



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service

Achieving More Together / Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

# Mid-Year Review 2018/19



Mabwysiadu  
Cenedlaethol Cymru  
Adoption  
Mid & West Wales



North Wales  
Gwasanaeth  
Mabwysiadu  
Adoption Service  
Gogledd Cymru



South East Wales Adoption Service  
Achieving More Together  
Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu De-ddwyrain Cymru  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd!



Credwch  
mewn plan  
Believe in  
children

Barnardo's  
Cymru



Cymdeithas Part Ddeu Sant  
St David's Children Society



Western Bay  
ADOPTION SERVICE  
GWASANAETH MABWYSIA  
Bae'r Gogledd



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



adoptionuk  
or gyfer pob teulu sy'n mabwysiadu  
for every adoptive family



after  
adoption



AFA CYMRI  
association for fostering and adopt  
cymdeithas ar gyfer maethu a mabwys

## Introduction and Overview

This mid-year review is for Welsh Ministers as well as people who use our services and the public. It is written with the input of the local government adoption regions, voluntary adoption agencies, other stakeholders and services in Wales.

This report provides an update on our work and priorities for 2018-19.

The National Adoption Service (NAS) continues to focus on achieving improvement within a challenging context of increasing demand, utilising its resources effectively, changing expectations, and modernising systems and processes.

What is not changing is that children need families, to belong, to be nurtured and to be loved – no more so than for children who have experienced early childhood adversity and have a plan for adoption.

Adoption has lifelong implications for all those it touches; recognising this provides a new 'mind-set' for services and different challenges in terms of how we attract prospective adopters, place children and provide adoption support in the future. It also provides challenges to the legal and policy context, resourcing and practice.

NAS firmly believes that adoption continues to provide good outcomes for children and that there needs to be continued discussion about the role adoption plays in permanency planning in Wales, that it is planned for, properly resourced and supported as well as being informed by research and evidence from people who use the service. We need to continue to challenge ourselves and our stakeholders to improve services so they are fit for the 21st century.

This informs the work we have been doing and the plans for the future as we aim for dynamic and flexible recruitment and adoption support services.



*Geraint Hyskin*

Governance Board  
Chair



*Philip T. Hobqson*

Independent Chair of  
Advisory Group



*Suzanne Efnthos*

Director

## Priority 1: Placing Children Effectively

### *Adopter Recruitment and Placing Children*

The challenge of recruiting sufficient adopters in Wales continues. This is within a context where there are ongoing increases in the numbers of children identified by local authorities as requiring an adoption placement and where the level of Placement Orders being granted by Welsh Courts is rising.

Our core activity data shows that demand for placements as well as activity in matching, placing children and Adoption Orders being granted are all increasing this year:

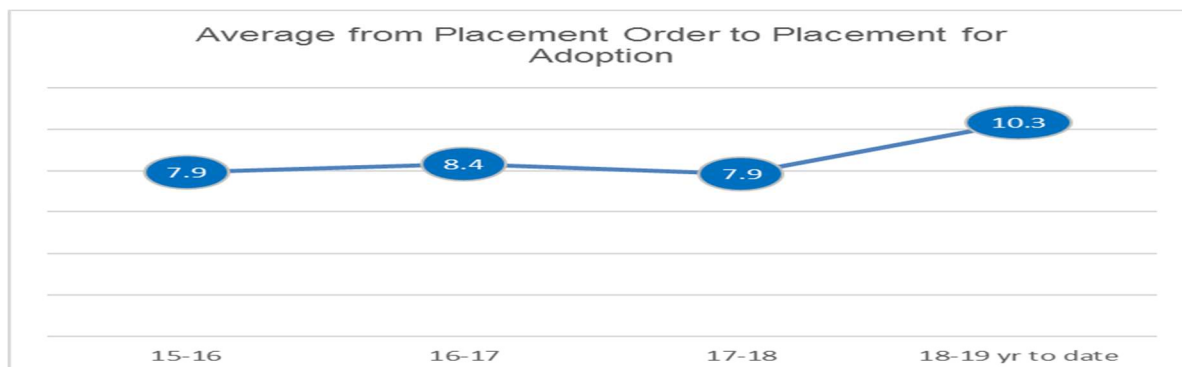
- 381 children have been referred to regional adoption services, a 1% increase on last year;
- 215 new 'should be placed for adoption' decisions were made by local authorities, a 17% increase on last year;
- 195 Placement Orders were granted by Welsh courts; based on current figures we project a 9% increase this year;
- 161 children have been placed with their adoptive family, 4% more than mid last year;
- A matching decision has been made for a further 167 children, 6% more than mid last year;
- 147 Adoption Orders were granted by the courts, marginally more than mid last year.

There are plans in place for services to approve more adopters but recruitment goals are not likely to be achieved this year and a shortfall will remain in the short to medium term. The latest projections show that there is likely to be a gap of circa 130 adoptive homes this year. The highlights in relation to recruitment so far this year are that:

- Improved marketing continues to increase enquiries, by a further 15% this year;
- A similar number of adopters have been approved as at this stage last year (102); the increase in approvals commenced last year means that services are likely to approve more adopters during this year than last year;
- Adopter approvals are taking on average 9 months after the initial enquiry, against a benchmark of 8 months, but performance between formal application and approval is good at 6.3 months which is in line with statutory guidance.
- The level of new assessments started so far this year is however lower which has implications for adopter approvals next year.

The number of children placed with their adoptive family so far this year is 161; services consistently continue to place between 70 and 80 children each quarter.

The **average timescale** for children being placed for adoption had been decreasing over time but this has begun to reverse and at mid-year had risen to an average of 10.3 months from Placement Order to placement.



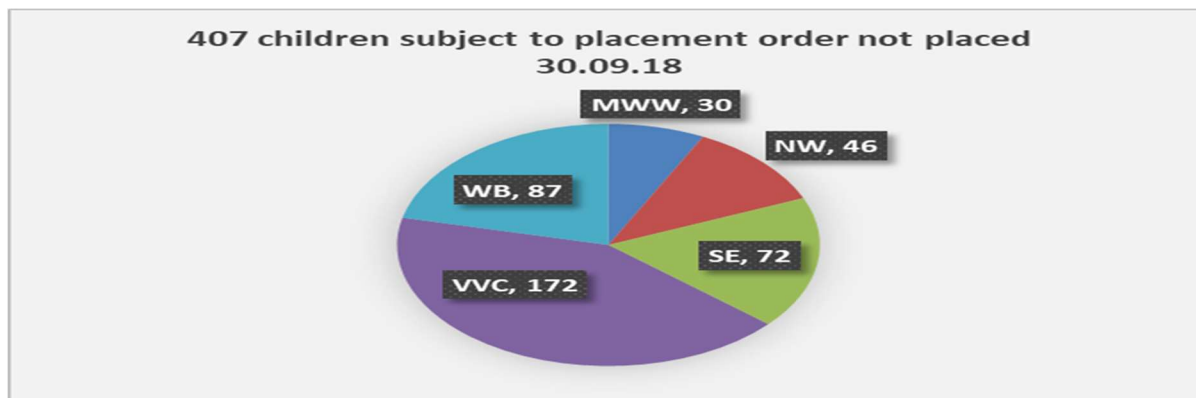
The children who take longer to be placed inevitably influence the average timeframe to placement; services are aiming for a benchmark of 6 months from Placement Order to placement. The significant increase in timeliness this year is, however, mainly due to 2 children in one region whose Placement Orders had been made 6+ years ago and a child in another who had waited more than 4 years for placement. The impact on timeframes is moderated by the very positive fact that regions have been successful in placing more complex children.

More generally the following characterises situations where placements take longer:

- Complex children, particularly those with significant health needs, older children and sibling groups;
- Foster carer assessments to adopt the child they had been caring for commencing late in the process;
- Prolonged court proceedings, including appeals by birth parents.

It is also likely that having fewer adopters available is having an impact on timeframes.

The challenge of rising numbers of children with an adoption plan and fewer available adopters however means the number of children waiting is currently rising; at mid-year there were 407 children waiting although a proportion of these have links or matches identified and awaiting approval. The graph below shows this by region.



Key: MWW – Mid & West Wales; NW – North Wales; SE – South East Wales; VVC – Vale, Valleys and Cardiff; WB – Western Bay.



## *Are we achieving our plans to place children effectively?*

### *Marketing and Public Relations*

## **COWSHED**

The Welsh Government Development Grant has enabled National Adoption Service to commission 'Cowshed Communication' to provide media and marketing support to the service, working directly with us at national and regional level as well as supporting our partners. This has resulted in an improved integrated approach to marketing and PR across the National Adoption Service.

Cowshed have directly supported SEWAS, VVC and Western Bay regions during 2017/18 to develop their regional marketing plans; the other two regions have been supported to work with their existing partners. At regional level Cowshed are helping regions to understand in more detail what activities and budgets are needed to realise the national marketing plans across Wales. Cowshed are also helping us to work with the Adopter Champions we recruited last year to promote the positives about adoption.

Cowshed were tasked with delivering a programme of marketing and promotional activities for **National Adoption Week 2018**. An integrated campaign was delivered including a media launch, social media activity, digital advertising and a three-week, pan-Wales radio advertising campaign on Global Radio to raise awareness and inspire more people to consider adoption.

We agreed with partners that this was the best time to formally launch the new Adopting Together scheme. Together with St David's Children Society, a news story was developed about the project and Huw Irranca-Davies, former Minister for Children and Social Care, supported this and also met with adopters from the scheme.

We are very appreciative of the role that the NAS Policy and Practice Officer had in leading this work, as well as numerous other elements of NAS' development work. Having been in post since NAS was set up in 2014 she has returned to an operational role within an adoption agency. We'd like to thank her for her significant contribution to the NAS over the last four years and wish her luck in her new role.

### *Adopting Together*



This is a collaborative, partnership project supported by the National Adoption Service and delivered by Voluntary Adoption Agencies in Wales. Led by St David's Children Society it brings together theoretical knowledge and UK wide best practice into one distinct model to secure an adoptive home for children who wait the longest for a family and provide guaranteed support.

The NAS regions have commenced referrals to the project; 10 children were linked at the first profiling event and more are planned.

The Adopting Together scheme is being evaluated by the Cardiff University School of Psychology and has been nominated for a GO Wales Award in the Social and Community Benefit in procurement award category as well as being shortlisted for an Institute for Collaborative Working (ICW) award where the project is one of three in the category of 'Innovation'.

*Adoption Register for Wales*



We are also improving how we match children to prospective adopters by making significant changes to the operation of the Adoption Register in Wales. The role of the Register is to provide pan Wales linking and matching services for Welsh adoption agencies with links to the Registers in other parts of the UK for matches where that is appropriate.



A new partner, **Link Maker** has won the contract to provide a new modern, bi-lingual and on-line linking service which will start operating in Spring 2019.

The Welsh Government fully funds the Adoption Register in Wales and since 2015 the Register and its associated functions have been provided through the National Adoption Service for Wales. This new service will be a further step in the Welsh Government Strategy to 'Improve Outcomes for Children' across Wales and will help to deliver the National Adoption Service priority to match and place children effectively.

The Register will be renamed the **Adoption Register for Wales (ARW)** but this is more than just a name change; the new Register will be more user friendly and efficient and will also provide managed access for approved adopters. It will also allow the development of a 'keeping in touch' system for approved adopters as part of improved adoption support arrangements. Look out for our regular updates on the implementation project on [www.adoptcymru.com/news-and-publications](http://www.adoptcymru.com/news-and-publications)

Alongside the development project the Register team have continued to link and match children; the links made at the successful Adoption Activity Day in March 2018 have been progressed, a successful adoption Exchange day was held in July 2018 and regular practitioner meetings have continued to support the matching of those children who cannot be placed within regions.

So far this year the register has facilitated the match of 25 children.

We have also seen a change in the Wales Adoption Register manager role. The manager, who had been in post since the Welsh Register was set up by BAAF Cymru in 2014, moved back into operational practice. We'd like to thank her for her significant contribution to the Register and NAS over the last four years and wish her

luck in her new role. We have made interim arrangements to cover the post and will look to fill it in the New Year.

### *Possible amendments to The Adoption Agencies (Wales) Regulations 2005*

Back in 2015 we asked the Welsh Government to consider implementing a simplified, streamlined and staged approach to the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters.

During this year as part of its ongoing programme to reform and consolidate social care law, the Welsh Government is consulting on changes to the adopter approval process alongside some other adoption changes in order to improve the legislative framework.

The National Adoption Service welcomes this Welsh Government consultation on the possibility of:

- introducing a two-stage process for the assessment and approval of prospective adopters;
- reducing the time in which adoption agencies must refer details of prospective adopters and of children to be placed for adoption to the Adoption Register for Wales;
- enabling 'authorised officers' to witness the consent of a parent or guardian to Placement or Adoption Orders, where the parent or guardian lives outside of England and Wales;
- improving the operation of the Independent Review Mechanism in respect of adoption.

Through our partnership with AfA Cymru and our Policy and Best Practice Subgroup NAS will be responding positively to this consultation which contains other changes that we have also suggested would improve services.

NAS has also responded to a Welsh Government consultation on the regulations to bring adoption services into the new arrangements for the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016.

It is disappointing that it was not possible to find a legislative opportunity to improve the legal basis for entitlement to adoption support but NAS will continue to advocate that these changes are made..

### *Keeping the 'Interagency Fee' in line with the rest of the UK*

Following an announcement that it was to increase in England, NAS led a review of this fee which is paid when an adoptive placement is secured and purchased from another adoption agency. This was the first increase for six years and created an arrangement to link the fee to Consumer Prices Index incl. housing costs (CPIH) to ensure it kept pace with relevant costs in the future.

The review concluded that Welsh Agencies would continue to operate within this framework thus ensuring that the widest choice of placements continues to be available for Welsh children. We were however pleased to agree to the offer from the



Welsh based Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Barnardo's and St David's, to pause the increase for their placements until the 1st October 2018 and delay the requirement for the full amount to be paid upfront until April 2020.

## Priority 2: Continuing to Improve Adoption Support

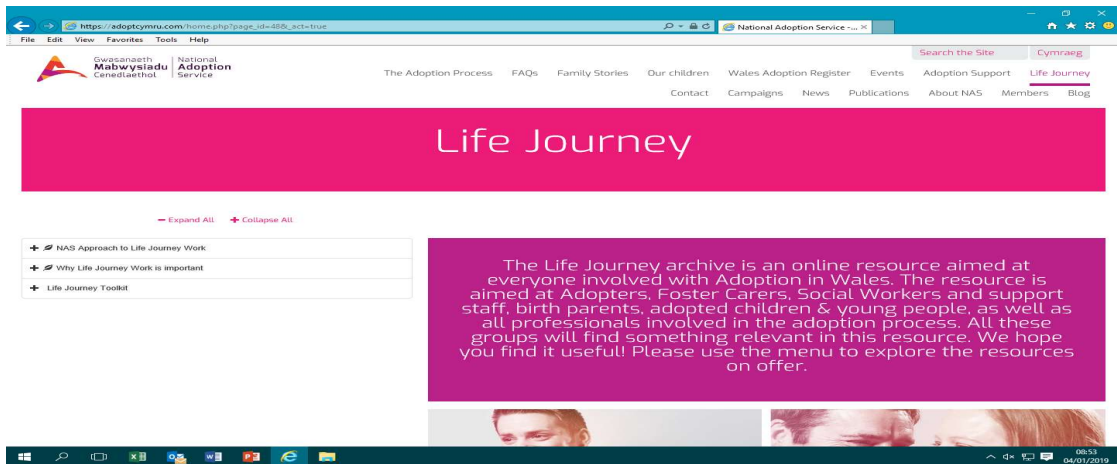
### *NAS Adoption Support Framework*

The investment achieved in 17/18 has enabled us to appoint an Adoption Support Framework Development Manager to implement the NAS Adoption Support Framework. Since taking up post in July 2018, she has worked with all regional and voluntary adoption agencies across Wales to review progress and reshape priorities.

Working with the NAS Adoption Support Sub Group a revised NAS implementation plan for adoption support, with clear and tangible actions, is being developed.

Alongside this we have continued to improve services by

- Finalising through consultation and engagement the 12 modules which will form our post approval training package to be launched later this year. Developed in conjunction with Afa Cymru and Adoption UK, they cover the following topics and build on the preparation training that all adopters undertake.
  - ✓ Child development
  - ✓ Attachment and Trauma
  - ✓ Contact
  - ✓ Parenting Teenagers
  - ✓ Support for extended family and friends
  - ✓ Effects of alcohol and drugs
  - ✓ Transitions
  - ✓ Life journey materials
  - ✓ Understanding and dealing with challenging behaviours
  - ✓ Child to parent violence
  - ✓ The Legal Process
  - ✓ Blocked care
  
- We've agreed a contract, also with Afa Cymru and Adoption UK, to work with existing trainers to refresh preparation training modules. It is planned that this will also include a guide for prospective adopters to inform them of the training offer and expectations.
  
- We've continued to implement and develop the new framework for Life Journey materials. We've put the guidance and existing toolkits on the NAS website <https://adoptcymru.com/life-journey> as well as working on more toolkits for children and young people, foster carers and birth parents.



Year to date performance in life journey materials being available by the 2<sup>nd</sup> adoption review is 53%. This is a little lower than last year and attributable by regions to the increased quality assurance that is possible through the investment that is being made. Across Wales this ranges from 94% in Mid and West Wales to 44% in South East Wales.

Welsh Government grant aid will fund a conference to formally launch the framework in January 2019.

- Adoption UK has continued to deliver their Adoption Support Wales – Getting it Right for Every Child programme. The scheme covers:
  - ✓ training on attachment and adoption issues to educationalists;
  - ✓ therapeutic parenting courses;
  - ✓ 12 support groups around Wales where adopters can meet and support each other;
  - ✓ responding to increased callers to the helpline;
  - ✓ the launch of a buddy scheme for new adopters as part of the Adopting Together project;
  - ✓ increasing the number of adopters responding to online consultation surveys as well as the number of children and young people involved in consultation.

We were pleased that the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams, wrote to all schools encouraging them to co-operate in supporting adopted children within education services which complemented the work Adoption UK has been leading.

- We supported the Welsh Government to set up a cross sector scoping workshop to consider how contact between siblings and letterbox contact could be improved. In addition we have commissioned consultation with adopters and adopted children and young people focusing on identifying the contact improvements that they would like to see.

## Consultation and engagement with adopters and adopted children and young people

- We have continued to commission Adoption UK and After Adoption to undertake consultation with adopters and adopted children and young people respectively.
  - ✓ Through 'Adopter Voice' adopters views on what would work better in sibling contact as well as whether they are seeing improvements in Life Journey, CAMHS, Education and Post Adoption Support generally will be sought.
  - ✓ Through Talk Adoption we are asking children and young people about their views on contact with siblings
- We have also produced feedback leaflets for 'Adopter Voice' and 'Talk Adoption' which update on the action taken in relation to views expressed to date.

**Thank you for telling us what you think through 'Adopter Voice'.**

We started this scheme so we had an ongoing way of keeping in touch with what matters to adopters. Your feedback is being reported to Adoption teams/services and their management boards across Wales as well as to the National Adoption Service Advisory Group and Governance Board.

We will continue to do other things like hold groups and events as well as involving you in improving the services. This update is to let you know what is happening about the things raised through Adopter Voice in 2017/18.

**Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Cenedlaethol | National Adoption Service**  
Achieving More Together / Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

### Listening to you

Phil Hughes, Sioned Griffiths, Cllwr Gwyn Iwan

What you said	What we're doing
<p><b>RECRUITMENT</b> is generally quick and easy but in a small number of cases the following was noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor communication particularly about timescales</li> <li>• Changes of social workers</li> <li>• Documents not being properly prepared</li> </ul>	<p>We encourage adoption teams to use the best practice model of agreeing a contract with adopters at the start of an assessment so everyone is clear about timescales etc.</p> <p>We've been lobbying the Welsh Government to introduce a two stage process for recruitment and assessment. This is due out for consultation and, if agreed, will clarify expectations and timescales.</p> <p>We've reported back to adoption teams the impact that poorly prepared documentation can have and asked them to look at this.</p> <p>Adoption teams are aware of the impact that changes of staff has, they are committed to minimizing this where they can.</p>
<p><b>PREPARATION TRAINING</b> is generally OK and effective as well as being a good opportunity to meet other adopters. Some suggestions were made namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the content of preparation training</li> </ul>	<p>We plan to review the pre-approval preparation training. This year we will take your comments into account and involve you in this.</p>
<p><b>MATCHING AND PLACEMENT</b> was reported to be well managed although the following were highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It sometimes feels a bit 'transactional' with the emotional side neglected</li> <li>• Sometimes the detailed planning doesn't go well</li> </ul>	<p>We focused on transitions for children in our last staff conference promoting best practice.</p> <p>We plan to share the good practice on transition highlighted by one of our regions and the Adopting Together scheme.</p>
<p><b>POST-ADOPTION TRAINING AND SUPPORT</b> was thought to be poor in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support falling away</li> <li>• Poor post-placement courses held at inconvenient times</li> <li>• Inconsistent financial support</li> <li>• Quality, availability and evaluation of therapy</li> </ul>	<p>We've developed a framework to improve adoption support and are changing things bit by bit. Adoption services are providing more adoption support than they used to.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All new adopters get a 1 year membership of Adoption UK free if they want it</li> <li>• We've made more information and advice available, including support groups</li> <li>• Some adoption team staff are now trained in therapeutic interventions</li> <li>• Our website now has information about adoption support on it</li> <li>• In most parts of Wales the regional adoption service is now the place to get help</li> </ul> <p>Adoption UK have launched their First 1,000 Days project to support families through the early days of their adoption journey.</p> <p>We've introduced an All Wales Policy for Financial Allowances. It has to comply with the law which allows for local discretion but things should start to become more standardised.</p> <p>We've developed a post-approval training programme, with more detailed information and courses. We are planning to bring this into use this year.</p> <p>We recognise there's lots more to do and we have an ongoing plan that includes trying to change the legal framework and securing more resources.</p>

**We'll continue to listen to what you tell us**  
Thank you for helping us to understand your views **029 2087 3927**

**Thank you for telling us what is important to you.**

**Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Cenedlaethol | National Adoption Service**  
Achieving More Together / Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

### Listening to you

**We thought it would be a good idea to let you know what the National Adoption Service has done about it over the last four years.**

**Services and Support - More support for adopted young people**

Adoption services are providing more adoption support than they used to.

Our website now has information on it.

We are working with you to add useful information to your newsletter.

We've developed a framework to improve adoption support and are changing things bit by bit.

**Life Story Work - Children to get their life story and to know about their past and adoption**

We now check if this is being done and tell people in our reports - it's getting better.

We've had a project and put in place a better way of doing it.

Children and young people from Talk Adoption helped us with this telling us what it should include and producing a video which is being used to train people.

Welsh Government gave extra money to ensure that this is in place for children being adopted now.

<https://www.adoptcymru.com/publications>

## Priority 3: Forward Thinking

The National Adoption Service was created to improve services for all those affected by adoption in Wales. However, needs and challenges faced by children presenting for adoption are changing rapidly and there is an ongoing need to respond more consistently and effectively particularly in the areas of recruitment of adopters and ongoing support.

We also want to more generally modernise the service to make the adoption experience better for children, young people, their adopters and others affected by adoption. Consequently NAS needs to grow and develop.

### *Looking ahead to investment opportunities*

We have been

- Working closely with Adoption UK as they develop a proposal for a UK wide programme to deliver Therapeutic, Education and Support Services in Adoption (TESSA).
- Building a business case for investment to present to the Welsh Government following the NAS meeting with the Minister in July.

### *Review of National Adoption Service Arrangements*

The review of the governance, management and operational arrangements of NAS is now moving into phase three. To date it has recognised

- ✓ the extensive efforts to establish NAS regionally and nationally;
- ✓ the commitment to making the arrangements work;
- ✓ the establishment of a nation-wide service which has achieved improvements and shows the potential for securing significant further benefits, if some key changes can be made.

Therefore, work is currently ongoing to develop proposals for changes to NAS which will build on its success to date by:

- Leaner national and regional governance arrangements by merging the meeting arrangements for the National Governance Board and its Advisory Group, improving links with regional management boards, reviewing delivery arrangements so the NAS / Joint Governance Board has improved oversight;
- Developing a whole service resourcing model;
- Strengthening central team role, confirming the long term host organisation for the central team with memoranda of understanding in place where needed;
- Strengthening relationships with the wider regional children's services agenda and planning arrangements.

### *Legal and Policy Context*

NAS continues to make a contribution to the Ministerial Advisory Group – Improving Outcomes for Children attending meetings and contributing to each of the work plan priorities. The Welsh Government / Institute of Public Care ‘Analysis of outcomes for children and young people 4 to 5 years after a final Care Order’ will help inform NAS activity; they resonate with issues we are aware of and which are informing our development work.

NAS has contributed to moving forward the ‘Mind over Matter’ report of the CAMHS enquiry. This includes strategic work with Welsh Government and advocating for investment in models such as the SEWAS psychology service and ‘Adopting Together’.

NAS also continues to work with Welsh Government Education colleagues, Adoption UK and ADEW to improve how adopted children are supported within education.

### *Performance Measurement System*

The contract for the current NAS performance management system will expire in June 2019. As such the service’s performance management needs are being reviewed and options are being developed.

NAS continues to work with the Welsh Community Care Information Service. (WCCIS). The processes for the adoption modules have been agreed; funding is required for the next stage for which a bid has been submitted to the National Informatics for Social Care (NISC) Board for consideration.

### *Budget*

We submitted a successful business case to Welsh Government for a £90k development grant for 2018-19. The priorities for expenditure are

- ✓ Implementing the post approval training / support framework for adopters
- ✓ Reviewing and updating pre-approval training for prospective adopters
- ✓ A conference/formal launch of life journey work framework
- ✓ Development of an adoption awareness raising toolkit for primary health and CAMHS
- ✓ Expert Marketing and PR Support to NAS
- ✓ National Adoption Week including an all Wales Radio Campaign
- ✓ Research into enquiries from prospective adopters that don’t progress to applications.

### *Learning from significant cases*

August saw the publication of a review into the circumstances leading to the tragic death of Elsie Scully-Hicks at the hands of her adoptive father. This caused many professionals to reflect on their approach to safeguarding, particularly for children in settled placements and where the state has already intervened.

In the aftermath NAS stated that it was important that adopters and professionals understood the need for professional vigilance and curiosity balanced by a focus on the child's welfare and providing support and guidance.

NAS supported the regional Safeguarding Children Board in publishing the review and continues to work with them to ensure that where the wider learning needs to be shared and acted upon across Wales it can be.