



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

Annual Report 2025/26

Achieving More Together

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South East Wales Adoption Service
Achieving More Together
Gwasaneth Mabwysiadu Deddwyrain Cymru
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd I



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Gogledd Cymru | North Wales
Adoption
Service



Mabwysiadu
Canolbarth a Gogledd Cymru
Adoption
Mid & West Wales



Cymdeithas ar gyfer Maethu,
Gofal Perthynas a Mabwysiadu
Association for Fostering,
Kinship and Adoption



Vale, Valleys
and Cardiff
Adoption | Mabwysiadu
yn y Fro, y Cymoedd
a Chaerdydd



Newid Plentynod.
Newid Bywydau.
Changing childhoods.
Changing lives.



GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU
Bae'r Gogleddin
Western Bay
ADOPTION SERVICE



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Dewi Sant | St David's
Adoption
Service

Chairs' foreword

We are pleased to present the 2025/26 Annual Report for the National Adoption Service (NAS).

Over the past year, NAS has continued to lead a programme of transformation, strengthening and modernising the way adoption services are delivered across Wales. Through a collaborative, multi agency approach, we have continued to build a more inclusive and responsive adoption system, one that places the needs of children and families at its heart and makes a meaningful difference to the lives of adoptive families and adopted young people.

Services have continued to place a strong focus on supporting children as they move into their new families, working closely with birth parents, and promoting a more open style of adoption. This approach recognises the importance of relationships and connections in helping children understand their identity and early life experiences, alongside ongoing development of post adoption support.

Everyone involved can be proud of the progress made in creating services that support children, young people, and the families around them as they navigate the lifelong implications of adoption.

NAS has continued to work closely with the Welsh Government. As we enter a new governmental term, we remain committed to strengthening this partnership to ensure continued support and investment in the reform of adoption services across Wales.

This year also marks significant change within NAS leadership. After 11 years of dedicated service, our Director, Suzanne Griffiths, announced her retirement at the end of March 2026, ushering in the first change in directorship since NAS was established. Suzanne has been instrumental in both the development and implementation of NAS, working tirelessly to improve adoption services across Wales throughout its entire existence. She leaves with our deep gratitude, warmest wishes, and the distinction of an MBE for services to adoption: a fitting recognition of her impact.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the adopters who have opened their homes, the professionals who work with unwavering commitment, and the communities that continue to support our shared vision of improving adoption services for children.

In this report, we look back on the progress of the past year while also looking ahead—with continued support, innovation, and compassion—to how we will work together to shape adoption in Wales in the years to come.

Independent Co-Chairs

NAS Combined Governance Board



Dr Carolyn Sampeys
Independent Co-chair



Cllr Jane Tremlett
Independent Co-chair



About us

The National Adoption Service (NAS) was created to improve services for all those affected by adoption in Wales.



It brings together Welsh local authority adoption services into a three-tier structure, which includes partnerships at all levels with Welsh voluntary adoption agencies, health, education services, and others.

All **22 Welsh local authorities** continue to provide services to children who are looked after, whilst identifying and working with those children for whom an adoption plan is appropriate.

Regionally, local authorities work together within five regional collaboratives to provide a range of adoption services. Each regional collaborative has links with the voluntary adoption agencies, health, and education and provides:

- The adoption agency function for children
- Recruitment and assessment of adopters
- Counselling and support to birth parents
- Advice and support to adopted adults
- Adoption support services, in some regions, this is shared with their local authorities.

Nationally, NAS's director and small central team provide leadership, coordination, strategic support and enabling whilst also commissioning some Wales-wide services.

To find out more about adoption in Wales, visit the National Adoption Service website (adoptcymru.com).

Abbreviations used in this report:

AMWW	Adoption Mid and West Wales
NWAS	North Wales Adoption Service
SEWAS	South East Wales Adoption Service
VVC	Vale Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Service
WBAS	Western Bay Adoption Service
St David's	St David's Adoption Service
AUK	Adoption UK Cymru
LAs	Local Authorities
Regions	Regional Adoption Collaboratives
VAAAs	Voluntary Adoption Agencies

Key achievements in 2025/26

In June 2025, the NAS Governance Board and key stakeholders met to set the priorities for the next adoption services strategy for Wales.

This resulted in the development of **AdoptCymru 2030: A Plan for Further Progress**, which will be implemented from April 2026.



The biennial NAS Conference took place in October.

Entitled **'Adoption in Wales: Learning from Research and Experience'** it was attended by 116 professionals and staff from across Wales as well as key stakeholders from England and included a range of speakers.

A pilot for digital letter-box contact called **'Letter Swap'** was rolled out early in 2026 across the five Regions.

The platform, developed by Link Maker, is designed to modernise and manage post-adoption contact between adoptive and birth families, offering secure, flexible, and trackable communication.

In October, a new NAS recruitment campaign entitled **'Now is a good time....'** was launched.

So far, the campaign has performed well through a targeted TV streaming advert, Spotify audio (delivering high numbers of listeners), strong social media engagement, as well as bilingual PR coverage across Wales.

In January, the **Finding and Building Adoptive Families for Children in Wales Good Practice Guide**, was launched.

Developed for NAS by AFKA Cymru in collaboration with all regions and VAAs, this covers all aspects of the family finding process from pre proceedings to matching panel/ADM.



In 2025, NAS partnered with a children's author and adoptive father, Sam Langley-Swain to share a book entitled **The Blanket Bears**, with all primary schools and libraries in Wales.

Further details are included later in this report.

Implementing the plan

The 'Adopt Cymru 2025 and Beyond....' strategic plan was developed following extensive engagement with children, young people and families, professionals, and service leaders, including via the annual 'Big Adoption Conversation'. The Plan was extended into 2025/26 for a 12-month period to ensure all priorities were met as follows:



STRATEGIC PRIORITY A

The best families for our adopted children

This strategic priority area is fundamental to good adoption services. Much has been done to improve and update practice in recent years, with NAS continuing to build on these improvements and drive forward modern adoption practice across Wales.

What we achieved during 2025/26

Throughout 2025/26, the NAS **marketing strategy** focused on increasing awareness of modern adoption in Wales, improving the quality of adopter enquiries and strengthening public understanding of the needs of children waiting for adoption.

A key highlight was the launch of the [Now is a Good Time](#) campaign during National Adoption Week, which focused on the qualities and experiences that equip people to become adoptive parents. The campaign featured authentic adopter stories from across Wales and was supported through bilingual public relations, broadcast media, social media and digital activity, helping to generate strong engagement and positive sentiment throughout the campaign period.

NAS maintained a presence at major national events including the **Hay Festival** in May, **Pride Cymru** in June, and the **National Eisteddfod** in August. Regional services and Voluntary Adoption Agencies also delivered a wide range of local events and engagement opportunities within communities across Wales.



NAS continued to strengthen a **collaboration and communications** infrastructure, including the development of a new All-Wales Events Tracker to support better coordination and promotion of regional and national activity. There has been a continued enhancement of the [Adopt Cymru](#) website and the delivery of a successful national media training event for colleagues and stakeholders, with a second session planned for later in 2026.



A **Quality and Skills Framework** was developed to define the key qualities for successful adoptive parenting and provides a practical tool to help practitioners assess and evidence these through clear, critical analysis. The Framework aims to strengthen consistency, professional judgement, and child-centred decision-making, whilst recognising the complexity of adoption and the importance of ongoing support for families.



The **Family Finding Good Practice Guide**, entitled *Finding and Building Adoptive Families for Children in Wales* was produced, setting out a Wales-wide framework for finding and supporting adoptive families, emphasising timely, well-coordinated planning, strong assessments, and collaborative processes to secure stable, lifelong placements for children. The Guide highlights the importance of the child's voice, maintaining relationships and identity, and providing ongoing support. It recognises adoption as an ongoing, relationship-based process rather than a single event.



Preparation Training (SEWAS Practice Example)

A birth mother created a video about her experiences of adoption to be shared with prospective adopters at preparation training. This was well received and impactful and will be included in all future training. Feedback received from one of the participants is as follows:

"We found the video from the birth mother incredibly moving. It really helped us see the adoption process from her perspective, which was something we hadn't fully considered before this process. Hearing about both the positive and negative experiences she had, and the very real impact these have had on her life, was eye-opening. It made us pause and reflect, and it has definitely shaped the way we think about birth parents. It reminded us that adoption touches everyone involved and hearing her story so honestly added a lot of depth and empathy to our understanding."

Trauma Nurture Timelines and Understanding the Child Days

These **processes** are now fully embedded in practice across Wales.

Trauma Nurture Timeline

A Trauma Nurture Timeline (TNTL) is a comprehensive, evolving record of a child's life experiences, compiled primarily by the Family Finding team using information gathered from social workers, carers, and other sources. It maps key events, relationships, and developmental influences over time, providing a structured understanding of how trauma and early experiences may have shaped the child's needs and behaviours. Developed from the point of the adoption decision and updated through the family finding and matching process, the TNTL is used to support linking and matching discussions and to help prospective adopters reflect on what it might be like to parent the child.

Understanding the Child Day

An Understanding the Child Day (UTCD) is a structured, multi-professional event designed to help prospective adopters gain a deep, child-centred understanding of a child's lived experiences and needs. It brings together relevant professionals to share the child's history in detail, enabling adopters to consider those experiences from the child's perspective and explore how early life events may influence the child's development, behaviour, expectations of adults, and future needs. The day focuses on reflecting on what life has felt like for the child, what supports them now, and how this knowledge can inform planning for transitions and support in an adoptive placement, with the overall aim of strengthening matching, improving preparation, and reducing the risk of placement breakdown.



Adoption Register for Wales

The [Adoption Register Wales \(ARW\)](#), managed by NAS on behalf of the Welsh Government, plays a key role in enabling cross-regional and inter-agency matching, particularly for children who may wait longer for adoption.

In 2025/26, practitioners continued to consistently refer children and adopters within required timescales, making effective use of the Register as a core family-finding tool.

259 children were referred to the register in 2025/26 and there were 328 children on the Register at year-end, (including 210 waiting without links) reflecting a steady increase in the number of children waiting over recent years. In contrast, adopter numbers have declined, with 90 families referred and 75 on the Register at year end.

Despite this, matching performance remains strong, with 155 children matched (37% via the Register) and 82 adoptive families matched (28% via the Register), demonstrating the ongoing value of ARW in facilitating placements, especially for children with more complex needs or sibling groups.

Targeted family-finding activity has been successful, particularly Adoption Activity Days, which continue to generate strong engagement and outcomes, including a record number of matches from a single event. Alongside these events, ARW has strengthened practice through regular forums, new monthly drop-in sessions, collaboration with the Adopting Together Service, and ongoing training to improve profile quality and use of the Link Maker system.



Adopting Together Service

In 2025/26, the Adopting Together Service continued to strengthen its infrastructure and national coordination through St David's Children Society. The service maintained a consistent focus on identifying and progressing children who meet the criteria, supported by regular engagement with regional partners and targeted regional outreach, which helped increase referrals in some areas.

Recruitment activity was enhanced through two bespoke campaigns '**Becoming Family**' and '**No Single Way to Belong**'. These campaigns ran alongside a developing multi-faith strategy designed to broaden the diversity of prospective adopters.

Operationally, the service facilitated ongoing profiling and matching discussions, with 38 child profiles actively explored and several expressions of interest generated following targeted engagement events. While there was demonstrable progress in awareness, engagement, and recruitment activity, no placements were achieved during the year, highlighting ongoing challenges in securing suitable matches for children with very complex needs and indicating the need for continued focus on conversion from interest to placement.

Practice Example (St David's)

During Stage Two of their adoption assessment, a couple were linked with a 4-year-old child referred to Adopting Together. Social workers responded positively, and the potential match began to take shape, with information shared and early discussions progressing well.

As the couple approached their approval panel, they had a change of personal circumstances. Rather than stepping away from the child entirely, they explored whether they could care for the child in a fostering arrangement. With robust support from professionals, they were approved as foster carers by St David's, and a carefully planned transition enabled the child to move into their care.

Eventually, the couple were approved to adopt by St David's and the child is now placed for adoption with them. This was initiated under the Adopting Together Service, and permanence has been achieved for this child, with excellent support, and good collaborative working.

Welsh Early Permanence (WEP)

All regions have now undertaken [Welsh Early Permanence](#) placements, reflecting a strong, collective commitment to embedding the framework into practice and benefiting those children for whom WEP is appropriate.

A WEP Champions Group meets on a quarterly basis, providing a valuable opportunity for lead practitioners from across all regions to come together, share experiences, and reflect on practice. Feedback from the WEP Champions Group informed a focused project to develop resources to support the existing children of WEP carers. This included a metaphorical story, '[Someone New](#)', told from a sibling's perspective, a direct work resource pack, and advice for carers.

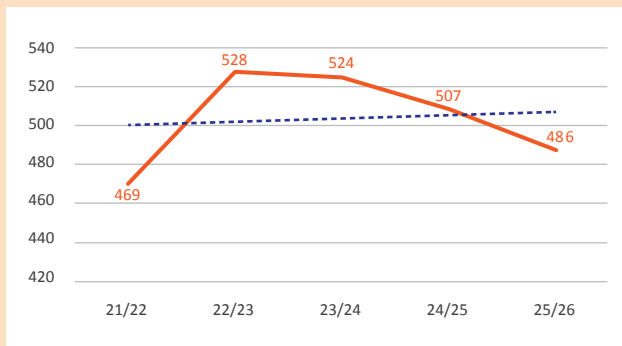
The webpage has also been expanded to include an interview with two Agency Medical Advisors, who shared their expertise to support carers considering WEP, including valuable insight into caring for children at an earlier stage, where less may be known about their medical history and needs.



The WEP carers' preparation course continues to be delivered bi-monthly and as experience across Wales has grown, the training has been further enriched by the contributions of carers who support sessions by sharing their own journeys of adoption through WEP.

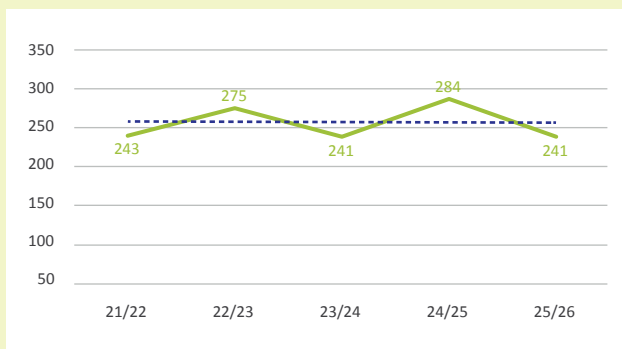
Over the past year, six online information sessions have been held to raise awareness of WEP amongst practitioners. These have been well attended by childcare, fostering, and adoption social workers, as well as Guardians and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), demonstrating strong engagement across the sector.

Data in relation to this priority



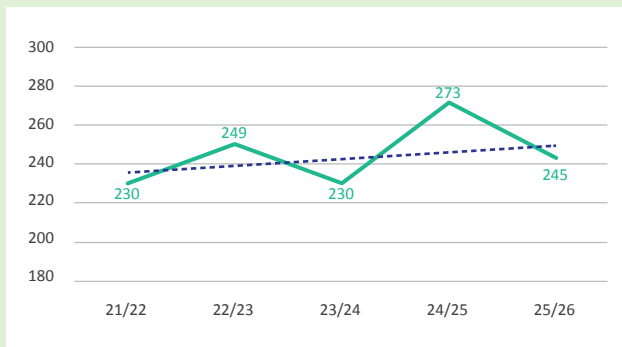
Referrals for Children

All-Wales Children Referral numbers increased initially but have declined for the past three years, resulting in 486 referrals during 2025/26.



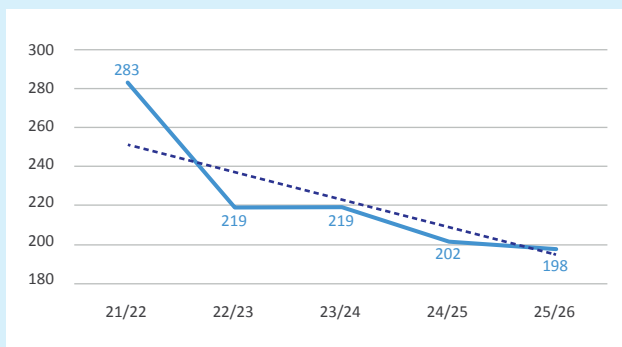
Should be Placed Decisions

While the number of Should be Placed decisions made has remained consistent, they have fluctuated over the past five years, with a reduction of 15% in 2025/26 compared with the previous year.



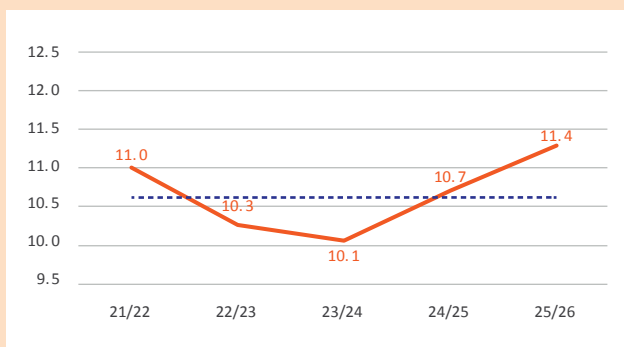
Placement Orders

The number of All-Wales placement orders made has remained between 230 and 273 per year over the last 5 years, with an increasing trend over time. However, there was a drop of almost 10% this year, compared to 2024/25 figures.



Children Placed for Adoption

The number of children placed for adoption across Wales has been steadily falling over time, with 198 children being placed in 2025/26.



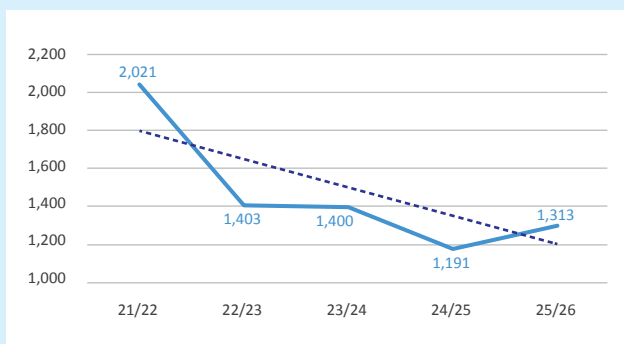
Timescales from Placement Order to Placed for Adoption

The time taken, in months, to place a child for adoption from the date of the placement order remains at an average of 10.6 months over the last 5 years.

Children Waiting

As at the end of 2025/26, there were **310 children** waiting to be adopted. This is an 11% increase on the end year figure for 2024/25, when there were **271 children** waiting.

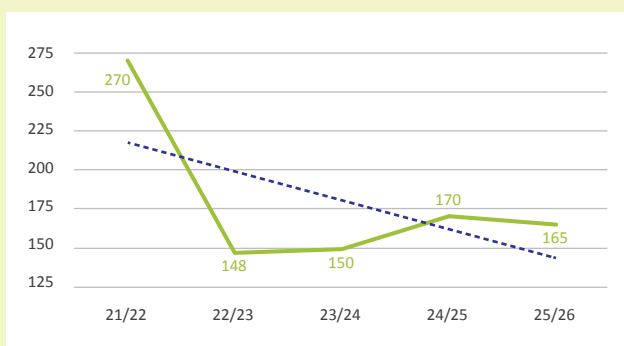
Of the 310 children waiting, 58 had a strong link, were on hold or were subject to a plan change. This left 252 children actively family finding at year end, a 16% increase compared to 2024/25, when there were 208 children actively family finding.



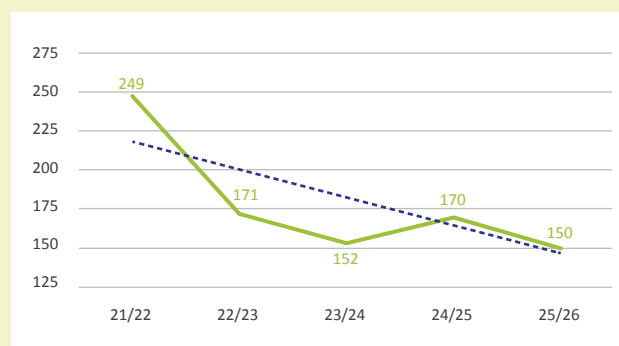
All-Wales Initial Enquiries to Adopt

Although there has been a steady reduction in the number of enquiries to adopt over the last five years, the number increased by 10% this year compared to the previous year.

Adopter Assessments Started



Adopters Approved



Despite the increase in the number of enquiries to adopt this year, the number of adopter assessments starting dropped by five to 165 this year, continuing a decreasing trend over time. This is also the case for the number of approvals, which at a total of 150 is the lowest number reported over the last five years. Subsequently, the number of **adopters waiting** for a placement dropped to 84 as at the end of 2025/26, the lowest number reported over the last five years.

How the Regions and VAAs are addressing this priority

There continues to be a sustained focus on strengthening adopter recruitment, preparation, and child-centred practice, alongside improving the quality and effectiveness of approaches.

- AMWW is advancing its marketing offer through a planned website upgrade, dedicated marketing capacity, and engagement in national events, while maintaining a positive recruitment pipeline and reviewing preparation training.
- VVC reports an increase in enquiries translating into more placements. This reflects effective partnership working which reduces delays for children.
- WBAS continues to deliver a robust, community-focused marketing approach and prioritises recruitment of WEP carers, with recent approvals and further applicants progressing through this process.
- NWAS highlights the positive impact of the Family Finding Good Practice Guide in supporting more reflective, analytical practice centred on children's needs, particularly around life story work and contact.
- SEWAS has strengthened preparation training by incorporating birth parent perspectives, which is improving adopter understanding and empathy, with positive feedback.
- St David's reports a stable number of approved adopters alongside a good number of applications being progressed.
- Barnardo's continues to enhance practice using more visual and activity-based tools to better understand and respond to children's needs.

Example of a sibling group placement where an external voluntary adoption agency was identified to widen the pool of adopters (AMWW)

The sibling group's needs, including maintaining their relationships and ensuring stability, were clearly identified within the matching process. Recognising that suitable adopters were not available in-house and to avoid delay, an external match was sought for the children.

Collaborative planning between the local authority and the external agency enabled a smooth transition. Good practice was evident in the structured placement planning and transitions process, ensuring both children and adopters were well prepared and supported.

The transition was carefully managed by the Family Finding Social Worker with clear communication between agencies, adopters, and professionals. Support packages, including therapeutic input and ongoing adoption support, were considered early to promote placement stability.

This highlights the importance of timely external linking, robust interagency collaboration, and comprehensive support planning when placing sibling groups. By adhering to NAS national guidance and maintaining a focus on the children's long-term needs, the placement progressed positively and minimised disruption risks.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY B

Great adoption support – when and where it's needed

NAS continues its success in building improved adoption support services across Wales, guided by the [NAS Adoption Support Commitment](#)



What we achieved during 2025/26

An [E-learning module for Health and Education practitioners](#) was created to help partners understand the role of adoption in permanence planning, how it is delivered in Wales and how practitioners in partner agencies can best support children and families within their context. This module is available on the NAS website and has been shared with colleagues across Health and Education.

A **scoping exercise of families** that regions and voluntary adoption agencies were working with, was completed in relation to young people aged 14+years. This identified several key themes to address areas of need during late adolescence and early young adulthood, including education, contact and Life Journey Work.

Through collaboration with all regional adoption support services across NAS, a new **post-adoption support plan template** was created which will allow for better identification of support needs post-adoption order as well as the ability to carry out timely reviews.

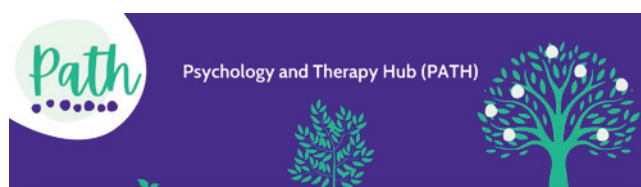
Pathways (MDT) Service

The Pathways service continued to provide support and access to multi-disciplinary therapies for adopters. A review carried out at the end of the year found that the new Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) model is highly valued by both professionals and families, delivering effective, trauma-informed and personalised support. The service was consistently described as compassionate and non-judgemental, with strong therapeutic relationships, specialist clinical input, and peer support helping families feel understood and less isolated. Reported outcomes include increased parental confidence, improved understanding of children's needs, and calmer home environments.

Performance at year end exceeded targets, with 109 referrals received from across Wales and all families were offered a service. 473 therapeutic sessions were delivered, with structured, needs-led interventions averaging around 10 sessions per family.



A **Life Journey Work** bulletin was published, focussing on advice for adopters when sharing life journey information with their children. New Life Journey Work web pages have been in development which will allow all families and professionals to access more resources, information and guidance. These will be launched in 2026.



Adoption Support (AUK) also offers community and nationwide peer support groups for adoptive families, as well as training opportunities for adoptive families and professionals working with adoptive families across Wales. This has included training on Non-Violent Resistance, identity in adolescence and trauma informed practice in the classroom.

Connected Service

The Connected service continues to provide advice, group activities and peer support to adopted children and young people.

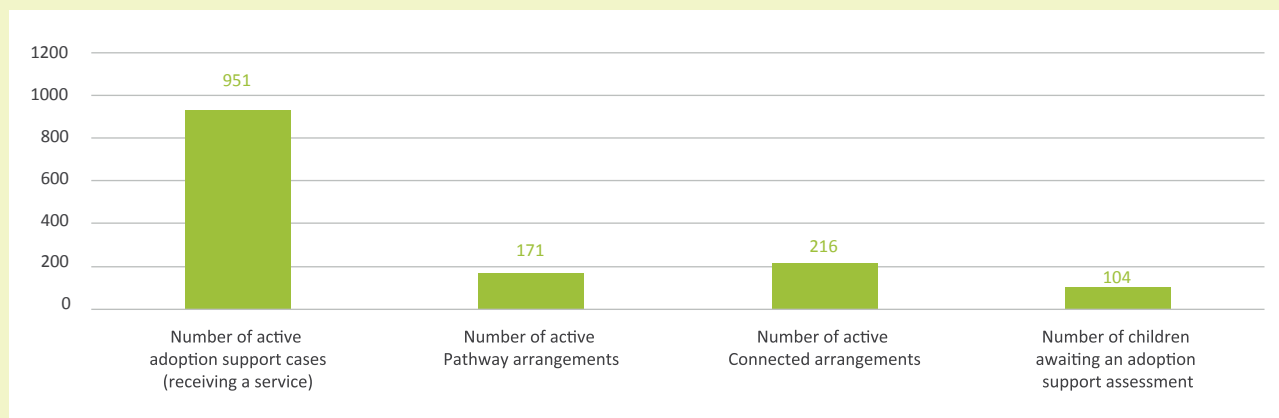
A total of 216 young people were registered with the service at year end (peaking at 269), with 71% engagement and 114 group sessions delivered alongside flexible individual support and accessible advice. Outcomes were positive, with 88.5% of young people achieving meaningful progress towards their goals and 93% of parents reporting positive experiences. However, staffing gaps, regional variation and delays in the digital offer impacted consistency and reach.

Enhanced outcome measures introduced during the year demonstrated clear impact across areas such as friendships, communication, social skills, confidence and life-skills. Feedback showed high satisfaction, with 73% of young people rating sessions 5* and parents reporting strong benefits, including improved confidence and new friendships. Co-production remains a strength, and engagement with young adults (18+) in March 2026 has informed the development of an ongoing peer support offer for adopted adults across Wales.



Data in relation to this priority

Adoption Support Activity



At the end of 2025/26, 1,338 children and young people were receiving adoption support, either via a formal assessment or through the Pathways and/or Connected services. This represents a drop of 17% compared to the previous year, when there were 1,618 cases.

It is likely that the reason for this reduction is because this figure does not include other informal sources of support, advice and signposting via other means, such as regional adoption advice 'hubs' and the voluntary adoption agencies. 104 children and young people were waiting for a formal adoption support assessment, which represents a 44% increase compared to 2024/25, when there were 72 children waiting.

How the Regions and VAAs are addressing this priority

Adoption support services continue to expand and diversify, with a strong emphasis on early intervention, therapeutic approaches, and strengthening support networks for adoptive families.

- AMWW has increased capacity and improved coordination, alongside delivering BUSS® model groups, adoptive parent groups, and developing new provision in Mid Wales, while also investing in staff training in TLSW.
- VVC continues to strengthen the quality of adopter preparation through enhanced training and in-house TLSW.
- WBAS demonstrates a well-developed early intervention model, offering a wide range of therapeutic and practical support including parenting programmes, Theraplay® groups, hubs for TLSW and contact work, and innovative new initiatives such as support for teenagers and trauma-informed school resources.
- NWAS provides a broad support offer, including early intervention, therapeutic work, group provision and, in line with other regions, a 12-month post-Adoption Order check-in for families.
- SEWAS reports positive outcomes from joint sensory processing workshops with health partners, improving parents' ability to support their children.
- St David's continues to provide ongoing post-adoption support to a stable cohort of families.
- Barnardo's has increased its face-to-face training offer and is adopting more creative communication methods to better support children and families.
- AUK facilitates a support group for adoptive parents who are navigating challenging conversations about adoption with their children. AUK work closely with the regional TLSW Coordinators to develop and facilitate the support group.

Adoption Support Practice Example (VVC):

Therapeutic Life Story Work (TLSW) in addressing identity and emotional challenges for a young person receiving post-adoption support within VVC.

The young person experienced difficulties due to gaps and misunderstandings in their early history, reflecting more limited information sharing at the time of their adoption. Inaccurate and distressing information, particularly about their birth father, led to anxiety, confusion, and behavioural challenges.

A Social Care Officer trained in TLSW built a trusting relationship through informal 1:1 sessions, enabling a gradual transition into therapeutic work. Through detailed information gathering, a clearer and more coherent life story was developed, supported by a TLSW welcome pack.

Parallel work with the adoptive parents helped address misunderstandings and strengthen their ability to support their child, including developing empathy for the birth family's experiences.

The intervention resulted in improved emotional wellbeing, stronger family relationships, and a more secure and positive sense of identity for the young person.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY C

Healthier contact through better birth family services

As part of a modern adoption service for Wales, NAS has continued to focus on improving adopted children's contact with their birth families (birth parents, siblings, and other relatives).



What we achieved during 2025/26

The [Contact Good Practice Guide](#) has been fully implemented into practice across Wales. The guide aims to ensure that, where a plan of contact is agreed, the focus is on the child's wellbeing throughout their life and that the agreed contact is supported and reviewed to ensure that it is always in their best interests.

To support the Good Practice Guide, a [Contact Planning Toolkit and Guidance](#) has been developed to aid planning and decision making at the point when permanence options are first considered for a child. A **training programme** for professionals on using the tool and guidance was developed and delivered to 97 attendees over two sessions in March 2026.

The Regions have continued to expand their offer of structured '**check-ins**' for both birth parents and adopters at key milestones. Originating from the [NAS Good Practice Guide on Adoption Support](#), these check-ins provide a valuable opportunity for services to confirm that children are settling well within their adoptive families and to identify any emerging issues at an early stage. For birth parents, these check-ins also offer a space to reflect on what is often a particularly challenging period, alongside access to appropriate support and the opportunity to discuss and address any matters relating to ongoing contact with their child.

A free pilot of a digital system to support contact was commissioned this year. **Letter Swap** is being implemented across the five regions to support with electronic letterbox contact.



A **Contact Task and Finish group** was set up at the start of 2026. In line with the recommendations from the [Public Law Working Group report on Recommendations for Best Practice in Adoption](#), the group comprises of a variety of stakeholders, from professionals to those with lived experience, who will work together to modernise contact in adoption.

In June, a survey was issued by Welsh Government (supported by ADSS Cymru) to all 22 local authorities to assess the impact of possible changes in contact expectations from the judiciary. While increased scrutiny of contact arrangements alongside positive use of the NAS guidance and toolkit was noted responses received found no evidence of delays to Placement or Adoption Orders being granted.

Practice Example (WBAS)

E (now 20, adopted) and siblings K (25) and C (23) (both in long-term foster care) had historically limited letterbox contact. In 2020, K's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) requested that contact be explored to re-establish sibling relationships, leading to WBAS allocating a post-adoption contact worker.

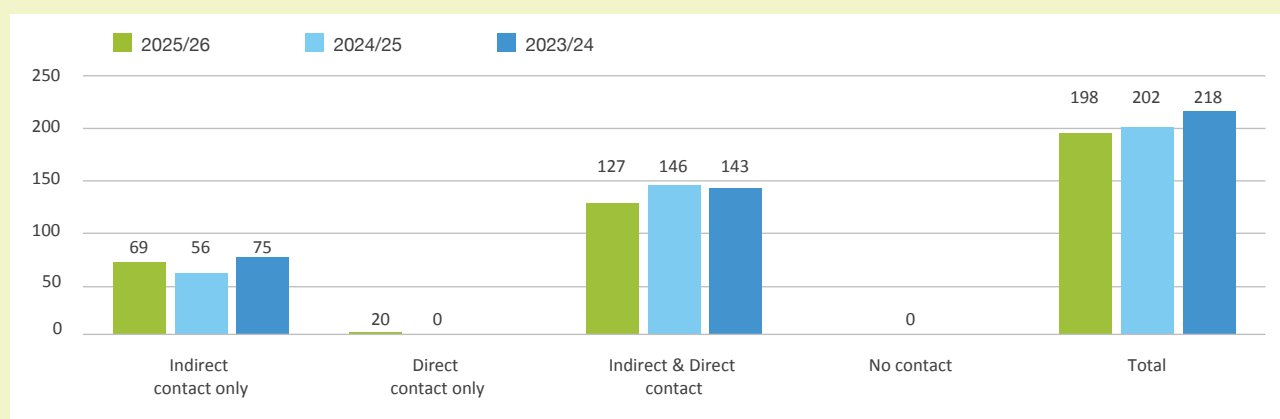
Initial work focused on supporting E (who was then 15) and their adopter to better understand their background, including therapeutically sharing information from their adoption records, which aimed to address gaps in their life story.

Letterbox contact was successfully reinstated and gradually progressed to the exchange of photos and gifts, which was later supported by a formal contact assessment to manage historical risks linked to the birth family.

Over the past year, this has developed into supported direct (face-to-face) contact, delivered jointly with a Young Person's Advisor. This steady, carefully managed approach has enabled the siblings to build warm, positive relationships, and they can now maintain contact independently.

Data in relation to this priority

Contact arrangements by number and type



All children placed for adoption during the year had a plan for contact arrangements. The majority (64%) had a plan for both direct and indirect contact, with 35% having indirect contact only.

How the Regions and VAAs are addressing this priority

There is a clear shift towards improving and modernising contact arrangements, with greater emphasis on early planning, direct contact, and improved support for both adoptive and birth families.

- AMWW is embedding the use of the NAS contact planning tool within family finding and decision-making processes, prioritising direct contact from the outset.
- VVC continues to promote contact at every stage of the placement journey despite resourcing challenges, alongside providing ongoing individual and group support for families.
- WBAS has established a dedicated post-adoption contact team, which is enabling more flexible arrangements, particularly for sibling contact, supported by early check-ins and virtual consultations.
- NWAS reports that the integration of Good Practice guidance is helping adopters to be more open to direct contact.
- SEWAS is seeing a shift in practice following delivery of modernisation training, with more considered approaches at matching and examples of supported video contact between children, adopters, and birth families.
- St David's continues to build peer and professional support through regular family events across Wales.
- Barnardo's is using more creative approaches, including birth family videos, to strengthen understanding and engagement around contact.

Practice Example (Barnardo's)

A family were keen to ensure their child received appropriate specialist intervention. The child's birth mother initially felt unable to attend a meeting, so the agency advocated for either a meeting with the maternal grandparents or, preferably, inviting them in a way that could support the birth mother to attend. Ultimately, the meeting went ahead with both the birth mother and maternal grandparents. Although it was challenging for all involved, it proved invaluable, with important information shared and a greater sense of understanding and empathy developed by the adoptive parents for the birth family's history.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY D

Better adoption records and access to information at any age

As part of the shift to a more modern adoption service in Wales, all relevant services recognise the importance of personal information and records for adopted people of all ages, and that improvements in their storage and access is a vital part of good practice.



What we achieved during 2025/26

During 2025/26, the NAS [Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Services](#) Subgroup continued to meet to strengthen national practice, improve consistency, and build the evidence base required to support future service development across Wales.

A key area of achievement has been the development of **national guidance and accessible resources** to support both practitioners and service users. The Subject Access Request (SAR) guidance has been comprehensively reviewed and updated to ensure it reflects current legislation, clarifies entitlement, and provides greater detail on adoption records. Alongside this, a young person-friendly leaflet has been developed to improve accessibility and understanding of rights and processes when accessing records. Together, these resources represent an important step towards more consistent, transparent and user-centred practice.

A Wales-wide **survey of Access to Adoption Information (AAI)** services was carried out, capturing data on waiting times, staffing levels and case volumes. Initial findings highlight increasing demand, particularly in post-commencement¹ work, alongside variation in regional capacity and the complexity of cases. This work has strengthened the ability to inform strategic planning and has been shared with Regional Adoption Managers to support future resource and funding discussions.

Work is underway to standardise **terminology and data collection** to enable more accurate comparison across regions. In addition, the development of a centralised contact list for agencies, archives and record holders will improve efficiency in accessing historical records and reduce delays, particularly in complex cases.

A major strand of work has focused on **strengthening the legal and practice framework for post-commencement cases** with a dedicated working group making significant progress in adapting and developing guidance produced in England by the Improving Adoption Services for Adults (IASA) project and aligning it to Welsh legislation. The guidance now incorporates Welsh practice and case studies, supporting a clearer and more consistent approach to complex post-18 work.

¹ [The Disclosure of Adoption Information \(Post-Commencement Adoptions\) Regulations 2005](#)

Access to Records Service (pre-1976 cases)

The Access to Records service delivered by St David's and Adoption UK provides an integrated, person-centred offer combining records access, intermediary support and therapeutic intervention. In 2025–26, St David's supported 21 people accessing their birth records and 29 people accessing intermediary support, with an average of around eight weeks from receipt of information to feedback being shared, significantly reducing earlier waiting times.

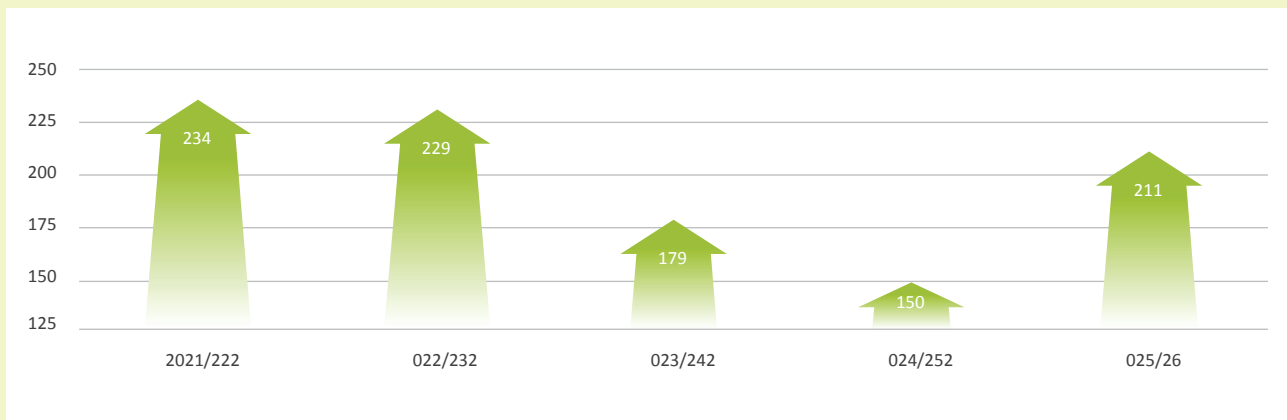
This practical support is complemented by Adoption UK's specialist therapy and peer support model, which received 14 referrals in the year and delivered up to 200 hours of therapy and 100 hours of peer support.

Overall, the partnership offers a holistic service that meets both the practical and emotional needs of adults accessing adoption records, with strong outcomes but some ongoing challenges in referral volumes and early-stage waiting times.



Data in relation to this priority

All Wales number of requests for access to birth records



The number of requests for access to birth records rose by 40% this year, with a total of 211 requests being made across Wales. This is a positive picture, following decline in previous years.

How the Regions are addressing this priority

There is a continued focus on strengthening access to records and intermediary services, alongside efforts to manage demand and reduce waiting times while improving the quality of support.

- AMWW has developed a structured approach using lead practitioners supported by trained administrators to manage searches, with waiting lists prioritised by need and supported through referrals to the Access to Records service.
- VVC has developed knowledge and expertise in this area and has continued to work to reduce waiting lists and adopt a needs-led approach.
- WBAS has a dynamic approach to access to records cases with consent and file requests being made immediately to reduce waiting times.
- NWAS has undertaken a service review and responded by increasing staffing capacity and developing future workforce expertise to strengthen delivery and reduce waiting lists.
- SEWAS continues to work in partnership with St David's to support access to birth records.

Example of Access to Records and Intermediary work spanning across different countries (NWAS)

NWAS supported an uncle seeking to trace his nephew, Michael, who had been adopted in the 1950s. The birth parents later married and moved to America, keeping the child's existence secret from their other children. After the birth parents died, the uncle approached NWAS, and despite complex challenges involving multiple agencies and religious organisations outside Wales, the team was able to locate the nephew. With the support of volunteer researchers and dedicated social work input, contact was carefully established, leading to a series of meetings with family members in America and ultimately a reunion in North Wales. Michael later captured his experience in his book, *A Boy Named Michael*, expressing deep gratitude to NWAS for helping him reconnect with his siblings and reclaim an important part of his identity.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY E

Maintaining the infrastructure to deliver services and sound governance

This has ensured the successful delivery of NAS and Foster Wales, ensuring continued investment in the infrastructure, and newly established governance arrangements.

What we achieved during 2025/26

The **National Joint Committee** that governs both NAS and Foster Wales met twice in 2025/26. Key issues discussed included scrutiny of indicative budgets and hosting costs, updates on audit and national financial arrangements, and assurance on adoption performance and planning. A review of the quoracy arrangements was also undertaken, which resulted in a Deed of Variation to the Joint Committee agreement.

Following its approval at the Joint Committee, the **Hosting Agreement** with Cardiff Council was signed by all 22 local authorities.

The **NAS Governance Board** met five times in 2025/26. Discussions focused on developing the new strategic plan within a context of financial constraint, rising demand and increasing complexity. Key issues included declining adopter recruitment, a growing gap between children and available adopters, and delays in the system impacting timescales. The Board emphasised the need for more targeted recruitment, stronger performance analysis and collaborative working, while continuing to improve adoption support, cross-sector provision (health and education), and the use of data, research and inspection findings to drive service improvement.

NAS Subgroups meet on a regular basis and are all chaired by a regional or VAA representative.

Other development work

NAS and Foster Wales commissioned a **Literature Review** to establish the shared motivations, barriers and public perceptions across adoption and fostering. The review identified some public misconceptions, increasing complexity and the impact of wider social and economic factors. The review noted a lack of up-to-date evidence on the potential pool of adopters and foster carers. It identified areas for strategic consideration, such as closer alignment in messaging and engagement between fostering and adoption, while maintaining clear distinctions between the two pathways. It was agreed that further research and wider stakeholder engagement are needed before any changes are implemented.

Work began on the development of an **interactive performance dashboard and reporting platform** for NAS. This has involved a review of all NAS performance measures, with a view to designing and developing the system to meet the needs of the service.



The Coram BAAF **Child Adoption Report (CAR B)** was updated, with a pilot running with six Welsh local authorities from July 2025. Early reports are that practitioners are finding the new format helpful.

NAS launched a new initiative to support children on their adoption journey by promoting greater understanding and empathy amongst primary school-age children. In partnership with a children's author and adoptive father, Samuel Langley-Swain, a bilingual illustrated book, **The Blanket Bears**, was distributed across Wales to help young children explore themes of belonging, identity and family. The book was distributed to every primary school and library across Wales, alongside a learning resource. The initiative aims to provide schools with a meaningful tool to encourage inclusive conversations, strengthen emotional literacy and trauma-informed practice, and ensure adopted and care-experienced children feel seen, understood and supported.

A national evaluation of 37 pre-order **adoption disruptions** between April 2022 and March 2025 identified recurring issues linked to children's complex needs, adopter preparedness, transitions and system factors. A key theme was the gap between adopters' expectations and the reality of parenting, with many feeling unprepared despite training, alongside challenges in applying therapeutic parenting and fully accessing support. Transitions and relationships (particularly with foster carers) were variable, and system delays and coordination issues affected stability. Initial recommendations focus on strengthening preparation, improving matching and pre-meet processes, and enhancing support and clarity for adopters and foster carers. A full report is due later in 2026.

Listening to our service users



The findings and recommendations from service user consultation continue to inform the priorities of NAS and these are reflected in the AdoptCymru2030 Strategic Plan.

This year's [Big Adoption Conversation](#) was held in October, bringing together members of the adoption community to explore the complex and interconnected needs of adopted children, particularly in relation to trauma, neurodivergence and attachment, and the challenges families face in accessing timely, coordinated support.

Key issues raised included delays in health assessments, fragmented services, gaps in professional understanding and barriers within education systems, often requiring parents to advocate strongly for support. Transitions across the life course were identified as particularly challenging.

Overall, discussions emphasised the need for earlier intervention, better information sharing and a more coordinated, trauma-informed approach across health, education and adoption services. Image 28

As reported in the Mid-Year Report, this year's [Adoption Barometer](#) highlighted strong satisfaction among new adopters but increasing challenges for established families, with 39% reporting severe strain. While support was effective when accessed, issues remain around consistency and timeliness, particularly in education and mental health services.

Complaints

The Regions reported 16 complaints in 2025/26. These complaints continue to provide valuable insight into areas of practice requiring improvement and include the following:

- Issues relating to communication, with some adopters and families reporting unclear/inconsistent messaging, delays in follow-up, and a perceived lack of compassion for one enquirer in key interactions. In response, services have taken steps to strengthen communication processes, including assigning dedicated points of contact and reinforcing expectations around professional practice.
- The management of contact arrangements, particularly letterbox contact, including delays or breaches of agreed arrangements, in some cases leading to significant emotional impact on birth family members and adoptive families. These cases have reinforced the importance of clear, formalised agreements at the point of placement, alongside robust systems to monitor and maintain contact.
- Linked to post-adoption support, some families reported difficulties in accessing timely or appropriate services. While a number of these cases were resolved through the provision of additional support, they highlight the need for more proactive planning and clearer communication around available support and entitlements.
- Concerns relating to assessment, approval, and matching processes were also raised, including dissatisfaction with assessment outcomes, the content and use of Prospective Adopter Reports, and the handling of linking and matching decisions. Learning from these complaints has focused on improving transparency, ensuring adopters are appropriately prepared and supported throughout the process, and on strengthening joint working between adoption and children's services teams.

Stakeholder collaborations

This year, Care Inspectorate Wales carried out a programme of [regional inspections](#) across Wales. These inspections represent the first comprehensive adoption inspections for several years and reflect a significant programme of work across the service. A national overview report is due later in 2026, which will draw together the learning and themes. The Regions are progressing work to respond to inspection findings through their local action plans.

NAS has maintained close engagement with the **Welsh Government**, particularly in relation to funding and policy development.

- Meetings to secure more sustainable funding arrangements proved to be fruitful, with Welsh Government securing Ministerial approval for a two-year grant period from April 2026 to March 2028.
- Alongside funding discussions, NAS has actively contributed to a range of consultations and policy developments, including proposed changes to fostering, adoption and special guardianship regulations, corporate parenting proposals, and legislation linked to the [Not for Profit](#) policy.
- Welsh Government has engaged NAS in early discussions on extending adoption record retention from 75 to 100 years, and on minor amendments to adoption regulations.
- Strategic partnership working continues to be a key feature of the relationship, with NAS contributing to Welsh Government's longer-term planning for children's services through national workshops and ongoing involvement in expert groups. This includes work on special guardianship, corporate parenting and the development of the National Practice Framework.

- Further meetings have been held to consider the recommendations of the Public Law Working Group report (PLWG). Regions and VAAs were consulted on the proposed actions, and these were mapped to progress key recommendations and future planning within the new strategic plan.
- Members of the NAS Central Team and AUK continued to meet regularly with Welsh Government Education Department officials to discuss proposals to address issues relating to adopted learners. This includes the opportunity to better support adopted children in accessing appropriate educational provision, while also strengthening how their needs are recognised within education policy. This has focused particularly on improved data, more targeted funding approaches, and greater awareness across schools. Work is progressing on new training for professionals and continued advocacy to improve visibility and outcomes for adopted learners.

Links with **Health** and Regional Partnership Board contacts across Wales have been made to explore some of the barriers adopted children can experience when accessing CAMHS and neurodevelopmental services. Work is underway to develop clearer pathways, promote stronger collaboration, and provide consistent specialist input.

The NAS Central Team continued to meet with the five **Regional Adoption Managers** and the three **VAA** representatives monthly throughout the year, as well as attending the five Regional Partnership Boards and the VAA equivalent meetings.



Annual finance update

The core funding for the national functions for the National Adoption Service is provided from a top slice of the Revenue Support Grant (made available through the WLGA).

The top slice allocation for 2025/26 was £524k, making up 14% of the total national budget of £3,736,195. The remainder of the national budget was made up of Welsh Government grant aid to support adoption services. A significant proportion of the national budget is passported to regions and VAAs.

The income sources and expenditure for 2025/26 are detailed in the table below. The Central costs, funded via the WLGA, are supplemented by grant funding to cover shared posts and additional costs such as hosting charges for services provided by the host authority, Cardiff Council. The underspend will be carried forward as reserves.

INCOME SOURCE	ALLOCATION 2025/26	TOTAL SPEND 2025/26	PURPOSE
Revenue Support Grant (WLGA Top-Slice)	£524,528	£745,734	National Co-ordination costs
Grant funding (Foster Wales and NAS grants co-ordination)	£244,957		
Welsh Government Grant (Adoption Support)	£2,300,000	£2,300,000	Passported to the Regions and to VAAs for the delivery of adoption support services
Welsh Government Grant (Adopt Cymru and Beyond)	£689,577	£689,577	National PR and Marketing, with the rest being used to procure the services of the VAAs and to cover some central costs relating to the plan.
Welsh Government Grant (Adoption Register for Wales)	£222,090	£222,090	Management of the Adoption Register for Wales on behalf of the Welsh Government

The final report of the **National Finance Review**, commissioned by the NAS Governance Board, was completed in May. This set out a series of recommendations that continue to be implemented, including the establishment of a Finance Support Group, which has developed a common reporting framework to report on the national spend on adoption services and to consider working on other financial issues.

Closing comments

Suzanne Griffiths MBE, Former Director of the National Adoption Service

It is a great pleasure to contribute to this 11th Annual Report of the National Adoption Service for Wales.

It has been an absolute honour and privilege to serve as the first Director of NAS. When I took up the post, NAS was quite literally a concept set out in a discussion paper. Since then, the adoption sector across Wales has come together to transform that vision into the contemporary, innovative and responsive collaborative service we see today. It is a service that looks very different from the one described in the Welsh Government inquiry of 2011 that led to its creation.

The investment and commitment of partners across Wales have enabled us to expand and strengthen adoption services significantly. More support is now available to families, adoption support has become an established part of the service offer, and adoption no longer automatically means a complete severing of links with a child's birth family. Support for adopted adults and birth families has also continued to develop and improve. NAS is well advanced on its journey to modernise adoption, driven by the strength of partnership working and by listening to the experiences and voices of adopted children and young people, adopters, and birth families.

However, there is no room for complacency. With some irony, I recognise that some of the challenges we face today are the same as those we faced at the beginning. Some children, particularly those in sibling groups or with additional needs, are still waiting too long for permanent families. We must continue to recruit more adopters and further develop sustainable, high-quality support for adopted children and young people, their families, and everyone whose lives are touched by adoption. At the same time, the environment in which adoption services operate is becoming increasingly complex and, at times, challenging. The work of strengthening and enhancing NAS therefore continues, ensuring Wales has an adoption service of which it can be proud and one that responds to the lifelong implications of adoption.

By the time this report is published, I will be a couple of months into retirement and my successor will be taking up the role. I wish them every success as they lead NAS into its next phase of development and continue this important work.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks and admiration to our adoptive families, foster carers and staff for their unwavering commitment to achieving the very best outcomes for some of our most vulnerable children. My gratitude also extends to colleagues past and present, particularly those within the NAS Central Team and the Adoption Register for Wales, whose dedication, support and hard work have been invaluable throughout my time as Director.





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Cenedlaethol

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