

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

9 MARCH 2021

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval to sign the revised National Adoption Service In Wales partnership agreement.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-
1. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
 2. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 The National Adoption Service for Wales (NAS) was established in 2014 in response to service user and Government recommendations for improving services. The original role and operational format of NAS was based on a Functional Model led by Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSS-C), agreed by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and approved by the then Deputy Minister for Social Services. Subsequent legislation underpinned it. Complex governance arrangements emerged to facilitate local government senior officer and political oversight of this local government collaborative service which exists within a wider collaborative partnership with a range of stakeholders particularly the Voluntary Adoption Agencies in Wales (VAA's). A Partnership Agreement has been in place since the formation of NAS and the Regional Collaborations.
- 3.2 In 2018 the Governance Board and Advisory Group for NAS determined that coherence and ability to improve needed to be strengthened in order to enhance the achievement of strategic objectives and priorities for adoption services across Wales. The WLGA and ADSS-C commissioned The Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University (IPC) to undertake a review of the existing arrangements. IPC engaged in various ways with a wide range of NAS organisations and stakeholders including Advisory Group and Governance Board

workshops, the Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee which concluded with three potential ways forward. In November 2018 the Governance Board decided that it wanted to create a hybrid of two of these to facilitate the below; it also considered NAS' role in respect of the National Fostering Framework national functions. The focus was primarily on NAS operating differently and more consistently rather than significant changes to structure. There were three key strands to this as follows:

- Combining the Former Governance Board and Advisory Group to undertake both functions. The new Combined Governance Board (CGB) started in July 2019.
- Creation of a 'Commissioning Fund' to support the central team to commission more strategically. Changing the management of regional resources was felt to be unrealistic at the time but that any future investment / 'new' resources should be used in a different way to achieve this. The award of £2.3m investment by Welsh Government in 2019 provided this opportunity which, from 2020, is to be routed through the central team.
- Setting out 'how' NAS will function in the future, in a document to replace the original functional model. This is the new Partnership Agreement.

3.3 IPC engaged further with a range of NAS stakeholders, including some regions and Directors of Social Services to test out and gain commitment to a different way of working. It was also discussed with the All Wales Heads of Children's Services Group (AWHOCS) and ADSS-C. The new Partnership Agreement that was produced is rooted in the NAS Directions 1. In many respects it describes NAS as it currently operates but also contains differences, which, in addition to the CGB and Commissioning Fund, will facilitate NAS operating differently.

3.4 The ambition is for:

- NAS to operate consistently to an agreed optimal model of excellence and as a single service.
- Increased ownership and accountability throughout the service for improvement against nationally agreed objectives, policies and priorities.
- Streamlined links between national and regional governance as well as service delivery and strategy.
- More working together across regions and centrally to share best practice, improvement and where appropriate resources

4. Current situation/proposal

The new Partnership Agreement

4.1 In summary key elements of the Revised Agreement are:

- Consistency in regional management board and delivery arrangements over which the NAS Governance Board has increased oversight.
- Implementation of agreed optimal models and their resourcing which is actively overseen by the Governance Board.

- Changes to political engagement regionally, different approaches to service financing, shared commissioning of some external services, access to shared regional and central resources to deliver on priorities through an internal strategic commissioning arrangement, protocols on partner engagement etc.
- Strengthened links between regional management boards and the NAS CGB / central team to improve focus and commitment to nationally agreed priorities.
- Continuing to mature the relationship between the VAAs and the NAS with additional opportunities for developing and commissioning VAA services through national strategic commissioning and the fund.
- Strengthened relationships with the wider regional children's services agenda to better predict and respond to changing demand and better link to external opportunities for planning and funding services.
- Strengthening arrangements for joined up input from adopters and adoptees to planning, performance review as well as feedback at regional / VAA level and nationally.

4.2 One of the key changes for Western Bay Adoption Service referred to within the new Partnership Agreement is the development of Regional Joint Committees. These are made up of lead Cabinet Members across a region who meet twice a year to agree plans and resource recommendations via the Regional Management Board (RMB). This should include the member that sits on the NAS Governance Board. The committee will support Members to be kept fully informed and involved in the strategy, delivery and resourcing of NAS both at regional and national levels. In the event of a situation where a regional Joint Committee cannot be established, an equally robust arrangement to bring the Cabinet Members with portfolio responsibility for children's social care together across the region, should be put in place to focus on the regional adoption service. Any such arrangement should be agreed with the Co-Chairs of the Combined Governance Board and the Director of NAS.

4.3 A briefing Paper will be presented to the next Management Board in April 2021 to consider how the region will address this particular element of the agreement.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 Existing policy and procedures will need to be reviewed and revised to incorporate the impact of the new agreement. This is predominately in relation to any issues raised from the further consideration of the Regional Joint Committee.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

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

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

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

8. Financial implications

8.1 The reviewed Partnership agreement does not have any financial implications for the Authority.

9. Recommendations

9.1 That Cabinet:

- Notes the contents of this report;
- Delegate authority to the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing to agree the terms and execute the Partnership Agreement in consultation with the Chief Officer – Legal, HR and Regulatory Services.

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Background documents:

- Final Partnership Agreement-Bridgend
- NAS Partnership Letter to Directors for Signature 12/11/20