



Mid-Year Review 2017-18



Introduction and Overview

This mid year review is for Welsh Ministers as well as the public and our services users. It is written with the input of regions, agencies and our Advisory Group as well as being agreed by our Governance Board chairperson. I am pleased with the progress we have made so far this year in implementing our plans. Our use of co-production is exciting helping to ensure that development work is rooted in what the people who use adoption services want and need.

Adoption services in Wales have continued to see an increase in demand; Placement Orders and 'Should be placed' decisions are currently continuing at the higher level that re-emerged last year. Likewise, more post adoption support is being provided. Both of these factors as well as our ongoing focus on improvement is having an impact on the capacity available for service delivery.

Despite these pressures, there have been in-year improvements in the average timeframes for children placed and in the approval of adopters. There is also improvement in the availability of life journey materials for children, which has met the benchmark of 75% for the first time.

There is, however, a growing gap between the number of adopters recruited and the number of children becoming available. To place more children effectively and to reduce the level of children waiting, adopter recruitment needs to increase. Currently we are not improving the proportion of children who wait more than 6 months for a match nor the overall level of children waiting.

We are doing exciting things to support regions and agencies to recruit more adopters; we have excellent messaging and materials in the #SeeTheWholeChild campaign and we launched our Adoption Champion initiative during National Adoption Week. The NAS regional services are working hard to develop marketing and recruitment plans so that there is active and sustained recruitment activity. Our voluntary sector partners are developing the 'Adopting Together' scheme aimed at attracting adopters for those children who wait the longest.

We acknowledge the importance of having more accessible adoption support and we continue to work on the significant cultural, operational and resource changes that are needed to implement the NAS Adoption Support Framework.

We have been successful in attracting £125k investment from the Welsh Government to help us make changes. There are many examples of good practice that are being / could be shared and the work to make education services more 'adoption aware' is progressing well. Our life-journey work project is at the early implementation stage; the framework and tools are developed and we are testing parts of the new approach out. We also received a £90k grant from Welsh Government some of which will be used to improve the training available to adopters including a post approval training package.

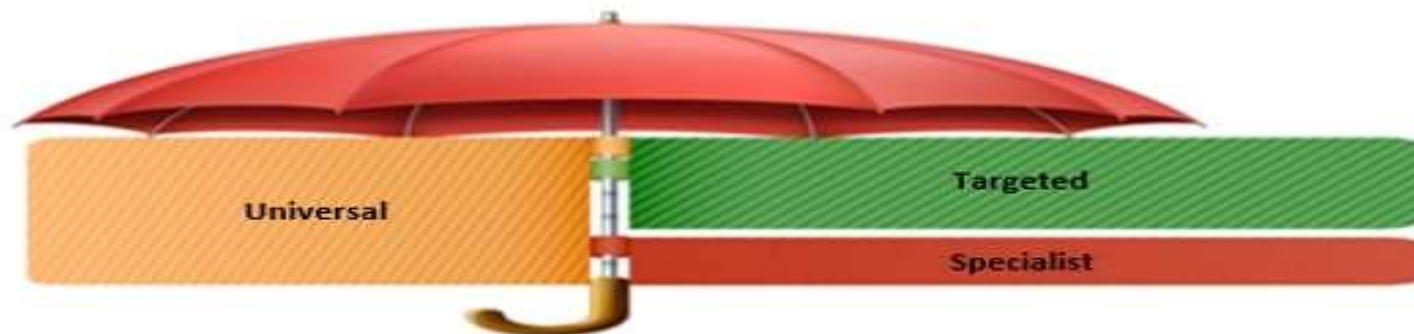
Overall inconsistencies do remain across Wales as we strive to develop a more coherent approach to delivering services alongside improving performance and practice. We will be reviewing the arrangements for NAS in the second half of the year which will contribute to addressing this in the longer term.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Suzanne Griffiths'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Suzanne Griffiths
Director of Operations
National Adoption Service

Priority 1: Continuing to improve adoption support

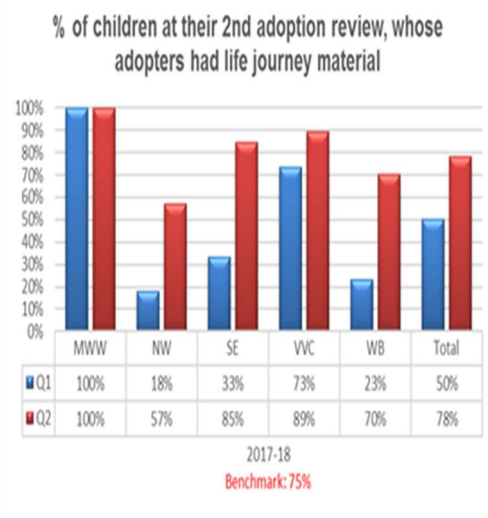
Improving adoption support is a significant challenge; probably the biggest one that NAS faces requiring cultural, service and resource changes. Last year we developed the NAS Adoption Support Framework (see below) and engaged with The Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University who worked with us to develop a Business Case for investment in adoption support.



There are a number of actions in this year's plan to help continue the improvement journey. These are

What did we say we would do?	What has been done?
1. Work with the business case to secure resourcing for improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The bid to Welsh Government (WG) for grant and additional resources has been successful - £215k secured of which £125k is recurringAdoption UK (AUK)/ After Adoption have realigned their 3rd sector grant to priorities of NAS including increased emphasis on TALK adoption and therapeutic training coursesAUK/ After Adoption have made successful bid to Henry Smith Charity to a fund First 1000 days in adoption projectSouth East Wales, Vale, Valleys & Cardiff and Western Bay have confirmed the Adoption Support Framework Business Case has been or plans are in place for it to be considered at their Regional ManagementThe potential conflict between the need for investment in adoption support and in recruitment of adopters is beginning to arise

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on a revised development plan will continue in the second half of the year.
2. Share existing good practice e.g. model for regions, as the access point for adoption support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> South East Wales have implemented direct referral into region for assessments for adoption support. In doing so, they developed a toolkit which is to be shared with other regions Western Bay and Vale Valleys & Cardiff were involved with the above and had already established access for all adoption support enquires Mid and West Wales also now undertake these assessments in the regional service Mid & West Wales hold a meeting between birth parent and adopter wherever possible prior to placement South East Wales and parts of Mid & West Wales have access to a psychology service for consultation. In South East Wales this also provides services to families and staff training which has expanded this year.
3. Implement the national policy on financial allowances in adoption.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly all LA's have agreed the policy with an anticipated start date of 1/4/18 The need for more robust and consistent assessment for and review of allowances has arisen as well as challenges in where the capacity to do this can be found Western Bay, who developed the original model, are updating the elements of the assessment tool that need to be kept in line with other similar models.
4. Implement the new framework for life journey work (LJW) in adoption.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This project is progressing very well with active engagement of all regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA's) Adoption and Fostering Association (Afa) and AUK have supported the project management at different times The draft framework, toolkit and practice guidance are available and being tested out in early implementation In Mid & West Wales the child's social worker provides a narrative as a starting point for relationship between child and adopters at matching panel South East Wales and Western Bay have identified life journey champions with Western Bay also developing a Transition Planning/ Moving On Programme Vale, Valleys & Cardiff now require a draft later life letter as part of the matching pack



- ✚ Barnardo's are raising awareness and ensuring staff are trained to support adoptive parents to secure LJW materials during matching
- ✚ An 'Extranet' for staff across Wales has been set up on www.adoptcymru.com to hold life journey materials and toolkits
- ✚ All regions are showing a significant improvement in the proportion of children who have life journey material by their second adoption review. Overall we are meeting the benchmark.

5. Continue to work with WG and AUK to make education services more 'adoption aware'.

- ✚ AUK/ After Adoption published a parents booklet in September 'Getting it Right for every Child – A parent's guide to working with schools' which complements the similar guide for teachers
- ✚ WG are funding AUK to provide six master classes across Wales to work with schools, regional staff and adopters
- ✚ AUK has employed an education co-ordinator and launched an 'attachment aware' schools campaign
- ✚ An ADEW (Association of Directors of Education in Wales) representative has been secured for the NAS Advisory Group and we are working with her to access relevant school staff and leaders
- ✚ Links made with National Association of Head Teachers by NAS and AUK leading to promotion of information and materials
- ✚ There is varied success with regional services securing local education contacts but some examples of good practice exist e.g. Western Bay meetings with Looked After Children Education Co-ordinators.

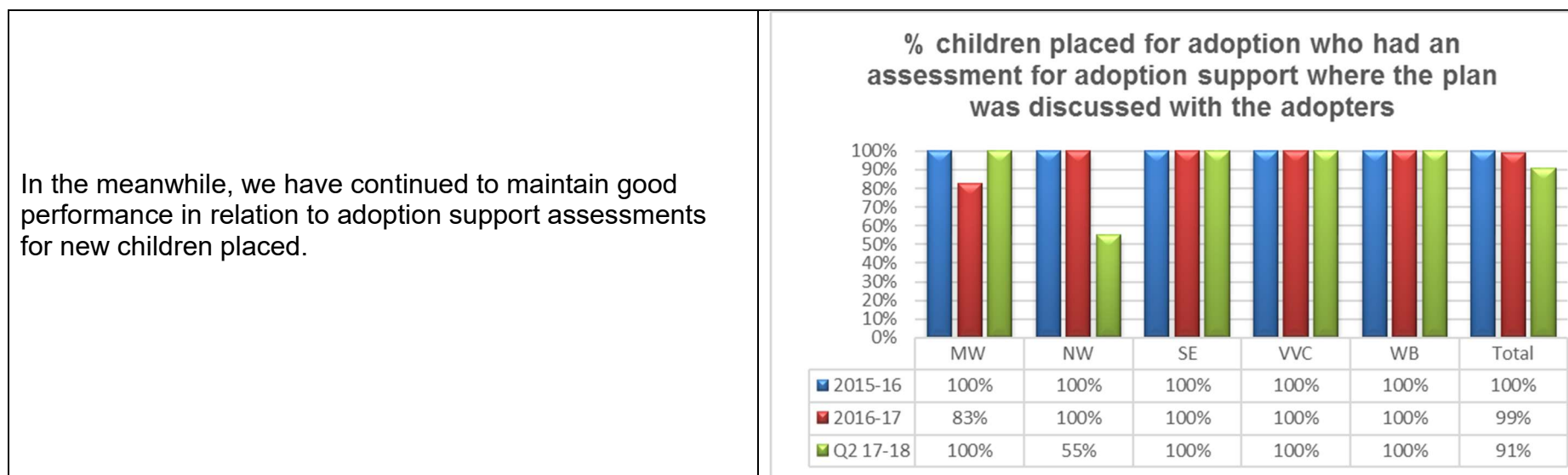
6. Implement legal guide for adopters.

- ✚ Central Team are having this professionally produced to be available in the second half of the year.

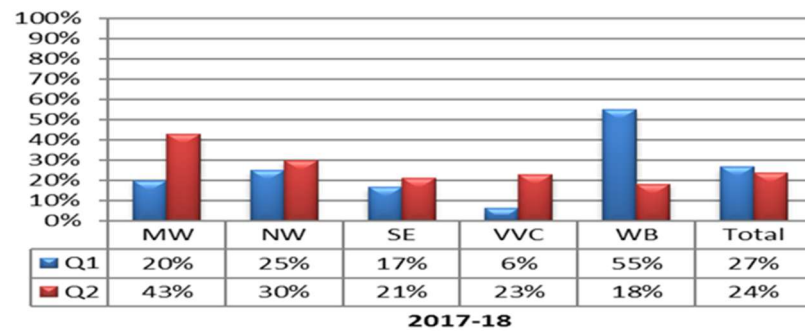
<p>7. Improve access to Child and Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and other health services that support emotional wellbeing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regions are following up locally the links made because of a meeting between NAS, the WG CAMHS advisor and Clinical leads in March 2017 Vale, Valleys & Cardiff and Western Bay have begun discussion with their local CAMHS to consider how resources can be deployed, access to consultation, referral routes and joint training Mid & West Wales have also done this and have undertaken some joint assessments with CAMHS Commencing this is more challenging in other regions and to be followed up as year continues.
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The business case suggests that implementing the Framework will at minimum cost £1.1 million alongside which there are some significant changes needed in how and by whom certain things are done e.g. locating assessments for post adoption support in regional services.

The recognition by the Welsh Government and other funders of the need for additional resources for adoption support is very welcome. However, there is much more work to be done, over time, to focus existing resources and attract further investment. This work will continue for the remainder of the year and beyond.



% of Children placed for adoption whose plan for adoption support involved ongoing service provision at the point of placement



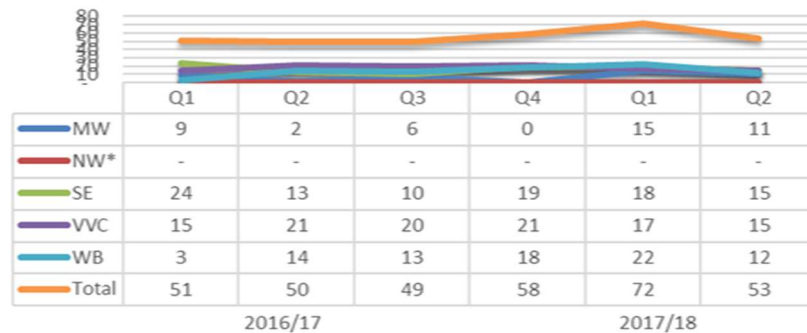
Of the 80 children placed in the first half of the year, 25% were receiving ongoing services¹ at the time they were placed². This compares with the annual average of 25% during 2016-17.

Of these services;

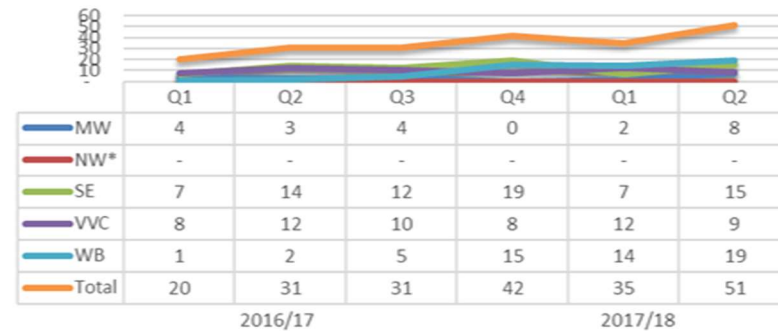
- 17% were ongoing financial allowances made in all regions
- 22% were 'one-off' financial payments made in 3 regions

A further 125 new assessments, for children not receiving ongoing services, were commenced in the first half of the year with 86 completed³. This indicates a higher level of demand in this first part of the year given that 200 requests for assessments were received with 124 completed in the whole of last year.

Number of new assessments started in respect of children that are currently not receiving an adoption support service



Number of completed new assessments in respect of children that are currently not receiving an adoption support service



¹ Individual children may be in receipt of more than one type of service.

² This does not include letterbox contact arrangements which are in place for most children.

³ Data for one region **North Wales** is not available; this was the case for 2016/17 data too.












Of the assessments completed so far this year:

- 19% resulted in a new ongoing financial allowance being made in 2 regions
- 5% a new 'one off' financial allowance in 3 regions
- 78% a non financial support service in 4 regions

Priority 2: Placing children effectively

We became aware last year, contrary to the trend that had been evident, that numbers of 'should be placed for adoption decisions' being made by local authorities and the number of Placement Orders being granted by the courts had begun to rise. This became a priority for this year in order to ensure that we could continue to place children effectively by having ongoing and effective recruitment of adopters suitable to meet their needs, building on the work we had done in the last two years.

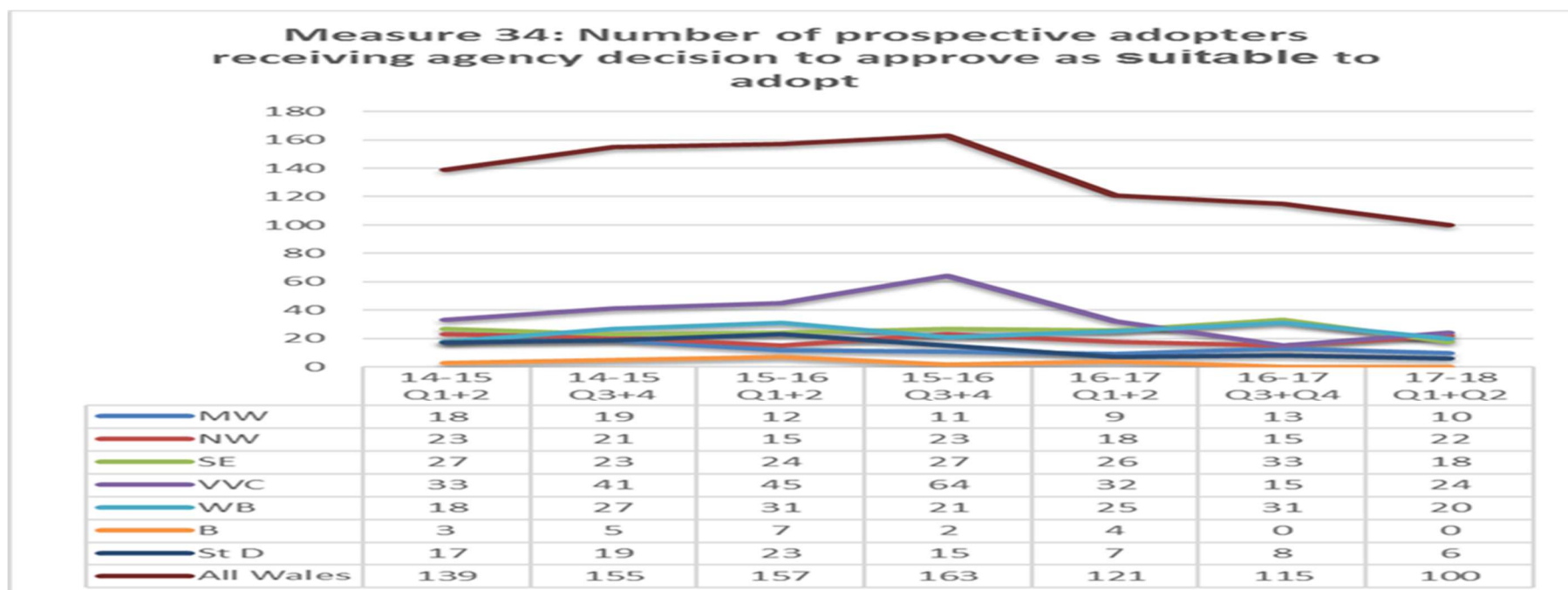
There are a number of actions in this year's plan aimed at ensuring we do this. These are:

<p>1. Embed the (adopter) recruitment strategy with co-ordinated activity focused on need.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  The NAS marketing strategy has been updated alongside data being used to develop projections of need  We have increased the part time hours of the marketing post in the central team  Our website has been improved with additional information about children waiting on the Wales Adoption Register  Mid and West wales have produced a video to help 'myth bust' about who can adopt which is to be available on their website  Central team staff have been working with regions and agencies to ensure that all have active marketing and recruitment strategies with adopter sufficiency goals  Overall, the NAS will need to significantly increase recruitment to be able to place the children likely to be available during the year and the children waiting  Some regions have identified capacity issues in the parts of their services responsible for recruitment  We will use Welsh government grant aid to support recruitment for the remainder of this year.
<p>2. Developing a specific approach for the more difficult to place children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Led by St David's Children Society and its Knowledge Transfer Partnership with Cardiff University the 'Adopting Together' scheme has been developed by Wales Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership  The scheme seeks to recruit adopters for the children who wait longest with an enhanced fee to fund a bespoke adoption support package tailored to the need of these complex children  Mid & West Wales, Vale, Valleys & Cardiff and Western Bay have gained approval for the scheme and children have been referred; the other regions are awaiting sign off from their Regional Management Boards

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Western Bay held a regional profiling event with the aim of raising the awareness of more difficult to place children; this was successful in identifying potential links amongst their own adopters.																																			
<p>3. Improving the timeframes from placement order to placement for all children.</p> <div><p>Average Placement Order to Placement</p><table><thead><tr><th></th><th>MW</th><th>NW</th><th>SE</th><th>VVC</th><th>WB</th><th>All Wales</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Ave 15-16</td><td>5.9</td><td>9.6</td><td>7.8</td><td>8.2</td><td>7.5</td><td>7.9</td></tr><tr><td>Ave 16-17</td><td>5.4</td><td>10.5</td><td>7.4</td><td>9.1</td><td>8.1</td><td>8.4</td></tr><tr><td>Ave Q1 17-18</td><td>6.6</td><td>9.9</td><td>9.8</td><td>8.6</td><td>7.7</td><td>8.7</td></tr><tr><td>Ave Q2 17-18</td><td>6.9</td><td>8.1</td><td>6.2</td><td>6.9</td><td>9.0</td><td>7.5</td></tr></tbody></table><p>Benchmark: 6 months or less</p></div>		MW	NW	SE	VVC	WB	All Wales	Ave 15-16	5.9	9.6	7.8	8.2	7.5	7.9	Ave 16-17	5.4	10.5	7.4	9.1	8.1	8.4	Ave Q1 17-18	6.6	9.9	9.8	8.6	7.7	8.7	Ave Q2 17-18	6.9	8.1	6.2	6.9	9.0	7.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There have been improvements in the average time between a child becoming looked after to placement for adoption (14 months) and the timeframe between the granting of the placement order to placement (7.5 months). These are amongst the better quarterly averages to date although short of the benchmark targets of 13 months and 6 months respectivelyThere has been no impact on the proportion of children who wait more than 6 months for a match which remained at 72%; this is reflected in an increase in the number of children waiting on the Wales Adoption Register for more than 6 monthsThere is emerging evidence of a small increase in children waiting longer on the Wales Adoption Register but not in those waiting longest; the number of children waiting longest (18 months or more) has remained stable, with a small but gradual increase in the number waiting 12 to 18 monthsThe level of children waiting at the mid year point, 365 children, was slightly increased on the position at the end of 2016/17.
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<p>4. Embedding the principles and practice of best practice in family finding and matching.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mid & West Wales, Vale, Valleys & Cardiff and Western Bay indicate they have implemented the NAS good practice for family finding.South East Wales are also developing their internal processes.																																			
<p>5. Improving transition into new families including examination of timeframes and concurrency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The ‘transitional model’ developed by Western Bay has been shared with the life journey working group and complements it wellWestern Bay are rolling out their transition model training to all their LA’sSouth East Wales are referring their harder to place children to the psychology service enhanced network pilot as well as staff being engaged in a psychology service reflective practice groupVale, Valleys & Cardiff have provided mandatory training for the whole team on transition and attachment as well as improving the matching process																																			

6. Support procurement and implementation of new adoption register, and	✚ We continue to work with the Welsh Government who are managing the procurement of the new Register
7. Working through changes to practice required by a new adoption register.	✚ Timeframes remain uncertain although the intention is to commence the procurement process this year.

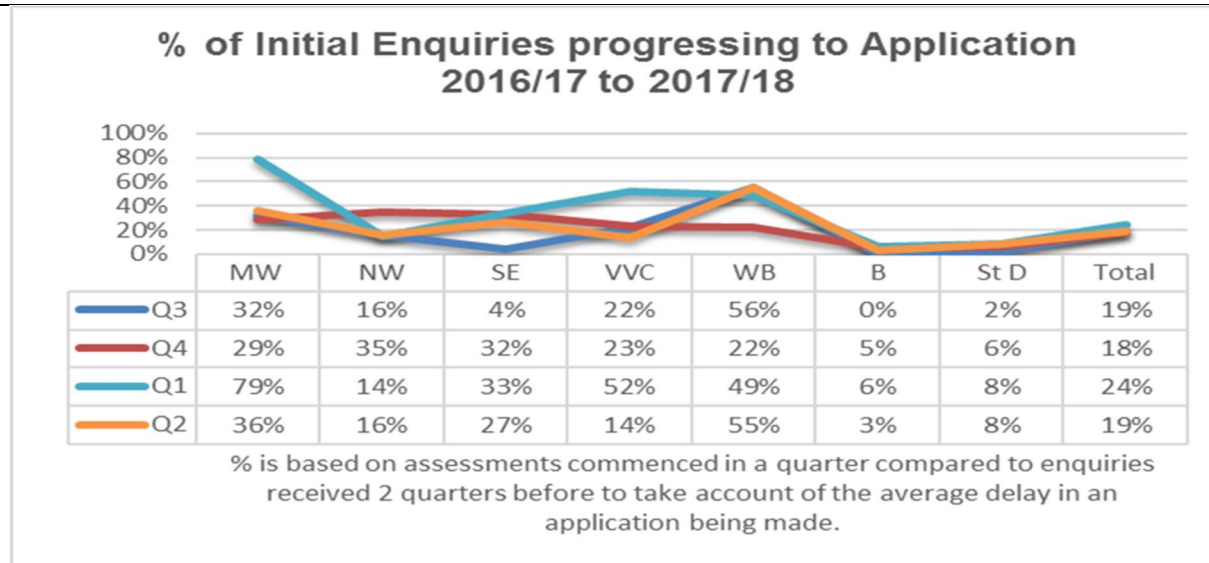
A growing gap between the number of adopters available or being recruited and the children being made subject of Placement Orders has become evident this year. 100 adopters have been approved so far this year in a trend of reducing approvals. Only Vale Valley's and Cardiff, and North Wales have begun to increase approvals so far this year.



Levels of enquiries from prospective adopters remain good and have increased slightly although the pattern is changing with more enquiries being made of the voluntary agencies than regions.

As was the case last year this higher level of enquiries is not resulting in higher levels of assessments being commenced by VAA's.

The conversion rate for enquiries to applications across Wales is shown. It varies between 19% and 24% with conversion rates in NAS regions generally higher than in the voluntary sector. The higher conversion rates may indicate that targeted recruitment is beginning to have an impact for regional services.
















146 assessments had been commenced by the end of quarter 2 compared to 246 in the whole of 2016/17; this is proportionally more than the same stage last year which if continued would make a contribution to increasing the number of adopters approved but a much bigger increase is needed as we go forward.

The average timeframe for adopter approvals, from the enquiry, was 9.1 months. This is an improvement on the year-end figure for 2016/17 (11.1 months) attributable to better performance in four of the five regions in quarter 2. North Wales and South East Wales are, however, the only regions / agencies that met the benchmark of 8 months for enquiry to approval.

Performance in respect of formal application to approval is better. On average it is 3.7 months after the initial enquiry that the adopter makes the formal application; assessment cannot commenced until this is received. Welsh Government guidance indicates that formal application to approval should take 6 months; on average it takes 5.4 months in NAS regions / agencies.

Underpinning Work

There were also a number of other areas of work to progress contained in the plan. These are

1. Tackling inconsistency/ outliers in priority areas of performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  We have attempted to do this through other elements of the plan e.g. the work on recruitment, placing children and life-journey work  Some Regions have had some success working in partnership with their LA's, for example, to implement the life journey framework and performance is improving within regions and across Wales. This reflects the level of hard work undertaken by staff as well as the impact of additional resources and focus  In contrast however some regions are reporting capacity issues relating to increased workload and staff absences which is hampering their improvement ambitions.
2. Systematic service user engagement and co-production.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Adopters and adopted children and young people have been involved in the development of the Life Journey Framework this year  Mid & West Wales undertake a range of engagement activity including family activity days, focus groups for consultation and involving birth parents in producing a training film for adopters  North Wales send regular questionnaires to adopters  South East Wales undertake routine evaluation of adopters experience of panel  Adopters in South East Wales and Vale, Valleys & Cardiff participate in the facilitating preparation training for prospective adopters  Western Bay has an Adopter Forum  The 'Adopter Voice' project is commencing, led by AUK but involving all regions and part funded by NAS  The NAS Adoption Champion initiative has been developed and launched  The many examples listed demonstrate that children, young people and adopters are at the centre of all our developments.
3. Work with WG to make the required changes to the regulations for adoption support and assessment of adopters and	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  We have continued to raise this informally and formally, with the Welsh Government.

implement changes to primary legislation.	
4. RISCA phase 3 – review of adoption regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAS are represented on the WG's technical group of implementation of phase of RISCA.
5. Engage with WG's development of new arrangements for additional learning needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AUK/ After Adoption and NAS central team attended the stakeholder and practitioner sessions.
6. Engage with CSSIW – development of inspection for adoption services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAS central team have kept in touch with CSSIW on this. An awareness raising session about the forthcoming inspection will be held early October.
7. Supporting the implementation of WCCIS.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National processes for children and adopters have been worked through with regions and VAA's and agreed Work in progress on developing the remaining processes and a national set of forms continues South East Wales likely to pilot the adoption module as the lead LA Blaenau Gwent have implemented WCCIS Progress is slower than anticipated, in part due to changes in personnel affecting NAS links to the national board and a lack of clarity about the local development of the adoption module by WCCIS without direct links to NAS.
8. Develop a NAS training and development strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regions and VAA's have contributed scoping information NAS continues to engage with Social Care Wales and their work e.g. review of the social work degree, links with workforce co-coordinators etc.
9. Further develop NAS governance arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance Board have agreed for a review of the NAS arrangements including the proposal that NAS co-ordinates national elements of the National Fostering Framework.
10. Other things to note.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAS has submitted evidence to the National Assembly for Wales review of CAMHS services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAS worked with with AWHOCS and WLGA on a submission to the Public Accounts Committee review of services for care experienced children An article about NAS was prepared for the Coram Baaf Journal
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