Developmental mapping- helping them think about how and why children present younger than their chronological age
- Internal working model- how children's beliefs about the world, adults and themselves are shaped by their dev trauma
- Strategies on how to make the children's brain's feel safe in school

## **Children and Young Person's Work**

During the period April 2023 – September 2023 we have delivered 19 youth club sessions with our Western Bay youth group. Our young people are aged 10-16 years and are from all across the Western Bay Region.



We have a youth club membership of 21 young people and on average around 10 young people regularly attend youth club each week. Our youth group keeps to the same structure each week which includes activities such as cooking, arts and crafts, playing pool, lego, and ball games outside. All of the activities provide the perfect opportunities for the young people to make new friends and build trusting relationships with the youth workers.

Discussions with our young people have been around relationships, school, identity, being adopted, transitions, anger, grief, death, home schooling, friendships, social workers, therapists, alcohol, drugs, family, keeping safe, LGBTQ+ issues, conflict, respect and personal space.

Through the summer months we had a visit from Circus Eruption which was great fun and we also benefitted from funding from the COAST grant and arranged various trips for our youth group. Firstly, we visited the Humanities Hub at Gower Heritage Centre, where our group learnt about the centre's history, learnt how to do screen printing and became very competitive during the duck race!

We then did a day of Bushcraft where our young people learnt all about survival skills; building shelters, making fires, wood carving and cooking waffles. Our last summer activity session was surfing. The conditions were perfect and again the group had lots of fun in the waves and were great at listening to instruction, trying something new and all particularly enjoyed an ice cream afterwards. These trips really highlighted how well our young people have bonded. We noticed how supportive they were to each as well as how much fun they have together and most importantly become friends.

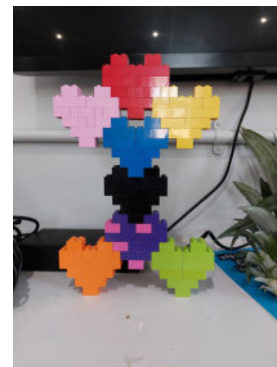
## **Parents comments**

“Thanks Jo and so good to hear that you love having S there, she loves coming and sings all your praises! It's so nice for her to come somewhere and be accepted and she can be herself. Thank you all”



“This is the only thing that R loves coming to, he doesn't feel able to go to any other clubs”

Supporting Connected sessions run by AUK has also continued alongside these other activities.



## Life-journey Framework update

The LJFT have sent a core offer of support to CSWs for 22 of the children who have had a POG granted between April 2023 and September 2023. One-to-one sessions are also offered to CSWs and Practice Support Workers across Western Bay. Members of the Family Finding Team tend to put CSWs in touch with us who request Life Journey Support.

Between April and September, at least 6 Childcare Social Workers were supported individually. Support has also extended in some cases to advising CSWs of the siblings of adopted children who have been 'left behind' and are living in care or with birth family members, giving advice on how to share information about their story and what's happened to their siblings. The LJFT continue to visit childcare team meetings across Western Bay to raise awareness of the support that can be offered regarding Life Journey Work around Adoption and also Reception Into Care. Resources have been shared with the team managers that can be disseminated to their team members.



The LJFT have introduced a new process in how we support adopters. When a referral for life journey support is received we invite these adoptive parents to workshops on how to share their child's life journey information with them. Between April & September we offered workshops covering two different age groups, 0-5 years and 6+ years. We invited 32 adoptive families to these workshops. 8 families attended. Some couldn't attend on the dates offered and have asked to be invited to the next round of workshops that we will be holding in the next quarter. Those that did attend, gave positive feedback to say they found it helpful. We then sent families a number of resources that we thought would be helpful to them in sharing adoption information with their children and we have contacted all the families since the workshops to ask if they want further support through a one-to-one consultation.

## **Birth Parent Support**

Our birth parent support groups continue to grow in strength and numbers and are supported by a cohort of 2 social workers and 3 adoption support workers. Our groups run monthly across the three local authorities and have been well attended.

Swansea is our biggest group with a total of 15 birth Mums who have attended for group work and/or support with their letterbox. We set up an additional Swansea group held at The Include Hub once a month for new birth Mums who may need a gentle introduction to groups and for any Swansea birth Mums who need support with their letterbox.

The main group is held in the Wellbeing Centre, Swansea where Mums can access additional support through the centre; several of our birth Mums have attended the building resilience course which is run through the centre.

Our Bridgend group is held at a local church which is centrally located for ease of access to public transport and the majority of the birth Mums attend independently. The Bridgend group has 7 birth Mums with a further two who have been invited and will need support to attend. The birth Mums have developed a trusting and supportive relationship with each other which has been lovely to observe as the group develops.



We have monthly groups in Neath held at The Gathering Place; the venue is free of charge and parents can take advantage of the free items of clothing, sanitary products and tea and coffee available. We have a total of 8 birth mums who have been invited to attend group and this has been the hardest group to engage due to mental health difficulties. The team has been consistent in offering support each month and transporting some of the birth Mums and it is positive to see that some of our more difficult to reach birth Mums have now attended group.

Since April our birth Mums have enjoyed participating in various activities; these include; making your own nail varnish, home-made face masks, soap making, candle making and creating their own bracelets. For the smaller groups we have included walks on the beach and a picnic. We ran a successful summer event at Gnoll Park where birth Mums were invited to attend from the 3 local authorities. They had a fantastic day making summer wreaths and enjoyed a communal lunch and feeding the ducks together after the event. A total of 13 birth Mum's attended and the feedback received was very positive and all enjoyed.

Our Swansea birth Mums also benefitted from grant funding from Swansea where they enjoyed paddle boarding in Port Eynon and a soap making workshop where they made beautiful soaps to take home. As the groups have developed we have observed that many of our birth Mums require additional support outside of groups; we have made referrals to Reflect and Rise and linked our birth Mums in with community support such as Food Banks, Woman's Aid and G.P's. This is testament to the support and understanding shown by the social workers and support workers at group and it is positive to see the birth Mums beginning to trust the team and ask for support..







## **BUSS model of sensory processing**

In April 2023 we launched our very first LEAPlets play group in Neath Afan Gymnastics centre. LEAPlets is a 10 week programme based on the Building Underdeveloped Sensorimotor System (Model developed by Sarah Lloyd, Specialist Occupational Therapist and Play therapist. The first group was a great success, it was amazing to see the progress the children made within a relatively short space of time. From September we are running two LEAPlets groups due to high demand, we have 10 families taking part. Thirteen members of staff across the service are also attending Level 2 BUSS training in September as we are working towards becoming qualified to carry out our own BUSS assessments and interventions for children with underdeveloped sensorimotor systems.

## **9. Policies and Procedures**

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The Service is pleased to report that the NAS have published the National Adoption Policies and Procedures which have been a collaborative piece of work involving all the regions and VAA's. These will be formally launched in National Adoption Week on the 18th October and will also be available for use on an APP.

## **10. CSSIW**

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The service was last inspected during 2018-19 and an appropriate subsequent plan drawn up which has been reviewed at the Management Board with actions completed. WBAS were the only region to be inspected. The future plan in respect of adoption service inspections isn't known currently.



## 11. Local Monitoring and Governance

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The Management Board is fully compliant with the Directions Powers Regulations, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) 201. The terms of reference in place.

Monitoring and governance of the service is the responsibility of the Management Board, which now meets on a quarterly basis. The Board members interrogate data provided on a quarterly and annual basis. Strategic decisions are shared with the board for approval whereas, in the main, operational decisions are overseen by the Regional Manager who is supervised by the 'Host' authority Head of Service. The service is measured on both the service plan and the national performance indicators through regular reports, presenting the achievements of the service compared to previous years and where data is available, with other regions across Wales. The formation of a Regional Joint committee has now happened and these meetings take place twice a year.

A six monthly report is available to Scrutiny Committees in all three local authorities. Periodically, reports are submitted and shared with Cabinet, Scrutiny Panels and Corporate Parenting Cabinets/Committees. Performance indicators are reported to the National Adoption Central team on a quarterly basis, this information is provided to the Advisory Group and the Governance Board of the National Adoption Service.

## 12. Consultations and engagement of those who use the Service

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The use of survey's and qualitative data continues to be used to receive feedback from families and professionals that have experienced the service. We are in regular contact with our adopters through our closed Facebook page where they are able to also provide feedback about their experience of the service and the events that are run.



A working group attended by adopters from various stages of the adoption journey will be starting in October with a view that they can provide ideas and feedback in respect of service developments, proposed processes, marketing ideas and events.

## **12. Consultations and engagement of those who use the Service**

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The use of survey's and qualitative data continues to be used to receive feedback from families and professionals that have experienced the service. We are in regular contact with our adopters through our closed Facebook page where they are able to also provide feedback about their experience of the service and the events that are run.

## **13. Quality Assurance, Compliments, comments, complaints, safeguarding issues, whistleblowing and representation.**

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The use of survey's and qualitative data continues to be used to receive feedback from families and professionals that have experienced the service. We are in regular contact with our adopters through our closed Facebook page where they are able to also provide feedback about their experience of the service and the events that are run.

## **14. Overall assessment of the Service**

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The overall assessment of the service during this reporting period is excellent and the priorities identified within the good practice guide and the Adopt Cymru plan continue to be developed creatively within the service. The service has been able to allocate all adoption support assessments in a timely way with no waiting list for these assessments due to the additional capacity that the temporary posts have provided.



Staff from the service have been asked to support workshops at Conferences in England to share our experiences of how the service are changing the culture in relation to contact, something that we are extremely proud of.



*Nichola Rogers*

**Regional Adoption Manager**  
**September 2023**





**GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU**  
**Bae'r Gorllewin**  
**Western Bay**  
**ADOPTION SERVICE**



# QUALITY OF SERVICE REVIEW



*For Period 1st October 2022 to 31st*  
*March 2023*



# 1. Introduction

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The requirement to provide six monthly reviews of the Adoption Service is set out in Regulation 39 of The Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019. The aim of this report is to bring into one document a presentation and analysis of the activity of each of the local authority adoption agencies, operating as a regional service. In addition, Section 15 (c) of The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 sets out the responsibilities of regional collaborative to report to the Director of Operations for the National Adoption Service on a quarterly and annual basis.

The report and information within it will be used for:

- The Review of Service (Regulation 39 report).
- Given the broad content of this report it will be used for informing senior managers, cabinets and scrutiny committees.
- Quarterly and annual reports to NAS.

This report is in respect of the period 1st October 2022 to 31st March 2023. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information presented is an accurate record of the activity and quality of the Adoption Service and consider targets for the forthcoming year.

# 2. Current Position

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The service has had a busy year focusing on business as usual alongside the development of areas of work such as birth parent support and post adoption contact. Performance data still highlights some stark differences compared to previous years, although business appears to be returning to the performance seen in pre COVID



years. The service has benefitted greatly from being able to recruit some adoption support staff from some generated income, they have made a huge impact in embedding areas of the good practise guide. The income generated enables the service to maintain these additional pots for a further 12 month period, however the financial pressures on the Local Authorities will mean that the use of such income may not be possible in future years. The service were also asked to present a workshop on Post adoption contact at the recent CVAA conference in Cardiff which was attended by the VAA's from across the UK.

### 3. Staffing

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Staffing has remained fairly stable throughout the last two quarters with low absence rates, only two member of staff remains on long term sickness. Two business support staff are on maternity leave, which have some temporary cover arrangements.

### 4. Adoption Panel

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#### Membership

The support of both Medical Advisors Dr Peter Barnes and Dr Emily Payne continues with both joining the service in regular interface meetings aimed at improving quality and timeliness of documentation used for panel. This has been an effective venture, utilising the expertise of the Medical Advisors to shape practice in the service. WBAS recognises that the support and service both provide to the service is considerable.



## Panel Training and Development

Panel continue to attend quarterly business and have had to opportunity to attend the AUK workshop.

## Adoption Panel Activity

Panel continues to have a central list of members and two new panel members have been recruited to further increase the diversity of panel members. Panel has continued on a virtual basis.

Quarterly business meetings have continued to take place, these have been held on a face to face basis and these have been hugely successful. Panel members have been able to understand the performance of the service and have an over-arching understanding of what the service is doing. Panel have also had the opportunity to review the cases that didn't go to plan during the introductions phase.

	Period 1st October-31st March 23
Number of Planned Panels held	18
Number of Panels cancelled due to lack of quoracy	0
Number of Panels cancelled for other reasons*	7 - No cases





## 5. Children

### Overall Summary of Children's Information

	2019/20	2020/21 COVID	2021/22	2022/23
Number of Referrals	153 BCBC 62 NPT 32 SC 59	129 BCBC 44 NPT 39 SC 46	118 BCBC 41 NPT 21 SC 56	115 BCBC 49 NPT 17 SC 48
Number of POG	63 BCBC 18 NPT 16 SC 29	69 BCBC 26 NPT 18 SC 25	34 BCBC 9 NPT 11 SC 14	51 BCBC 18 NPT 7 SC 26
Number of children matched	80 BCBC 22 NPT 22 SC 36	79 BCBC 23 NPT 19 SC 37	51 BCBC 15 NPT 14 SC 18	38 BCBC 8 NPT 7 SC 23
No of children placed	79 BCBC 20 NPT 21 SC 38	69 BCBC 20 NPT 17 SC 32	49 BCBC 17 NPT 14 SC 18	35 BCBC 11 NPT 5 SC 19



## Overall Summary of Children's Information Continued

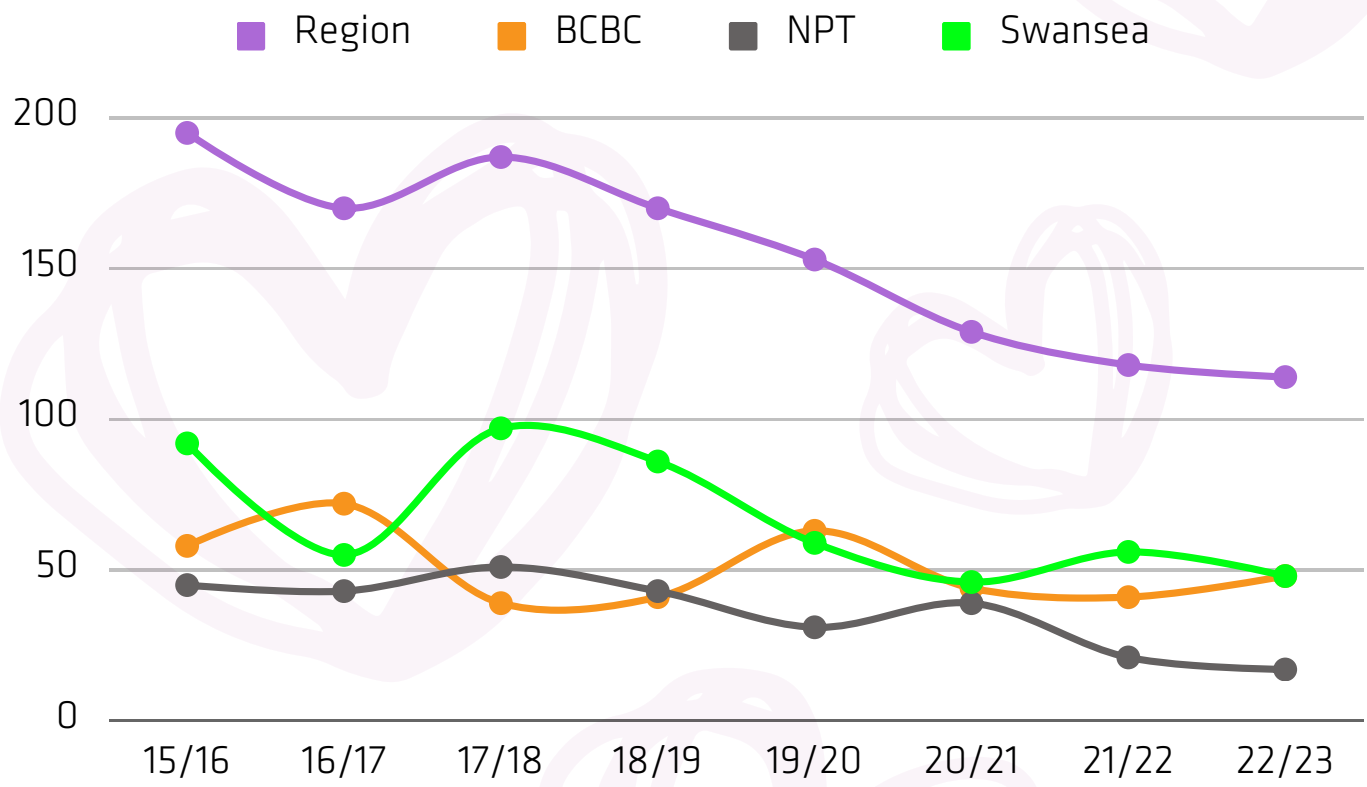
	2019/20	2020/21 COVID	2021/22	2022/23
Of these children number of children placed with WBAS adopters	44	55	32	21
Of these children number placed via the Market Share Project			3	3
Of these children number of children placed with non regional adopters	35	14	14	11
Number of AOG	62 BCBC 17 NPT 14 SC 31	63 BCBC 20 NPT 13 SC 29	61 BCBC 16 NPT 15 SC 30	46 BCBC 17 NPT 10 SC 19



## Referrals and Placement Orders

There is a marked downward trend for twin-tracking referrals and POG. When comparing the trend over the last 5 year it shows an interesting pattern of the work that the service receives. The reason for the pattern and recent reduction is work this is hard to determine but factors are likely to be recovery from COVID, the LA's development of preventative and edge of care services. The trend over the last 8 years is as follows for each LA.

### Referral for TwinTracking to WBAS each year:

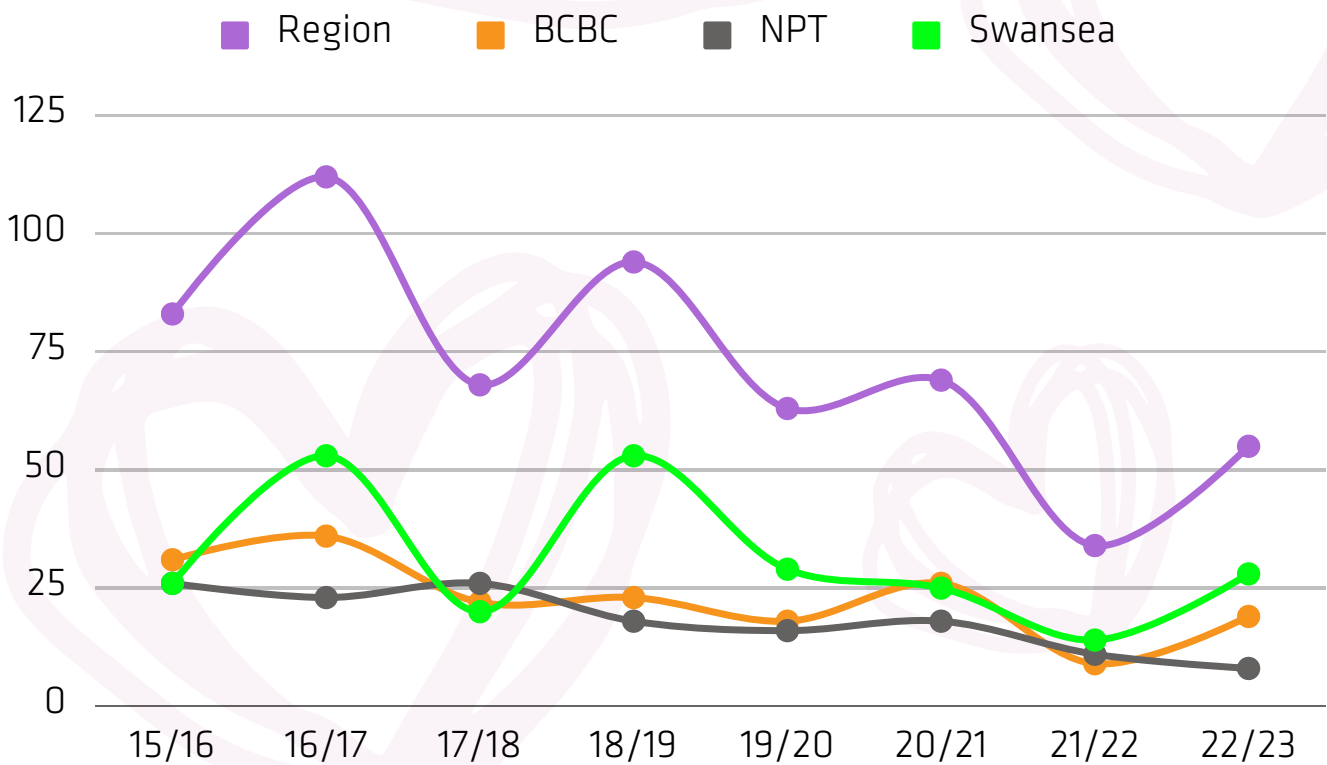




# POG

After two years in which the service has seen a marked reduction in placement orders being granted this year has seen numbers rise again particularly in the latter two quarters. When looking at the trend line there appears an overall downward trend and it is likely that the service will probably settle around the 55-60 POG each year as the new norm.

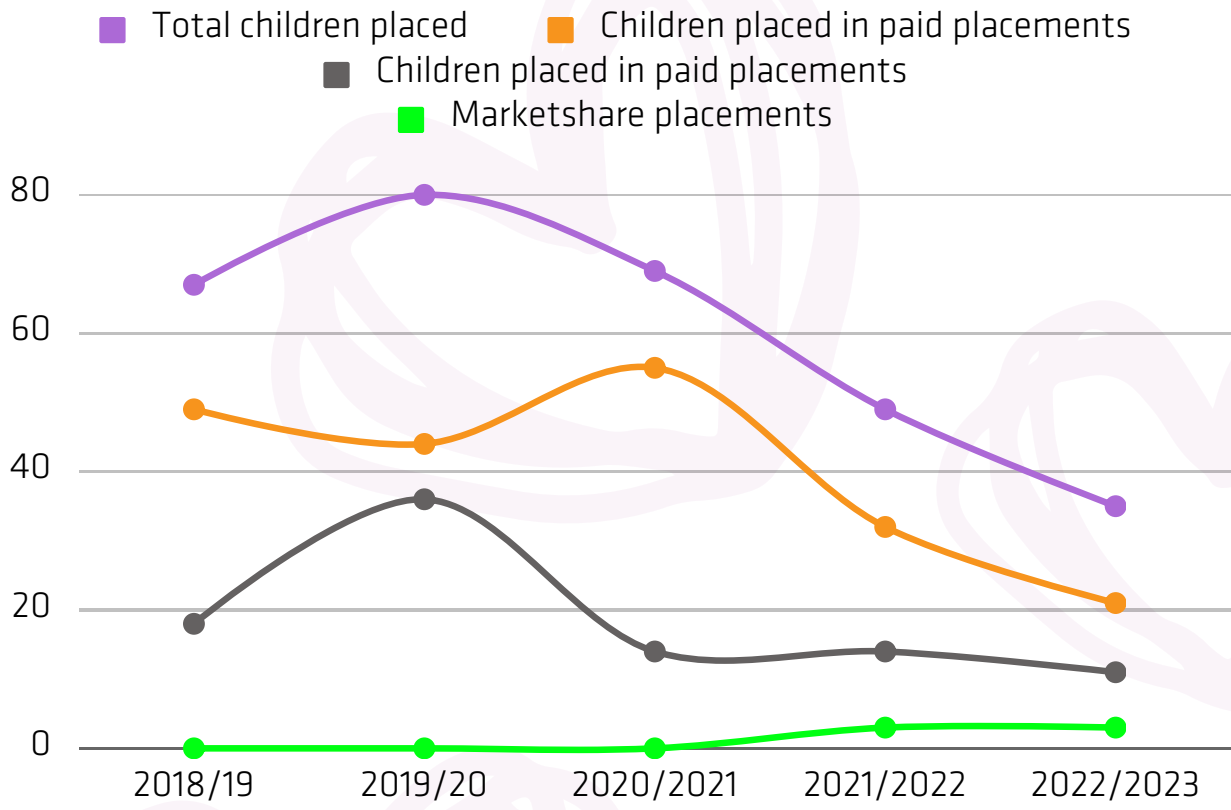
## POG Per Quarter Per Year



The reduction in referrals and POG has had a follow on effect in relation to the number of children placed for adoption. The children being referred are increasingly presenting with more complex health, genetic and developmental issues.



## Children placed for adoption



Of the 35 children placed this year, 21 were placed with regional adopters, 1 child was placed in New Zealand which was heavily supported by the region, 3 children were placed via the market share project (Barnardo's). 11 children were placed out of the region - 1 of these children remained in Wales, 10 of these outside Wales, 1 in Scotland and 9 in England. Below is a breakdown of the placements that were made out of Wales.



<p>Single child age 3 Diagnosis of a genetic condition of 15q13.3 microdeletion. Global Developmental delay, Mobility issues, needing surgery to correct defect of the skull,</p>	<p>One Adoption Yorkshire</p>
<p>Sibling group of two children 5 and 4 years Extensive history of Neglect</p>	<p>CS Adoption, Gloucester</p>
<p>Single child - 2 years Extremely premature, surgery on Bowel when 8 months old. Investigations regarding possible seizure activity</p>	<p>Scottish Adoption</p>
<p>Sibling group of two aged 5 and 3 Challenging behaviour.</p>	<p>Jigsaw Berkshire</p>
<p>Single child no additional needs - placed with adopted siblings</p>	<p>One Adoption York</p>



Sibling group of two aged 7 and 4	PACT Buckinghamshire
Single child 7 years old Early trauma and attachment difficulties	Adopt South Hampshire

## Marketshare Project



Three potential placements have been achieved through the Marketshare project all three matches have been with Barnardo's. The reduction in number of children has been a challenge to the project along with the complexity of the sibling groups who have been referred. It is positive to note that there are already two Marketshare placements in the early linking process for the forthcoming year.

## Children Waiting



At the end of the year 22 children were waiting without a strong link or matching panel booked. The average age of the children waiting was 4 years old. The average length of time waiting 5 months with the longest time waiting being 15 months. 9 of the 11 children have complex medical or genetic diagnosis.



The number of children open to family finding has also reduced considerably as can be seen in the table below there has been a slight increase in the last two months due to potential matches for 3 sibling groups of two not proceeding. There have also been POG for 7 children in March who are all at the early stages of the family finding/linking process.

	TOTAL CASES OPEN	NUMBER ACTIVELY IN FAMILY FINDING
April 2019	89	29
October 2019	70	25
January 2020	68	30
April 2020	75	22
October 2020	56	23
January 2021	54	16





The number of children open to family finding has also reduced considerably as can be seen in the table below there has been a slight increase in the last two months due to potential matches for 3 sibling groups of two not proceeding. There have also been POG for 7 children in March who are all at the early stages of the family finding/linking process.

	TOTAL CASES OPEN	NUMBER ACTIVELY IN FAMILY FINDING
March 21	49	15
October 21	33	11
January 22	27	7
March 22	32	16
December 22	38	12 (6 on hold due to further assessments)
March 2023	39	22



## Birth parent adopter meetings

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These meetings have been a focus for the service as when they have taken place the quality of the post adoption contact is vastly improved. Of the 35 children placed this year, 23 birth parents were offered meetings with the adopters. The parents of 12 children attended these meetings which were seen as hugely positive and beneficial to those involved, parents of 4 further children have agreed they would like to meet but have requested these meetings take place after the child is placed so these are in the pipeline. The parents of 7 children did not engage, however in one of these cases the adopters were able to meet the child's older sibling who is long term looked after.

Three of the children placed have been adopted by their foster carer and the CSW assessment was that holding a meeting would be a risk to the stability of the placement.

In addition there have been an additional meeting between birth parents and adopters for a child who was placed in the previous year. There was also a further child where the meeting took place prior to the placement and the placement didn't continue.

## Number of Adoption Order's granted

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The number of adoption orders granted has remained consistent and the Court deal with applications in a timely manner. Currently there are 23 children placed in adoption placements where the AOG has not yet been granted, of these 9 are not yet eligible to make the application, the longest placement was made in April 2022, that application is currently before the court.



## Disruptions & Breakdowns of Placement

Within Western Bay during 2022-23 there has been two placement disruptions post formal placement, a sibling group of two and a single child. The independent review report has been received in respect of both disruptions and actions considered. Staff in the service will consider the outcomes of both in a service learning event in April.

## 6. Adopters

Enquiries and adopters interested in attending the intro to adoption course have been extremely slow in Q3 and Q4 which has been noted by all regions. The impact of the cost of living crisis is likely to be having an impact on families who may have considered adoption as an option.

### Enquiries and Adopter Approval

Enquiries are reduced on the previous 2 years (Covid years) and have returned to the levels that we saw pre covid. The service approved 32 adopters which is short of the target set but in line with the number of children that we saw with an agreed plan of adoption.

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Number of Enquiries	166	260	224	164
Number of Approved Adopters	54	53	52	31



The reduction in children waiting and the steady flow of adopters being approved throughout the year has seen a high number of children waiting without a link. The number now stands at 25. The table below shows the length of time adopters have been waiting.

Recently de-registered - awaiting IRM decision	0
Only approved in Q4	11
Adopters seeking a cultural match	1
Adopters on hold	5
Adopters on hold reactivated in the last month	0
No appropriate match identified	25

The service is starting to address the issue of ensuring that adopters for siblings are approved with a continued increase in the number of placements that are generated by the approvals.

An audit of the 31 approved adopters at end of year March 2023 has been undertaken and the following identified:



	Number of families approved 2020-21 (53)	Number of Adoptive families approved 2021-22 (52)	Number of Adoptive Families Approved 2022-23 (31)
Bridgend	9	10	14
Swansea	25	22	7
Neath Port Talbot	8	11	4
Cardiff Area	7	5	2
Carmarthenshire and Tenby	3	5	3
England	1	1	1



Of the 31 approved adopters this year, they can further be broken down into approvals of 4 single adopters, 5 adopters from same sex relationships and 22 heterosexual couples.

This year has seen an increase in the interest and number of adopters from Bridgend which is a positive outcome. The number of adopters coming from the Swansea area has reduced considerably so the marketing activity will need to refocus in the area.

### **Pre Adopter training**

The newly created 'introduction to adoption' event, pre enquiry, now runs monthly. This enable prospective adopters to informally engage with the service to ask questions about adoption to determine whether this is the right route for them in achieving a family. This also reduced social work hours given that we were not undertaking initial visits to families and later discovering they were not proceedable. 64 potential adoptive families have attended the intro course over the last 12 months.

The 'three day preparation training course' is now run with the Vale Valley Cardiff (VVC). The training has been significantly revamped and modernised. 73 individuals attended the Preparation training from WBAS.

We have re-introduced 'day four of the preparation training course' which includes the medical advisor talk and a question and answer session with experienced adopters. It is following this training that our adopters enter stage one of the assessment phase. 35 prospective adopter placements attended this day.



This training programme continues to develop beyond approval, with the creation of our 'post approval training', day 5 of the preparation training course, to provide continuity for adopters.

This is an important part of the adoption process as it provides a lot more detail surrounding the stages that are now most relevant post their approval. 34 Prospective adopters attended day 5.

**Our 'Family and Friends' training is now fully embedded and has been well received. It runs quarterly, with friends and family of prospective adopters being invited. Significant and key individuals within an adopters support network will be identified by the adopter.**

The training will include an overview of the assessment process and legal framework, but focus on the needs of our adopted children and the impact trauma has on their development. We will also look at what support adopters have identified as helpful from their network. We will be taking our family and friends on a journey with a case study of a sibling group and their journey from their birth family to their adoptive family and how they may feel at each stage. We will be exploring the behaviours they might be exhibiting at each stage and what support and parenting style the child will require. We will be looking at PACE parenting and directing them onto further study and reading to broaden this understanding.

Family members from 26 prospective or newly approved adopters attended the training. Some of the feedback received following their attendance was:



## What part of the course did you find most useful?

- All aspects of the course was informative
- All of it. I found the course very useful and was good to hear about how to help our families during the adoption process and also how important it is for us to think of the child's needs over our own when it comes to discussing their adoption and past
- It was all useful and informative
- Discussion around therapeutic parenting
- Good range of info
- Case studies, video on therapeutic parenting, Q&A opportunities, seeing things through the children's eyes
- Understanding therapeutic parenting
- Talking about therapeutic parenting
- Contact section and the background of adopted children

## Any other comments?

- I enjoyed taking part today, keep up the amazing work you are doing
- It's made me more excited for the time ahead and prepared
- I thought the course was very helpful and answered all my questions and addressed my concerns
- Very good
- The course was enthusiastically delivered by Jodie and Claire who made everything clear and were able to answer all questions in depth
- Very informative day
- Information on therapeutic parenting and ways to support our family members during the adoption process





- As an adoptive parent myself, this course is invaluable for family members

## Non Agency referrals

The number of non-agency referrals has fallen back to pre covid levels.

	LA AREA	TOTAL
2019-20	BCBC 9 NPT 13 SC 21	48
2020-21	BCBC 3 NPT 15 SC 7	34
2021-22	BCBC 16 NPT 21 SC 23	70
2022-23	BCBC 15 NPT 19 SC 18	55

Of particular note there are no cases waiting allocation and the triage system in places allows inappropriate referrals to be screened out straight away.



## 7. Marketing

We kicked off the autumn season at the beginning of October with a trade stand at The Welsh Business Show at the Swansea.com Stadium. We engaged with members of the local business community included some who had adopted and featured heavily in the organiser's event media.



Continuing with the in-person theme our October Adoption Information Session was held at Blancos Hotel in Port Talbot with around 10 people attending and learning more about the adoption process.



The middle of October saw the return of the annual National Adoption Week (NAW) and with it some key media releases and activity. As a region Team WBAS launched NAW with a service-wide charity walk up Pen y Fan Mountain. We had a great turn out for the walk internally and were also joined from colleagues from VVC Adoption.

Some staff members conquered personal fears and challenges during the walk whilst we also addressed some of the preconceptions about the children the longest for adoption. Importantly we also raised over £1,000 for Macmillan Cancer Research!

Nationally we released Season 2 of the 'Truth Be Told' podcast which featured heavily a WBAS adopter talking candidly about the additional learning needs of adopted children amongst other pertinent topics. The podcast has performed well on reflection (in late March 2023) racking up 1000's of listens between the two seasons.



Our local authorities of Swansea, Neath and Bridgend supported us strongly as ever during the week with some lighting up their civic buildings to mark the start and end of the week. During the month to celebrate adoption week we also had a radio advert with Nation Radio which featured spoken word poetry and a advert using the new digital billboard in Aberavon Shopping Centre to further drive awareness of adoption.





Maintaining our strong community presence in Bridgend into the winter and November we attended home games at the Dunraven Brewery Field Stadium between Bridgend Ravens and Aberavon RFC.



Continuing with the in-person theme our October Adoption Information Session was held at Blancos Hotel in Port Talbot with around 10 people attending and learning more about the adoption process.

This theme continued in early November with our presence at the TATA Steel Richard Burton 10K and Kevin Webber Mini Miller Race in the heart of our NPT community in Cwmavon. We gave out WBAS goodie bags to all children who attended the race with the help of the local scouts an Air Cadets and created an impact on

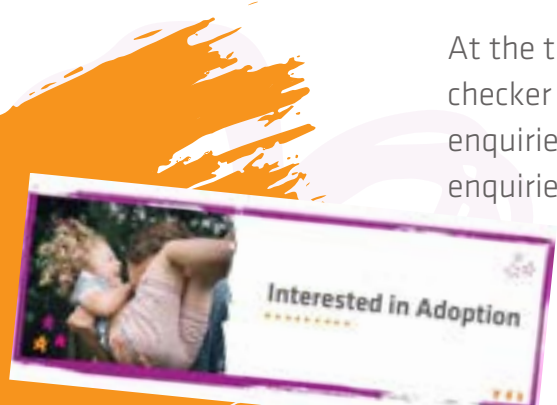


the event which was attended and participated in by 1000's.

Still in chilly November Team WBAS 'dipped deep' for Children In Need raising a few hundred pounds by taking a cold water swim down a brisk Caswell Bay.

At the end of November we attended the Bridgend Council Family Support Event, creating some useful connections with various Bridgend family and children services.

In December we launched some new features on our recently refreshed and redesigned website. One feature which has proven to be very successful our new Adoption Checker function. It serves as a pre-screening and myth busting tool, allowing users to find out if they eligible to adopt and what to if they can't.



At the time of writing the adoption checker is our main source of adoption enquiries, generating 4 - 5 pre-qualified enquiries per week.



Our WBAS Christmas Party was then a great way to sign off the year with a bang. Proving as popular as our big events such as the WBAS Summer Party, staff and adoptive families alike had a 'bearilliant' time!



We kicked off the New Year with an explosion of colour and creativity from our adopted children with the unveiling of our Children's Art Mural in Tregelles Court. We held a workshop earlier in the winter with around 10 children and prominent Swansea based company Fresh Creative. The mural now takes pride of place in our office corridors adding some much needed colour! Julie Davies Swansea Council Child and Family HOS and Victoria Smith LAC PO were on hand to help with the unveiling.



Still in January Julie and Victoria were on hand again to help us with the judging of our Annual Life Journey Awards. Winners were given book and cinema vouchers. The judging was a heart warming occasion, showcasing the care and effort that adoptive parents, birth parents, foster carers and professionals put into important life journey work.

At the end of January we also attend the awards ceremony for the Richard Burton 10K at TATA Steel - making some great community connections and receiving acknowledgment for our efforts on the day of the race. The Chief Executive of TATA Steel was also present at the awards.



Finally at the end of a busy month we kicked off our Let's Talk Adoption series of talks and content with a virtual talk by adoption author Holly Marlow. Around 40 adopters booked in to the talk with some fantastic feedback received from adopters. The series continues throughout the year with different guests.

Sticking with campaigns and content our social media has also developed during this time offering a much bigger range from our community work and recruitment messages to more educational posts.





Our social media is currently performing better than ever with 1000's of engagement and reach per month - this contrasts quite starkly to other regional adoptive agencies and similar sector services.

February we were out in the community again, this time supporting Children's Mental Health Week at Swansea Quadrant Shopping Centre.



Meanwhile we also received our new signed jersey from Bridgend Ravens RFC for our commercial partnership which has certainly helped us to address the issue of low recruitment in the county.

Following on from feedback from the workshop with children for the mural we also held a Street Art/Graffiti Lettering workshop with children in Gnoll Park.

March we continued our Let's Talk Adoption series on 'World Book Day' with popular adoption author Rosemary Lucas. The event this time was face to face in the Aberavon Beach Hotel. Around 30 adopters registered for the event, with again fantastic feedback from those who attended. The series of talks have so far been engaging and educational to those to attended, and have also contributed to our overall very strong social media performance with blogs and recordings of the events proving popular.



Our busy stream of social media continued during the month with our support of New Family Social's LGBTQ Adoption and Fostering Week, whilst we also got out into the NPT community with Foster NPT at the new town leisure centre. Continuing our NPT community outreach work in Margam, I ran the Margam 10K to support the Lord Mayors Charity with support from NPT and WBAS staff.



As alluded to above throughout this 6 period our social media and online presence has gone from strength to strength with 1000's of engagement each month. Key to this is the diversity of our content from educational content to funnier, irreverent team based posts. To keep improving and drive our assessment rates we are aiming to target LGBTQ audiences and potential adopters for siblings more in the next quarter.

The refresh of our website has also been successful, with the new look of the site better encapsulating the dynamic and colourful values of the service. We have around 150 visitors to the site a week at the moment but this is something we can improve on in the next quarter with improved digital advertising and site refinements.



Finally, still looking ahead we need to increase enquiries in Swansea and NPT whilst maintaining our improvement in Bridgend. We will achieve this with better targeted digital advertising and increased presence in these communities.

# #TeamWBAS





## 8. Development of Adoption Support

Our families tell us how well supported they feel by our team around the family ethos. All our social workers are DDP trained, this is a therapy and parenting approach which enables children who have suffered trauma to form attachments. This in itself has made the biggest difference to our families who are struggling to parent traumatised children with attachment difficulties. The adoptive parents we work with feel held and nurtured by our DDP informed practice. This approach is also used in the supervision of adoption support staff, holding their wellbeing at the centre and recognising the challenges of supporting families experiencing complex emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The social work team have also received Trauma recovery model training which has assisted the team in knowing which interventions to use with families first. It provides practical guidelines for knowing which interventions to use and when. This means practitioners understand the psychological needs that underpin behaviours and can identify the types of interventions that best address those needs. TRM has further cemented out DDP focused relationship building/connected approach to working with families. These models also have a hugely positive impact on our team connection and support for one another.

We have successfully developed and are embedding our early intervention services, this ranges from using the adopter check ins at 12 months and 3 years, families being able to book in to a virtual hub consultation to discuss the issues they face rather than make a formal referral for an assessment when that may not be needed and screening cases that may be suitable for ongoing referral to Pathway formerly known as TECSA.



## Virtual Hub Consultations

Virtual hub runs fortnightly, we have a social worker and a therapist (four staff in total) who run the hubs. This gives adoptive parents opportunity to meet with a therapeutic social worker and a therapist to talk through any difficulties they may be experiencing. The team are then able to offer support/assess adoption support needs and to refer parents into the appropriate resource within the service. 7 Virtual Hub consultations have been completed since November. All adopters attended confirmed that they felt more confident in managing the issues they brought to discuss following the consultation.

Outcomes for those who attended included signposting to other agencies such as SNAP, further discussions with school re the issues, referrals on to Pathway, referral for in house therapy, agreement to full adoption support assessment and referred on to the life-journey workshop and NVR course run by the service. Adopters provided the following comments: 'it feels like a weight has been lifted from my shoulders, I have been able to speak to people who get it', 'I feel listened too and not on my own', and 'I feel more confident in speaking to school about the issues now'.

## **BUSS - Building Underdeveloped Sensori Motor Systems Training Update March 2023**

It has been recognised by research, and supported by WBAS observations, that children who have experienced developmental trauma have difficulties with their sensori motor systems. We have been spending monies on specialist Occupational Therapy assessments and felt that we needed to build our skills in house.





The BUSS Model is congruent with our needs as a service as it is designed specifically for children who may have missed out on early sensory experiences both in the womb and in their early life, it is an intervention that can be put in place early and also fits with the Service ethos of DDP and Theraplay. The quote used by BUSS practitioners about how our children are needing to “fight against their own bodies” has struck a chord with colleagues across WBAS.

Since June 2021 all WBAS staff attend the Introduction to BUSS workshop as part of their induction enabling the Service to have a baseline understanding and common language around sensori motor difficulties resulting from early trauma. We have embarked on two strands of further training, one to run BUSS groups for our children and adopters, and the other to carry out BUSS assessments and interventions with individual families.

We opted to include colleagues from Fostering across the 3 regions in the training so that the rebuilding of sensorimotor systems start as soon as the children come in to care.

Nineteen WBAS colleagues attended the 3 day Level 1 training starting 13th February 2023. Colleagues from Recruitment and Assessment, Family Finding, Adoption support and the Therapy team participated along with 6 representatives from the 3 Fostering regions. The training was very positively received. In April 2023 a proportion of the Level 1 trained group will attend BUSS Groupwork training.

From May 2023 we will be running two 11 week BUSS group interventions in the gymnastics centre in Neath. One for 2-4 year olds and one for 4-6 year olds, the children identified for this intervention will attend with their adopted parents. We envisage that the intervention will run again in September 2023.



In September 2023 we have provisionally booked for WBAS colleagues to attend Level 2 training which will lead to Level 3 and 4 training resulting in qualified BUSS practitioners within WBAS. We will then be able to provide assessments and interventions to all of our children who need more than the group intervention, or who are older than 6 years.

## Therapy Team

The Therapy and Psychology team have continued to work closely with the therapeutic social workers and support workers in Adoption Support having settled in to the working environment of Tregelles. Eighteen children have accessed play therapy during the year, five children have accessed music therapy, six families filial therapy and twenty six families have engaged with family therapy. Reflective case consultations have continued to be an important forum combining the psychologist, creative and systemic therapists with therapeutic social workers to consider complex cases.

Thirty-six Reflective Case Consultations have taken place this year. Therapists have paired with therapeutic social workers in Adoption support to pilot Virtual Hub consultations. This forum allows parents direct access to therapeutic support without the need for initial assessment or screening. The pilot has been extended by another three months as the Hub is well received by the families accessing it. The psychologist and a play therapist, as part of the Understanding the Child team, have also offered consultations earlier on in the adoption journey around the time of placement order being granted, 47 of these consultations have been carried out this year. The psychologist and therapists have also provided adopters of complex children newly placed with therapeutic support sessions. In addition to consultations and direct therapy, the team have facilitated groups and training.



For example, adoption support case work highlighted a need for therapeutic work with teenagers. A group was therefore set up and facilitated by a play and systemic family therapist. Six teenagers attended over a period of 8 weeks. The evaluations have been very positive. A systemic family therapist has also designed a series of three workshops for parents of teenagers, the feedback from the first of these was excellent. Non Violent resistance and therapeutic parenting courses for children under twelve month placed have been run by therapists periodically throughout the year, as have direct work training for children's social workers across the regions. The Therapy and Psychology team continue to extend and develop their skills by participating in CPD including BUSS training, Enhanced Case Management Training and attending discipline based conferences. Our music therapist has recently qualified in selective music and imagery therapy which can be offered to our adopters. The team are continually evolving their practice to meet the needs of the Service as the needs arise.

## **Understanding the Child Day Team**

The Understanding the Child team have continued to evolve and embed good practice. The team consists of a psychologist, play therapist and two Family Finder social workers each dedicating a proportion of their working week to carry out this work. We recognise the importance of becoming involved very early on in a child's adoption journey to think carefully about the potential impact of early experiences on development prior to considering potential adopters. We work collaboratively with the children's social workers, Family Finders and supervising social workers to complete trauma nurture timelines and circles of understanding. This has helped us achieve a shared understanding of the type of family we are looking for before considering potential adopters. Since April 2022 we have had 47 initial consultations with Family Finders at time of ADM/SBP. Thirteen cases have progressed to a half day Trauma nurture time line/circle of understanding meeting.



The evaluations from these meetings have been positive. The participants invariably rate feeling more confident in understanding how the children's early experiences could impact on their presentation at the end of the meeting. Qualitative feedback includes;

'very pertinent sharing of information. A very helpful unpicking and exploration of all past information and what this means to (child's name) in terms of his progression and longer term matching. Fantastic stuff!' Practice Lead to CSW

'helpful to break down thinking around finding the best match for the child' CSW  
'I always find these sessions (trauma nurture timeline CoU) so informative and helpful' SSW

'Compiling the information with the team is invaluable and crucial for matching. I have really valued the meeting as I have a better understanding of what I would look for in adopters' FFSW

We have carried out four Understanding the Child Days with sibling groups of two and two Understanding the Child Days for individual children with complex needs. Those most involved with the child attend the day including foster carers, school staff, child social worker, supervising social worker, family finder along with prospective adopters. Participants have invariably rated the days as being very useful. Qualitative feedback includes;

'I knew, or thought I knew what he had gone through, but after today I have much more understanding' Foster carer

'It has been an amazing experience to be part of this day. The organisation, structure, clarity has been brilliant. We would never have gained this level of



understanding about the children without this day. Absolutely fantastic.' SSW

'Hearing the information first hand and with emotional content made such a difference. The children's story really came alive!' WBAS therapist

'Having been given a more comprehensive and detailed brief of the children's early years, I am much more confident I understand where they have come from' prospective adopter.

The therapist and psychologist have also provided families with therapeutic support sessions in early stages of placement and have carried out play based assessments to add to the understanding of children's needs prior to Understanding the Child Days.

The Understanding the Child team presented and facilitated a workshop at the WBAS Conference in July 2022, this helped to share practice of completing trauma nurture timelines and Circles of Understanding amongst a wider group of collaborators. In December 2022 we also presented to Abertawe Bro Morgannwg Community Paediatricians in their Journal Club.

### **Schools training**

28 Schools and 2 CAMHS school in Reach attend attended the workshop during the year, with 3 further onsite trainings undertaken.

### **Adopter and Birth Parent Reviews**

In line with the recommendations of the Good Practise Guides adopter and birth parents check ins are being completed by the team. For the first year checkins have been completed for adopters and Birth parents 3 years post AOG.



This is a great way of identifying any early adoption support needs for adopters, children and birth parents. We have found that everyone has welcomed the opportunity to talk to an experienced member of the team. In summary check ins with birth parents 12 months after their child has been placed have been undertaken for all children placed from April 1st 2020. 38 of 58 eligible parents have engaged in these discussions.

All of these parents have been offered support with letterbox contact if they have not already engaged in it. Sadly 3 birth parents had died since the child had been placed and three were now in prison. Positively 12 requested support with letterbox and 5 were engaging well in the letterbox in the first year.

Check ins with adopters 12 months after their child has been placed have also been undertaken 25 of the eligible 58 adopters have been engaged in these discussions. Two families had been referred to TESSA, a further 6 families had attended the therapeutic parenting course. Four families had recently had an assessment of their adoption support needs and were receiving support.

### **Therapeutic Parenting Programme**

All our adopters are encouraged to attend our therapeutic parenting programme. We run a course for adopters in the early stages of placement and separate course for adopters where children have been placed for over 18 months. 27 families have attended the post 18 months therapeutic parenting course since September. This is some feedback we received in following the Sep course:

“I really benefited from the training and used PACE to empathise with my son when he was having a ‘blow out’ and at the height of his distress, which is something



I would not have dared doing previously for fear of making him worse. It really worked and helped him to calm down quicker, and I feel more confident using this approach.”

“I’ve loved the course. It’s really been life changing. Thanks so much. I wanted to let you know that I’ve bought the A-Z of Therapeutic Parenting, Theraplay and TP for teenagers – so my post course study continues.”

### **Post Adoption Contact**

We have developed a Letterbox team who have worked hard to improve the efficiency of this area of our service. We no longer have backlog of letterbox and are more able to keep on top of our contact investigation referrals. A focus group on post adoption contact has commenced, participants from all areas of the three local Authorities have come together to consider how we can influence the contact agenda.



### **Child and Young Person’s work**

Our adoption support workers have set up various activities for children and young people throughout the holiday periods, we’ve had great uptake for these activities and positive feedback from families. The annual summer party and Christmas party were hugely successful with well over 100 families attending both events.

The Adoption support workers are currently undertaking work on a one to one basis with 15 children. The youth group for 13+ started in September and has been a huge success particularly for previously hard to reach children. For most of the children who attend this is the first time they have successfully engaged in a group.



In total 16 young people are engaged in the group and a video has been produced of the young people sharing their feedback.

## **Life-journey Framework update**

In October/November 2022, the third year of the WBAS Life Journey Awards took place. Social Workers, Practice Support Workers, Foster Carers, Adopters and Birth Family Members were nominated and celebrated for the work they have done in helping a child/children to understand their journey to adoption. The winners were very pleased to be recognised for their work. Where appropriate winners were celebrated in WBAS Social Media and across the three LA newsletters. We currently have 40 referrals across the adoption support team related to adopters not being confident to share life-journey work with their older adopted children, We are working with the Recruitment & Assessment Team to work proactively in training prospective adopters about the importance of children understanding their identity in order to promote their development & wellbeing. The Life Journey Team recently presented at a Prospective Adopters Support Group to share this message on 2nd March in which approximately 14 prospective adopters were present.

During a support group for adopters who have children placed with them was held, focusing on how they can share their child's life journey information with them. We will be showing the parents child-friendly resources and methods that can be used to do this. We will be advising on how to share difficult & sensitive information, and what information is suitable to be shared given their child's developmental stage. This is an open support group for any adoptive parents who are interested in coming.

The Life Journey Team has analysed the referrals that we currently have and we have decided to offer adoptive parents an invitation to workshops that





I we will be running from April depending on their life journey needs. We have noticed themes across the referrals of parents wishing for advice on how to share their child's life journey information with them and secondly parents who would like to adapt or make their own life journey books.

### **Birth Parent Support**

Bridgend Group is held on the first Wednesday of each month at Hope Baptist Church, Bridgend.

Swansea Group is held the third Monday of each month. Again we tried to find a venue that was central to the bus and train station so birth Mums could access the groups independently. We secured the Include Hub on Humphreys Street which holds a woman only day on Mondays. The Include Hub offers support and advice to disadvantaged groups and offers free food for anyone in need.

We are exploring the Well-being Centre for future groups and may need to offer two groups in Swansea due to numbers. It has been easier to establish relationships with Swansea birth mothers due to the support Reflect have provided.

The NPT Group are held at The Gathering Place in Neath town centre. NPT Mums have initially been difficult to engage with. The first two groups were poorly attended so the team are undertaking some further 1:1 sessions with the birth mothers in order to develop that trusting relationship.

In total 14 birth mums regularly attend the groups. A winter wellbeing event was arranged in December bringing Birth mothers from across the region together, 18 birth mothers attended.



The session ended with a mindfulness exercise and Mums were provided with well-being bags to take home.

Feedback after the event was positive:

“Just wanted to say thank you for inviting me yesterday, I really enjoyed. I will definitely be coming to the next big event xx”

“Hello, really enjoyed at the adoption wellbeing group last week, my candle looks lovely on my window”

The plan is run two of these larger events each year. The service would also like to develop a birth dads support group.





## 9. Policies and Procedures

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The Service has worked with NAS to review of all policies and procedures across the Welsh regions and VAA's. The set of policies and procedures are nearing completion and are expected to be available imminently.

## 10. CSSIW

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The service was last inspected during 2018-19 and an appropriate subsequent plan drawn up which has been reviewed at the Management Board with actions completed. WBAS were the only region to be inspected. The future plan in respect of adoption service inspections isn't known currently.

## 11. Local Monitoring and Governance

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The Management Board is fully compliant with the Directions Powers Regulations, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) 201. Work to identify and education representative to join the Board will take now take place. There are terms of reference in place.

Monitoring and governance of the service is the responsibility of the Management Board, which initially met every two months and during the latter part of the year moved to quarterly meetings. The Board members interrogate data provided on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis.



Strategic decisions are shared with the board for approval whereas, in the main, operational decisions are overseen by the Regional Manager who is supervised by the 'Host' authority Head of Service. The service is measured on both the service plan and the national performance indicators through regular reports, presenting the achievements of the service compared to previous years and where data is available, with other regions across Wales.

An annual report is presented to Scrutiny Committees in all three local authorities. Periodically, reports are submitted and shared with Cabinet, Scrutiny Panels and Corporate Parenting Cabinets/Committees.

In addition the regional adoption service has a management by exception route to the Western Bay Programme Team/Leadership Group if there is ever a need to resolve issues at a regional strategic level. Performance indicators are reported to the National Adoption Central team on a quarterly basis, this information is provided to the Advisory Group and the Governance Board of the National Adoption Service.

## **12. Consultations and engagement of those who use the Service**

The use of survey's and qualitative data continues to be used to receive feedback from families and professionals that have experienced the service.



### 13. Quality Assurance, Compliments, comments, complaints, safeguarding issues, whistleblowing and representation.

Attempts are made to address any complaints received by the service at the informal stage but registered with the relevant local authority within the region. Fortunately complaints remain very low with many issues being resolved informally before reaching the formal process. Five complaints were received in Q3 and Q4, it became apparent that a common theme in three of the complaints was the difficulty individuals had in finding out the complaints process for the service.

This was immediately rectified and the website updated. The complaints centred around peoples experience of a specific part of the adoption process, communication, the interface between the CMHT and the service and letterbox contact. All of the complaints were dealt with at the first stage and resolutions agreed. The service has had no significant data breaches in this reporting period. Compliments received are celebrated.

A National Quarterly Assurance framework has been established and is due to be signed off by all Regions in April. The outcomes from the identified activities within the framework will be reported on in this report in future period.

### 14. Overall assessment of the Service

The overall assessment of the service during this reporting period is good and significant progress has been made in a number of areas. The service has presented a workshop at the CVAA conference in respect of post adoption contact.



A focus group considering post adoption contact has also been established and this was attended by IRO's, CAFCASS, LAC SW's, Front line SW's and was supported by a birth sibling who has not had contact with her adopted siblings. Key priorities for the service identified at the end of 2022-23 are in progress, significant areas of the Good practise Guides have been developed, the cases that did not go as well as hoped have been reviewed and learning from these cases have been considered at staff events, panel business meetings and a summary provided to the interface meetings and management Board.

Supporting the development of the WCCIS adoption module continues with all of the adoption processes being mapped. Subject to the work going to plan the regional service could be testing a module from late Autumn. The service has been able to allocate all adoption support assessments in a timely way with no waiting list for these assessments.

## 15. Future recommendations



- One of the future hopes for our service is that we would be able to access respite for our adoptive families.
- Re-modelling of the service to align with the available budget, a forward look at the service over the next 1, 3 and 5 years.
- Further embedding of the GPG's
- To increase the number of approved adopters to 40 next year. To ensure a continued marketing focus in each of the LA areas
- Further Implement the BUSS model of sensory processing and start the 10 week sensory course
- Partnership with Foster Wales at local land regional level



- High visibility at local and national events.
- To Continue to roll out the Understanding the Child Day as part of the transition service, increasing the confidence of the family finding team to grow capacity in the service.
- Review all Letterbox post 18. We will contact all adopters when their child reaches 17 to ask adopters and young person if they would like to continue letterbox post 18, this can continue until age 25.
- Invite all adopters with active letterbox to a workshop to look at contact issues post 18. This will be an opportunity to check in with adopters to see if there are any Life journey issues which need to be addressed.
- Workshop/advice to birth parents when their child reaches 18. There has been an increase in birth parents making contact with the letterbox team to request contact with their child who has reached 18.

*Nichola Rogers*

April 2023

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