

**BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING**

**18 OCTOBER 2017**

**REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING**

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

**1. Purpose of Report.**

- 1.1 To provide the Committee with information about the performance and progress of the Western Bay Regional Adoption Service, including the Annual Report on Regional PI Performance 2016/17 which is attached at **Appendix A**.

**2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority.**

- 2.1 The report links to the following corporate priorities:

- Helping people to be more self-reliant;
- Smarter use of resources.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 Adoption has, and continues to receive, high levels of attention from both the UK and the Welsh Government. Members will be aware that the creation of a National Adoption Service is one of the key policy strands of the Welsh Government, as enacted in the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014. This Act provides powers, under Part 9 Section 170, for Ministers to direct local authorities to collaborate in relation to adoption services and to prevent any local authority from withdrawing from these collaborations in the future.
- 3.2 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 came into force on 13th March 2015. The primary purpose of these Directions is to ensure effective joint arrangements are in place between local authorities in Wales for the delivery of adoption services
- 3.3 Schedule 1 of the Directions sets out which local authorities must collaborate with each other. For the Western Bay region the local authorities are Swansea, Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot. Swansea host and manage the regional service on behalf of the partner agencies, this having been approved by Cabinets in all three local authorities in April 2014.
- 3.4 The Western Bay regional service is integrated into the National Adoption Service (NAS) as one of the five identified regional collaboratives. The National Service is underpinned by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015.

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

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

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

#### **Governance Board**

Includes representatives from each agency:

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

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

3.6.2 The nominated elected member representative on the Governance Board will be decided in due course.

#### **Advisory Group**

3.6.3 Includes the following representatives from:

- each collaborative Head of Children's Service
- the Association of the Directors of Social Services Cymru
- the Association of Directors of Education in Wales
- the WLGA
- 3 from voluntary organisations
- Legal adviser from the lead local authority
- Health professional for Looked After Children
- Medical advisor to an adoption panel
- CAMHS
- Service User
- Social Research Centre

3.6.4 The functions of the Advisory Group include:

- Provision of professional advice and

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

3.6.5 The City of Cardiff Council has been given the role of Lead Authority for the National Adoption Services and as host authority will work with key partners to run an all-Wales adoption website, develop a centre of excellence for adoption services and employ a Director of Operations for Wales.

**Director of Operations and Central Team:**

3.6.6 The National Adoption Service has appointed Suzanne Griffiths as Director of Operations, along with a Business and Performance Manager, Policy and Practice Officer and Administrative Assistant.

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

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

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

**4. Current situation/Proposal.**

4.1 Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS) became fully operational in April 2015. Prior to this adoption services were delivered locally via the three local authorities.

4.2 The regional adoption service provides a range of services and interventions across the five key domains to those affected by adoption. Those being:

- Assessing and supporting prospective adopters
- Assessing non-agency (parent/care, 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 (PO) has been granted by court in searching for an adoptive placement

4.3 The attached annual performance report outlines the performance within the regional adoption service for 2016/17.

Key achievements for the year include:

- We continue to place more children within WBAS than with Inter Agencies (IA) this has been despite some challenges encountered i.e. children having complex needs, sibling groups/older children and a sustained picture of adopters wishing to have the more straightforward and younger children. We placed 39 children within WBAS and 32 with IAs. For Bridgend, 13 were placed with WBAS and 11 with IAs.
- The length of time taken from 'becoming looked after' (LAC) to placement for adoption has reduced from 19.5 months with the average time now being 15.3 months. This however has not met the national bench mark of 13 months and further work is needed within the local authorities (LAs) to address this.
- The average time it takes for children who wait longer than six months from Should Be Placed Decision (SBPD) to placement for adoption has increased but only very slightly from 9.25 to 10 months. However there have been considerable successes with a number of children placed in very short timescales; the lowest for WB being 104 days (3.5 months). This success includes a case from BCBC with its lowest being 140 days (4.6 months). This is attributed to the close working between Recruitment & Assessment (R&A) and Family Finding (FF) functions to identify early the needs of children and adopters so that where suitable the link can be progressed without delay.
- There has been greater collaboration between Family Finding (FF) and Adoption Support (AS) to put together packages of support for more complex children or where placements need additional support.
- Enquiry rates are consistent despite a focus on harder to place and more complex children as part of the recruitment message which has been devised jointly by the managers of R&A and TT&FF. This focusses on prioritizing adopters who are interested in taking older children, those in sibling groups and those with complex needs. Whilst this has seen some success the reality is that many adopters are still presenting themselves as wanting younger children which is in line with national research.
- The average time taken to approve adopters from the inquiry stage to Agency Decision Maker (ADM) decision has decreased compared to last year from 10.1 months to 9.7 months.
- There has been, as a result of a number of WBAS and LA strategies a small increase in the number of children presented to panel where there is evidence of Life Story Materials (LSM). This is particularly noticeable in the last quarter where the jump in performance goes from 1 in Q3 to 11 in Q4.
- Performance in the number of Birth Parents referred and offered a service has been sustained.
- There continues to be evidence that there are more direct interventions from the adoption support service than previously thus reducing the need for higher cost commissioned services.

- Successful placement of a number of sibling groups. This includes four sibling groups of two from Bridgend.
- The Children's Guide has been launched and appears to have been received positively in the three LAs. It has also been placed on the WBAS website so adopters can access directly if they choose.
- There has been a review and revised guidance for the Child Adoption Report-Annex B (CAR-B) to improve quality of information. This has been backed up by training offered by WBAS and mentoring by the TT seniors for workers / managers who have requested additional support. In 2016/2017, approximately 60 staff from Childrens Social Care in Bridgend were offered/provided with the training.
- Development and implementation of the Transition/Moving on proposal to assist in improving the preparation of children for adoption and in the provision of LSM. This was showcased in a workshop at the recent NAS Conference in March.

4.4 The challenges/developments that the service will need to undertake in the coming year include:

- To further increase the number of WBAS placements. The service plans to address this through a number of initiatives such as a local 'profiling' event, a year of targeted recruitment specialising on identified children and developing further the website and recruitment and information materials on offer.
- Where possible to further reduce the time from LAC, SBPD and Placement Order (PO) to placement for adoption. This will be through a joint focus by WBAS and the LA's, currently a number of strategies are in place from the TT&FF function to ensure that the service does not impact adversely on this measure.
- The number of adoption orders granted (AOG) has dipped significantly from 94 the previous year to 69 this year. Whilst there are currently 36 adoption applications before the court, it is recognised that a focus is now needed to address where if any the delays in the various stages of progressing an application.
- Introduce in the TT&FF function local performance indicators and more robust monitoring of activity to ensure delays are kept to a minimum.
- There needs to be a robust and whole region approach to the improvement of LSM in relation to quality and timeliness. The current NAS measure is by 2<sup>nd</sup> review however, WBAS with the support of the senior management in the LAs has agreed that this measure should be the longest time and the best practice aim is on placement.
- There is a desire to improve Birth Parent take up of the service on offer to them and this will be addressed though a revision to the facilities on Oracle, (the service IT system) as it is evident that the FF and AS functions have

been under reporting significantly in this area. This will be addressed through guidance and training events in Q1-2017/18.

- There is need to improve the time taken to approve adopters. The assessment itself is not problematic but areas outside of the service control need to be accommodated so that measures are taken by the service to avoid incurring unnecessary delays.
- Inclusion of the adoption support network in the pre-approval training will be re-introduced in the coming year. It is envisaged at this point that additional training events will be run for family and friends, alongside the pre-approval training. This will further equip adopters and their support network to meet the needs of more complex children and harder to place children.
- Expanding adoption support is a key focus for the coming year. Utilising the fostering training as part of the post adoption support provision is planned.
- Partnership working with neighbouring regions to develop services to meet the needs of children and particularly birth parents.
- Greater use of IT system by all functions in WBAS this is a particular challenge in TT&FF and will be the main focus for the coming year. Improvements across all three functions will equip management to accurately collate and report on performance and underperformance.
- The continuing development of policies and procedures is a key priority for the coming year.
- Addressing the significant backlog of non-agency assessments through a number of strategies.

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

- Ensuring that all children in the region for whom adoption is the agreed plan are found adoptive homes that meet their needs. This includes reducing the time any child waits for an adoptive placement but also that children who are part of a sibling group can be placed together.
- Improving the number of children who have life story work provided at placement.
- Increasing the numbers of children placed within the region.
- Increasing the range of adoptive parents available to meet the needs of children in the region who have an adoption plan. This includes ensuring that prospective and approved adopters receive good quality, timely assessment and support services when they need them.
- Implementing the National Framework for Adoption Support which aims to provide an improved range of information, advice and support services available universally or following assessment according to need for children, their adoptive parents, birth parents and for other adults and children affected by adoption.

- Achieving an overall improvement in the performance of the adoption service across Wales.

## **5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.**

5.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

## **6. Equality Impact Assessment**

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

## **7. Financial Implications.**

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

## **8. Recommendation.**

8.1 That the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee notes the performance and review of the adoption service and its ability to meet the needs of those affected by adoption within the region.

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## **Background documents**

None