



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service

**Achieving More Together /  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd**

**Annual  
Report  
2014 - 2015**



Western Bay  
ADOPTION SERVICE  
GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU  
Bae'r Gorrlewin

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



MABWYSIADU  
& MAETHU  
**BAAF**  
ADOPTION  
& FOSTERING



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



Mabwysiadu  
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru  
Adoption  
Mid & West Wales



**Credwch  
mewn plant  
Believe in  
children**  
**Barnardo's**  
Cymru



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



Gwasanaeth  
Mabwysiadu  
Gogledd Cymru | North Wales  
Adoption  
Service



Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant | St David's Children Society

# Message from the Independent Chair of the Advisory Group

I was delighted to be appointed as the first Independent Chair of the National Adoption Service Advisory Group in the autumn of 2014.

I am particularly pleased to be presenting the National Adoption Service's first annual report and to acknowledge the importance of the combined leadership of the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru, the Welsh Local Government Association and Welsh Government.

Our aim was to fundamentally change how adoption services are delivered in Wales. I would like to highlight some of our achievements towards that.

- All of the regional collaborations are working. This is a considerable achievement in a time of so much organisational and financial uncertainty.
- The National Advisory Service launch event was well supported by Ministers and attracted media attention to adoption and adoption services.
- The role of City of Cardiff Council in hosting the central parts of the service.
- Our very important relationship with the voluntary sector adoption services is growing and deepening.
- We have a strong partnership with Health, via the Designated Doctor service.
- We have a strong relationship with Cardiff University through CASCADE (Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre, School of Social Sciences) and the Wales Adoption

Study (School of Psychology). We look forward to learning about best practice from their research.

- We have begun to engage with adopters and adopted young people, to find out what matters to them and how they would like to work with us in the future.
- We have established links with important partners such as Education, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, the Children's Commissioner for Wales and The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service.
- We have a better system to collect information about how we are doing. This shows where we need to do better and where we have already improved.

I know we still have much to do. However, I am pleased to acknowledge that a good start has been made - as this report will demonstrate.

Philip T. Hodgson

**Phil Hodgson**

*Independent Chair of the National Adoption Service Advisory Group*

# Message from the Director of Operations

I felt enormously privileged to be appointed the first Director of Operations for the National Adoption Services for Wales last summer, and also a little daunted by the high expectations that went with it.

The success of the first year is testament to the huge amount of work undertaken by local authorities, the voluntary adoption agencies, Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru, Welsh Local Government Association, managers in the City of Cardiff Council and over the last few months the small central team of the National Adoption Service.

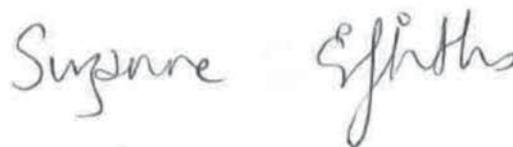
None of it could have happened without the commitment of the Task and Finish group that steered the development, the sterling work of the project manager, Jane Moore, who was employed by ADSSC to develop the national service and funding from the Welsh Government for the first year while arrangements were put in place for the service to be fully funded by local government in Wales.

The model for the National Adoption Service has a unique, collaborative way of organising and co-ordinating adoption service delivery. The model was developed by the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru, the Welsh Local Government Association and the voluntary adoption agencies in Wales. Welsh Government sees it as an important example of delivering services in a very different way, in line with the principles of the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014.

The creation of the National Adoption Service heralds the beginning of a very different relationship

between the statutory and voluntary sectors, a relationship that will need to be further developed into the regional and local arrangements over time.

This report records the work and achievements of the inaugural year of the National Adoption Service. I am very pleased with what has been achieved so far but this is, of course, just the beginning.....



**Suzanne Griffiths**

*Director of Operations*



## SECTION 1

# What is the National Adoption Service?

The National Adoption Service was launched in November 2014 during National Adoption Week. It was developed during the previous 18 months under the leadership of a Task and Finish Group (Appendix 1).

The Service is run in line with regulations in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015.

The National Adoption Service is an umbrella that brings together local, regional and national organisations and activities.

**Locally**, each local authority identifies and meets the needs of looked after children, including those where a decision has been made that the child should be placed for adoption.

**Regionally**, local authorities work together within five regional collaboratives. The collaborations have (or will have) strong links with voluntary adoption services, health and education. Section 2 includes information from and about the five regional collaborations.

**Nationally**, the local authorities collaborate to provide central services and voluntary adoption agencies collaborate as the Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership.

The local authorities collaborate to provide:

- a central team, hosted by City of Cardiff Council. This team is headed by a Director of Operations. The start-up costs for the team were funded by the Welsh Government (see Appendix 4).
- a National Adoption Service Advisory Group, including four sub-groups. Appendix 2 has a list of members.
- a National Adoption Service Governance Board. Appendix 3 has a list of members.

- links with national voluntary adoption agencies.
- managing the new Performance Measurement Framework.

Members of the Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership played a strategic role in the setting up of the National Adoption Service. They continue to play a key role in the National Adoption Service Advisory Group and its sub-groups, the National Adoption Service Governance Board and the regional collaboratives. The five members are:

- St David's Childrens Society
- Barnardo's
- BAAF Cymru
- Adoption UK
- After Adoption

Section 2 includes information from each of these voluntary organisations.

# Report on the 2014-2015 work plan

This first year saw the end of the work of the Task and Finish Group and the launch of the National Adoption Service itself.

This section reports on progress in these key areas:

1. Setting up the central operation for the service and getting it working
2. Developing the regional collaboratives
3. Collaborating with voluntary adoption agencies
4. Collaborating with the people who use adoption services
5. Collaborating with health services
6. Looking specifically at adoption support
7. Making sure there was a smooth hand-over from the Task and Finish Group to the National Adoption Service
8. Developing key aspects of running the National Adoption Service, such as:
  - Building good relationships between staff and managers
  - Getting into the media
  - Developing good relationships with key people outside the National Adoption Service

## Setting up the central operation for the service and getting it working

Our goals, which were achieved, were to:

- Appoint the host authority. City of Cardiff Council was appointed.
- Recruit Director of Operations and appoint a Policy Officer, Business and Performance Manager and Administrative Officer. All had started work by 5th January 2015.



- Establish the National Adoption Advisory Group, Governance Board and appoint a Chairperson. Mr Phil Hodgson MBE was appointed as Independent Chair of the Advisory Group. He took up his post fully in April, after a short period of temporary arrangements for the role. Both the Advisory Group and Governance Board are fully operational. The Advisory Group has four sub-groups to take forward the work.
- Commission the All Wales website. This was 'live' in time for November's launch. It includes video and digital real life stories from adopters and professionals. The Task and Finish Group agreed a brand, logo and strap line. In time, they will be used regionally and locally as well as nationally.

## Developing the regional collaboratives

We needed to:

- Make sure the regional collaboratives were working by October 2014. All the regional collaboratives were at least partly working by October 2014 thanks to the hard work of many, particularly the Heads of Service from the five regional lead authorities chaired by the Association of Directors of Social Services Lead

Director for Adoption Services. Four regional collaboratives were fully working by 31st March 2015.

- Make sure that children and adults who use adoption services have similar experiences across the regions, and, as far as possible, services are run in similar ways. The five Senior Adoption Managers meet every other month to develop ways of working that can be used in all the regions.

## Collaborating with voluntary adoption agencies

Voluntary adoption agencies have played a strategic role in setting up the National Adoption Service and continue to play a strategic role in how it is run.

There are, were or will be representatives on:

- the Task and Finish Group
- Advisory Group and its four sub-groups
- Governance Board
- the interview panels for choosing the Host Authority, the Director of Operations, other staff in the central team and the Independent Chairperson of the Advisory Group
- the management committees of all five regional collaboratives

Representatives were also involved in:

- commissioning the All Wales website
- creating the brand
- the media strategy
- organising the launch event

The Director of Operations met with five representatives of voluntary adoption agencies before taking up her post, and has continued to do so.

## Collaborating with the people who use adoption services

Section 3 has details about the work we commissioned to consult adopters and adopted children and young people, and what we learned about their priorities and how they would like to be involved in our work in the future.

We also found out about the current activities across Wales for listening to, talking with and working with people who use adoption services.

Based on this work, we will be making recommendations for the future, including how birth parents could have a say in the work of the National Adoption Service.

## Collaborating with health services

Carolyn Sampeys, our Designated Doctor representative, has led this work. A number of workshops have been held to:

- find out about health services for looked after children and adopted children;
- develop and test 'standards' for the role of the medical advisor with adoptive parents;
- develop a plan for how adoption services and medical advisors will work together when they are dealing with adopters, children and matching children with adopters
- create a peer group and peer review process for medical advisors

## Looking specifically at adoption support

We held a workshop on 7th July 2014. As a result, a framework has been agreed for providing adoption support services. The Adoption Support Services sub-group of the Advisory Group will take a lead role in taking this work forward.

## A smooth hand-over

The Director of Operations and Project Manager (working for the Task and Finish Group) agreed a transition plan. The plan was approved by the Association of Directors of Social Services and the Welsh Local Government Association.

Four sub-groups were set up as part of the Advisory Group to make sure the hand-over was smooth and that work keeps progressing. The sub-groups are led by the Policy and Practice Officer and the Business and Performance Manager from the central team.

The sub-groups are chaired by members of the Advisory Group. The four sub groups are:

- Adoption Support Services
- Media and Marketing
- Common Policies and Good Practice
- Performance Management

## Developing key aspects of running the National Adoption Service

### ***Building good relationships between staff and managers***

We held a conference in March 2015 for staff and managers who work in or alongside the regional and voluntary sector adoption services in Wales. This was important in helping staff in the wider service to understand what the National Adoption Service is and the implications for their work in the future. The conference was very well attended, feedback was good and we received lots of ideas and suggestions to consider in plans for the future.

### ***Getting into the media***

We contracted 'Brighter Comms' (formerly 'CAKE') to:

- manage the PR for the launch of the National Adoption Service
- promote the service
- train staff from the central team, regional collaboratives and voluntary adoption agencies so that they are ready to take responsibility for PR from 1st April 2015

### ***Developing good relationships with key people outside the National Adoption Service***

The Director of Operations, Chair of the Advisory Group and Chair of the Governance Board met with the Minister for Health and Social Services, Mark Drakeford AM, and Welsh Government officials. This was a positive meeting and confirmed the priorities for the service.

We held a number of events to tell people about the National Adoption Services, and took part in a number of events and conferences.

We have responded to two key Welsh Government consultations:

- the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015
- regulations that say how to put into practice the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014



## SECTION 2

# Reports from the regions and voluntary organisations

## North Wales Adoption Service



**Led by: Wrexham**

**Comprises: Ynys Mon, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham**

*Started: 2010*

Our operational procedures are working well. We will be able to work well as part of the National Adoption Service.

We are fully staffed and good at keeping our staff. The staff group went to the National Adoption

Service Staff Conference in March. This helped them to appreciate the wider adoption community in Wales.

We have presented our Annual Report for 2014/15 to our Partnership Board, and shared it with other organisations including the courts.

We are revising our partnership agreement, to reflect recent changes in adoption legislation in Wales.

We have three joint panels. These are working together more closely and knowledgeably.

## South East Wales Adoption Service



**Led by: Blaenau Gwent**

**Comprises: Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Newport**

*Started: 1st April 2014. Before this, three of the five local authorities had already been delivering some adoption services together.*

We have specialist teams for:

- recruiting and assessing adopters
- family finding (matching adopters and children)
- adoption support

We will review how well it is working at the end of 2015.

Our management committee includes representatives from voluntary adoption agencies, education and health. The committee looks closely at our quarterly performance information.

We have agreed a logo, strapline and vision statement. We are working to make sure all advertising and documents use our branding and National Adoption Service branding.

Our work plan includes:

- organising task and finish groups to look at how the service operates
- reviewing adoption support and adoption panels
- producing practice guidance, for example 'From Enquiry to Approval'

## Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional Adoption Collaborative

**Led by: Vale of Glamorgan Council**

**Comprises: Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr Tydfil,  
Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan**

*Fully operational: 1st June 2015*

We have already done a lot of work to develop joint working arrangements for:

- training prospective adopters
- a joint adoption panel
- sharing approved adopters
- matching children with adopters
- sharing the same policies and procedures

We launched a regional webpage in November 2014 for enquiries about becoming adopters, along with an 0800 number for telephone enquiries.

The service is based in Pontypridd. Staff not already employed by the Vale of Glamorgan were transferred on 1st June 2015. The Regional Adoption Manager and Business Support Manager are already in post. We are recruiting for vacant posts.



We are governed by a Joint Committee and a Management Board. The Joint Committee has councillors from all four local authorities, and the Management Board includes a representative from St David's Voluntary Adoption Agency. We have a legal agreement saying what the collaborative will do and what each local authority will do.

We have a joint budget. For now, budget decisions about placements outside the local authority, adoption support and adoption allowances are still made by the individual local authority.

The service will have three specialist teams:

- recruitment and assessment
- family finding (matching adopters and children)
- adoption support

We expect there will be a high demand on the service. We will keep checking that we have got the right structure to meet that demand.

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## Barnardo's Cymru

Our Welsh Adoption and Fostering service is long established.

We have bases in Cardiff and Colwyn Bay.

During 2014/15, we continued to recruit adopters and place children with approved adopters.

Our service is smaller than the other services, but we have played a full part in the development of the National Adoption Service and will continue to do this. We have been active in all the sub-groups, and we chair the media and marketing sub-group. We represent voluntary adoption agencies on the South East Wales Adoption Service management committee.

We placed 15 children for adoption in the last year, from both Welsh and English local authorities.

**Credwch  
mewn plant  
Believe in  
children**



**Barnardo's  
Cymru**

Our 2015/16 target is to:

- recruit 17 more adoptive families and place 22 children
- increase the number of children we place from Welsh authorities
- focus on children such as those on the National Adoption Register who are harder to match with adopters, for example sibling groups, older children and children with disabilities

## Mid and West Wales Adoption Service



**Mabwysiadu**  
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru  
**Adoption**  
Mid & West Wales

### Led by: Carmarthenshire

### Comprises: Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire

*Launched: April 2014. However, three of the four local authorities were already working together to provide some adoption services.*

We have regular meetings to develop working across the region.

We have produced new information leaflets. This has helped give us a regional identity.

One priority is to streamline the adoption enquiry process.

The TV programme O'r galon Teulu, which shows the changing nature of the Welsh family, includes adopters in West Wales, both pre and post approval.

We are focusing on how we will work with birth parents, for example:

- setting up a support group
- having a birth parent to speak at preparation training for prospective adopters
- encouraging adopters to meet the birth parent before being introduced to the child (if that is appropriate)

- filming a video clip of a birth parent to use as part of training
- making the postbox contact system clearer (this is a way for letters to be passed between adopted children and their birth family)

We are also focusing on checking and improving the quality of the reports that say whether a child should be adopted and who should adopt them.

We have run training and workshops for children's social workers, managers and independent reviewing officers. We have held activity days for adoptive families across the region.

We have a worker whose sole job is to develop adoption support. This has highlighted challenges in terms of resources and meeting the need for support. The worker is developing links with other services, such as the Education Psychology Service and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. We have surveyed adopters and used what they said to write a new adoption support policy.

Some of our staff are on National Adoption Service sub-groups.

We want more adoptive families and staff to take up learning opportunities. Our training officer is looking at alternative ways to provide learning opportunities.

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## BAAF Cymru



Our Director is on the National Adoption Service Governance Board and Advisory Group.

We are looking forward to being the voluntary adoption agencies' representative on the Mid and West Wales Regional Partnership Board. We are well represented on the National Adoption Service sub-groups.

During 2014/15 we were awarded two contracts by Welsh Government:

- Wales Adoption Register
- Independent Review Mechanism Cymru

These two services are central to the National Adoption Service.

### The Wales Adoption Register

*Launched: 4th June 2014*

The register has information on children and adopters from the five regions, St David's Children's Society and Barnardo's. This information is critical to helping everyone understand adoption activity in Wales.

In the last nine months we have:

- set up systems for referring children and adopters to the register

- set up the Wales Adoption Register Steering Group
- held consultation meetings with colleagues from voluntary and public sectors
- led an Adoption Exchange day in November 2014

The register has generated 294 potential links.

41 children have found adoptive families as a direct result of the Register, including eight as a result of the Exchange day.

We are looking at the data we have collected, and this will be included in the Wales Adoption Register annual report.

We are constantly looking for ways to make the Register even more effective. We very much welcome the feedback from colleagues about this.

Priorities for the Register are:

- launching the website
- producing user-friendly leaflets for prospective adoptive parents, children and birth parents

## Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

*Launched: April 2010*

This service can independently review approval decisions when a foster carer, adopter or applicant to foster/adopt is not happy with the local agency's decision.

Our current contract is until 31st March 2016.

In 2014/15, we had 13 applications to the IRM, mainly for fostering decisions. This is the highest number we have had. We also had the first application from a prospective adoptive family.

We have now appointed seven additional Panel members to increase the Panel's diversity.

We have offered workshops to agencies across Wales to explain the work of the IRM.

We plan to revise the information for prospective applicants about the IRM.

We get feedback from applicants and agencies after each case is closed. Overall feedback is very positive. We use less positive feedback to improve our service.

We also give feedback to agencies on good practice to support them to improve their services.

## Western Bay Adoption Service



**Led by: Swansea**

**Comprises: Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea**

*Plans approved: December 2014*

*Adoption teams relocated to Port Talbot Civic Centre: February 2015*

Our model is based on:

- recruitment and assessment
- twin tracking and family finding (twin tracking means a child is fostered by someone who can adopt them if the plan becomes for the child to be adopted; family finding means matching adopters and children)
- adoption support

Staff work across the service as the need arises. As a result, different parts of the service are working together more closely.

We have agreed how we will buy services and we will be buying adoption support services.

Our website is now live. It links with the National

Adoption Service website and the three local authority websites. So far, feedback on our website is positive. Our logo uses the National Adoption Service colour scheme.

A councillor represents our service on the National Adoption Service Governance Board and is attending the meetings.

We are forming a management board. We have agreed representatives from the voluntary adoption agencies, and they attended the first meeting in May. Health and education representatives still need to be agreed.

We are developing policies and operational procedures for the region. These will fit with the policies and procedures of the rest of Wales. We are working on how to listen to and involve people who use our service.

Staff are beginning to settle to this new way of working. We hope this is just the start of a journey to give better outcomes for children, adopters and all those affected by adoption.

## Adoption UK

Our role is to support and give a voice to adoptive families and people who want to adopt.

We currently have 350 adoptive family members in Wales who get:

- regular newsletters and magazines
- access to a Wales helpline
- invitations to a network of 11 support groups, which includes specialist groups for adoptive dads, single adopters and Lesbian and Gay adopters

Our Development Manager in Wales is a voluntary sector representative on the National Adoption Service Advisory Group.

# adoptionuk

ar gyfer pob teulu sy'n mabwysiadu  
for every adoptive family

The first year of the National Adoption Service was all about getting the new structures in place. The challenge for all of us now is to co-produce a service that gives adoptive families the support they need to enable their children to recover and move on from earlier neglect and abuse.

The long term success of the National Adoption Service will rest on whether we can all work together to get the adoption support system working across Wales.

## After Adoption

We continue to work tirelessly to promote our perspective that adoption is lifelong, and to make sure that anyone involved in adoption can access our services.

We were delighted to work with others to help set up the National Adoption Service. However, setting up the National Adoption Service has resulted in local authority colleagues focusing on restructuring into regional collaboratives. This, together with the economic environment, has made life uncertain for voluntary sector colleagues.

We see a firm role for the voluntary sector and After Adoption in Wales in the future. The National Adoption Service gives the chance:



- for us to deliver on day to day adoption support
- for us and the people who use our services to have a voice in shaping the future of adoption practice in Wales

The National Adoption Service is creating good links with our Talk Adoption group of adopted young people.

We continue to work collaboratively. We have an ongoing role in the National Adoption Service support sub-group. We are in regular contact with the National Adoption Service central team.

## St David's Children Society

Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant



St David's Children Society

We play an active role in the National Adoption Service.

In 2014/15:

- 41 Welsh children were placed with adopters we had approved

- 54 couples or single applicants came to pre-adoptive training
- we approved 36 applications to adopt

Our Chief Executive is on the National Adoption Service Advisory Group. We contribute to sub-groups and the regional collaboratives.

## SECTION 3

# Listening to people and working with them

## Listening to adopted young people and adopters

We asked Adoption UK to consult adopters. We asked After Adoption to consult adopted young people.

We wanted to know:

- What current issues concern people?
- How would people like to engage with the National Adoption Service in the future?

Adoption UK and After Adoption have both produced reports. There is also a short video made by the children and young people. The key messages are in this section. You can get the full reports from the organisations.

## Listening to professionals

We used discussions at conferences and events to consult with:

- The Wales Family Justice Network
- CAFCASS managers
- Some staff working in or linked to the National Adoption service

We know we need to listen to other people, particularly birth parents.

We have started to look at how different parts of the National Adoption Service listen to people and work with them.

## Key messages from adopted young people and adopters

Young people said:

- I want support to understand my emotions
- School doesn't understand adoption
- I want to know about my past & my adoption
- There should be more support around birth family contact



Adopters said they had most issues with:

- Therapy for the child / access to CAMHS
- Getting support in school (primary & secondary)
- Life Journey work
- Contact with birth parents

Young people also said:

- People don't understand adoption
- I have been bullied because I am adopted
- I feel different and don't want to
- I feel there is a lack of support

Adopters also had concerns about:

- Therapeutic parenting
- Adoption allowances
- Statementing when a child has additional learning needs
- Social media
- Child to parent violence
- Sibling contact

Adopters were happier about support before the adoption order than after the order had been made.

## Key messages from professionals

Their key messages were about the need for:

- better adoption support
- more choice of placements
- more support for birth parents
- better practice (eg better practice around Life Journey work)

## Getting involved in the future

Young people and adopters would be willing to sit on the Advisory Group.

Adopters wanted to get involved by:

- answering surveys, with a preference for on-line surveys
- being consulted during support group meetings
- taking part in focus groups

Adopted young people wanted to get involved by:

- meeting with National Adoption Service staff
- making video blogs

## SECTION 4

# What we know about adoption activity in Wales

### Introduction

This is the first year it is possible to report on data about adoption activity across Wales.

Having reliable data helps improve services throughout Wales as we:

- compare the activities of the five regional collaboratives and (where relevant) the two voluntary adoption agencies that approve adopters
- understand what the data means
- find out the stories behind the data
- compare data from Wales with data from other parts of the UK

The data is from:

- the new Adoption Performance Measurement System (data collection began in April 2014)
- the Wales Adoption Register
- local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies (who provided data from previous years)

Our annual report gives an overall picture of adoption activity in Wales.

This is the first time that the five regional collaboratives and the voluntary adoption agencies have had a chance to compare their activities with those of other agencies. It will take time for everyone to reflect on the data in this section, and think what it means for the future.

A note of caution: it was the first year of collecting many of these data, and we have identified some areas where data collection could be improved. However, the data presented here is reliable and gives a picture of the journeys of children who need to be adopted and adults who wish to adopt.

**All data is for the year 2014-2015, unless it says otherwise.**

### Looked after children

Looked after children may live with foster carers, in residential care, with a family member or with their own parents. They may need to be looked after by their local authority for a short time, or may never be able to return to live with their birth parents. Some of these children will need a plan for a permanent home. For many, this will mean an adoptive family.

The most recent data about looked after children is from 2013-2014. The Welsh Government will publish data for 2014-2015 later this year.

### What's the story in Wales?

The number of looked after children in Wales has been going up, year on year (see Figure 1). The rise was less in 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 was the first year where the numbers fell slightly. When we see the 2014-2015 numbers, we will know if the upward trend has changed to a downward trend. We cannot predict how this trend should affect the numbers of adoptions without knowing the reasons why more or fewer children became looked after. As yet, no-one knows this for sure.

**Figure 1** Number of looked after children in Wales

Year	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Number of looked after children	5,160	5,410	5,720	5,765	5,755

## How does Wales compare to England?

The rate for looked after children (the number of looked after children per 10,000 population) is higher in Wales than in England (see Figure 2)

**Figure 2 Rate of looked after children in Wales and England**

	Wales	England
2011	85	58
2012	90	59
2013	91	60
2014	91	60

No-one is sure why the rate is higher in Wales than England. Without knowing this, it is hard to interpret any differences in rates of adoption between Wales and England.

## From looked after child to adopted child

Looked after children need a plan for their long term future.

If they cannot live with their birth parents, there may be a **“should be placed”** decision by the local authority that adoption is the best plan for them.

The local authority then applies to the court for a **placement order**, allowing them to place the child with approved adopters once a match is found.

After the child moves in with the approved adopters, there is a period of becoming a family before going back to court for an **adoption order**.

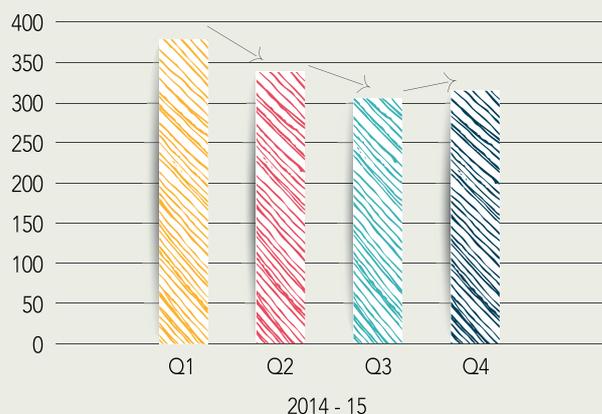
Sometimes, despite a “should be placed” decision or placement order, plans change. This could mean:

- adoption is no longer the best option
- there is no realistic chance of the child being matched for adoption as there are no suitable approved adopters

## What we know about “should be placed” decisions

During the year, the number of children with “should be placed” decisions who had not been placed for adoption went down (see Figure 3). On 31st March 2015, 316 children with a “should be placed” decision were waiting for a match.

**Figure 3 Number of children with a “should be placed” decision who have not yet been placed for adoption**



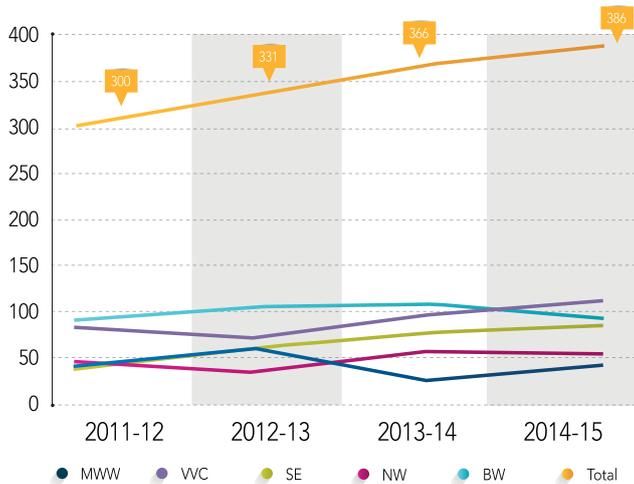
67% of the children who were matched in 2014-2015 were not matched until more than six months after the “should be placed” decision was made. This percentage varied considerably around Wales (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4 Number of children matched who have waited longer than 6 months between a “should be placed” decision and being matched for adoption**



## What we know about being placed for adoption

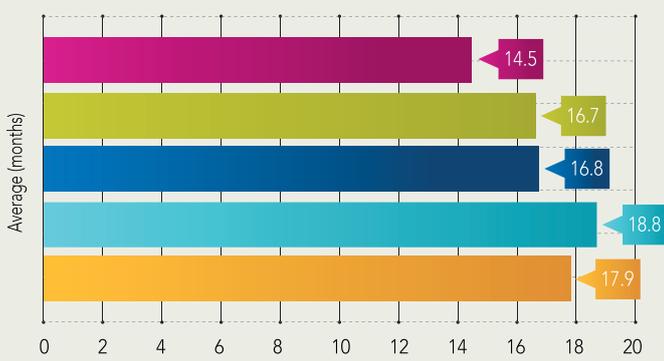
**Figure 5** Number of children placed for adoption



386 children were placed for adoption in Wales (see Figure 5). This includes 38 children placed through St David's Children Society and 11 placed through Barnardo's.

On average, it took 16.5 months from becoming looked after to being placed for adoption. The previous year's average wait had been about 26 months. The average wait varied considerably around Wales (see Figure 6).

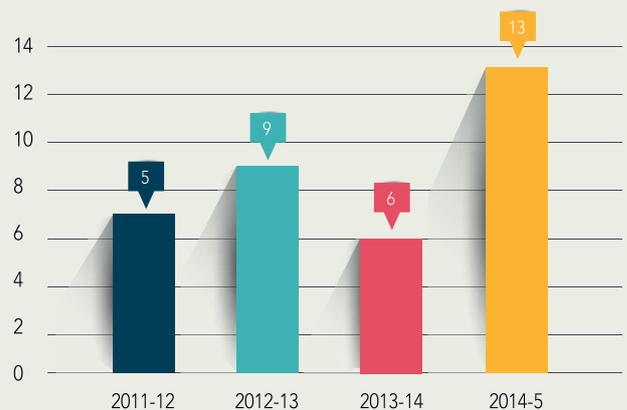
**Figure 6** Average time between becoming looked after and being placed for adoption



Almost all placements lead to an adoption. However, for a small number of children and adopters, the placement breaks down before the adoption order (see Figure 7).

Region	Average (months)
WB	14.5
WVC	16.7
SE	16.8
NW	18.8
MWW	17.9

**Figure 7** Number of children whose placement breaks down before the adoption order



A small number of adoptions also disrupt after the adoption order. We know that on 31st March 2015, 34 looked after children had previously been adopted.

## What we know about children who are still waiting

Children should be referred to the Wales Adoption Register if they are not matched within 3 months of a placement order. This increases the number of possible adopters.

On 31st March 2015, there were 201 children on the register. Most of these children were in the process of being matched.

Only 62 children were still available to be matched. These children were likely to be over the age of five, and wanting to be placed together with at least one brother or sister.

## What we know about children whose plan is changed from "should be placed"

This is an area we want to understand better in the future. This is what we know:

- Fewer children had their plan changed in 2014-15.
- The most common reason for changing the plan is that there are no suitable adoptive placements. For these children, the plan is often changed to long term foster care. For some, the change is

because the child is going to live with someone permanently under a Special Guardianship Order or Residence Order.

### What do we know about adoption orders?

In 2013-2014, 345 children were adopted. This is 6% of the looked after children in Wales. Both the number of children adopted and the percentage of looked after children who are adopted has gone up over the last few years (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8 Children adopted in Wales and England**

Year Adopted	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Wales</b>	229	254	246	329	345
As % of looked after children	4.4%	4.7%	4.3%	5.7%	6.0%
<b>England</b>	3,200	3,100	3,470	4,010	5,050
As % of looked after children	5.0%	4.7%	5.2%	5.9%	7.3%

We know that a higher percentage of looked after children are adopted in England (7.3%) than in Wales (6%). We are not sure why this is. It may be due to differences in adoption activities, or it may be due to differences in the needs of children who are looked after.

### From first enquiry to becoming an adoptive parent

#### What do we know about enquiries

Agencies received 1,161 enquiries about becoming adopters in 2014-2015. This is an increase of 27% since 2011-2012 (see Figure 9).

We know that some people made enquiries to more than one agency, so we cannot give a definite number of people who made enquiries.

**Figure 9 Number of enquiries about becoming adopters**

2011-12	913
2012-13	950
2013-14	1166
2014-15	1161

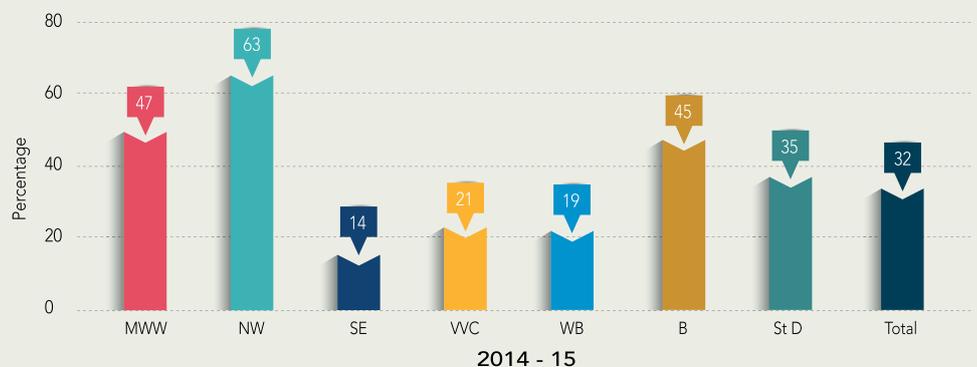
The target is to reply to 100% of initial enquiries within five working days. St David's, Western Bay and Barnardo's all achieved 100% and North Wales was very close to this (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10 Percentage of enquiries responded to within five working days**

Mid and West Wales	94%
North Wales	99%
South East	90%
Vale, Valleys and Cardiff	90%
Western Bay	100%
Barnardo's	100%
St David's Childrens Society	100%

### What do we know about enquirers who don't then apply to adopt?

**Figure 11 Percentage of enquirers who don't apply to adopt with that agency**



After enquiring to an agency, a person will:

- have an initial visit from the agency to be given more information
- decide whether to make an application to adopt

32% of people who had an initial visit in 2014-2015 did not make an application to adopt with that agency within that year. This varied considerably depending on which agency did the initial visit (see Figure 11).

We need to understand the stories and reasons behind these numbers. We do know:

- some people enquire with more than one agency, and may have applied to another agency
- some may still be thinking and could apply in 2015-2016

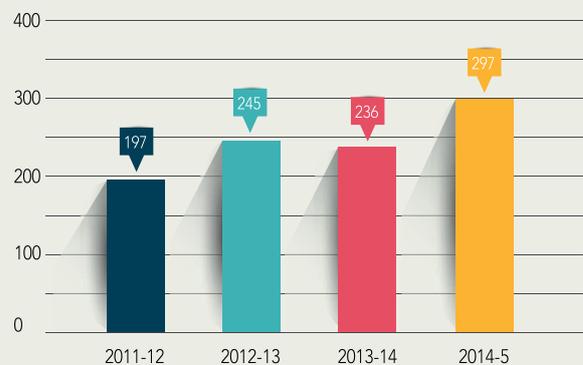
### What we know about how long it takes to be approved

Welsh Government guidance says it should take 8 months between that first enquiry and when a person is approved as an adopter.

The average time for Wales as a whole was 9.4 months. However, as Figure 12 shows, the average time varies between under 7 months and over 13 months.

### What we know about who is approved

**Figure 13** Number of adopters approved



Across Wales, 297 people were approved as adopters. This number has been going up year on year (see Figure 13) and we want to make sure this continues.

Any adopters not matched within three months of approval are referred to the Wales Adoption Register to look for a match with a child looked after elsewhere.

Of the 153 adopters referred to the Wales Adoption Register during the year:

- 75% wanted to adopt just one child who was under the age of five
- 89% were a couple (either heterosexual or same-sex)
- 86% were white

Of the 56 adopters on the Wales Adoption Register on 31st March 2015:

- 87.5% wanted to adopt just one child
- most of these wanted to adopt a child under the age of five.

**Figure 12** Average time from initial enquiry to approval as adopters



### What the data tells us about who we need to focus on recruiting as adopters

More people are being approved as adopters and there are more children needing adoption.

Currently, most approved adopters want to adopt just one child, and almost all want to adopt a child under the age of eight.

The mismatch is clearest if we look at adults and children on the Wales Adoption Register on 31st March 2015.

- Most adopters want to adopt younger children, but there are fewer younger children needing adoption.
- There are not enough adopters available to adopt older children, especially children from the age of four upwards.
- There are too few adopters available to adopt sibling groups.

Based on this, the National Adoption Service aims to increase the number of adopters who are willing to consider older children and sibling groups.

## Other functions of adoption services

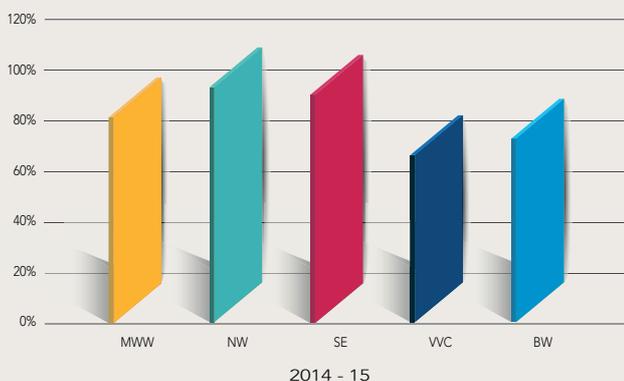
### What we know about life journey material

Children who are going to be adopted need information about their lives before their adoption.

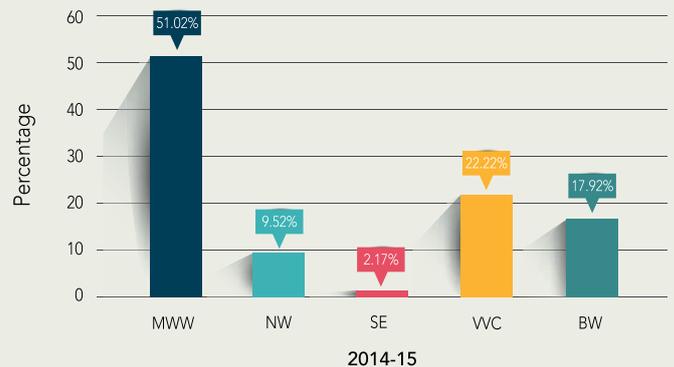
Under 25% of children had life journey materials before their second adoption review. This is a major concern, because life journey materials are so important for children's long term well-being.

### What we know about work with birth parents

**Figure 14 Percentage of birth parents offered counselling**



**Figure 15 Percentage of birth parents who accept the offer of counselling**



Birth parents whose children are to be adopted are entitled to have counselling to:

- explain the adoption procedure
- explain the legal implications of the adoption process
- find out their wishes and feelings about certain matters such as their child's religious and cultural upbringing and future contact

This was the first year of collecting data about whether parents were offered counselling and whether they accepted the offer (see Figure 14 and Figure 15). We have identified an issue with how the data were collected which means we may have under-recorded the number of parents who accepted the offer of counselling. We are changing how we collect the information next year.

### What we know about adoption support

We are working out how to measure adoption support activities and setting targets for 2015-2016.

### What we know about listening to and working with children and adults who use adoption services

We are working out how to measure these activities and setting targets for this for 2015-2016.

## SECTION 5

# What needs improving?

A lot has already been done to improve adoption services. A lot still needs to be done.

These are our top priorities.

1. We need more adopters who can meet the needs of children waiting for adoption, particularly for children over the age of 4 and sibling groups.
2. There is more work to do to improve how children and families are matched. We have speeded this up, but too many children still wait more than 6 months for a match. Too many children have their care plan changed from adoption because we cannot find an adoptive family for them. We do not have an agreed system that works well for matching children with a family. We aim to develop a system, and also address some practical matters such as getting life story work done.
3. A lot of work needs to be done to improve adoption support services. This is going to be challenging because of the cuts to public services. At the very least, we need a way for adopters to keep in touch with the adoption services if they want to. It would be a step in the right direction if adopters had an annual contact or information bulletin from the adoption service, were told what support is currently on offer and the process for accessing support was easier.
4. Everyone needs a way to get involved and have a say about adoption services. This applies to work with individuals, how we check the quality of services and how we run services. Both children and adults need a way to get involved. We will need to do some further development work on this, alongside doing what adults and young people have already told us. We need to

find out why we are not doing well at involving birth parents, and think of how to do this better in the future.

5. Research has been published about the quality of services, from the perspective of adopted children, young people and their parents. The research has some important and difficult messages for us. Everyone involved in adoption services needs to hear these messages. We all need to take the messages into account as we make changes.
6. The Welsh Government is developing work around looked after children. We are watching this work. We recognise that we have a role to play in this. In particular we have a role in promoting good practice about attachment and resilience in children, and in planning for permanent futures.



**SECTION 6**

# What we plan to do

This is the summary of our plan for 2015/16.

During 2015/16, we will write a 3 year plan.

The plan says how we will deal with the issues we identified in Section 5.

We have written a detailed plan as well. Please ask if you would like a copy of the detailed plan.



Priority 1:	What we will do	Success means...	Why it matters
<p>More adopters, including more adopters for sibling groups and older children.</p>	<p>Look at everything from someone's first enquiry to their approval as an adopter. Then develop a model of best practice. And then use the model nationally.</p> <p>Agree a national adopter recruitment strategy.</p> <p>Think of different ways to market adoption, and use those different ways.</p> <p>Change the culture of organisations, and the way organisations do things.</p>	<p>The time between a child going into care and being placed for adoption is 13 months (or less).</p> <p>There are at least 25% more adopters.</p> <p>The average time from first enquiry to approval is 8 months (or less).</p> <p>There are fewer sibling groups and older children waiting for adoption.</p> <p>We have agreed and use the best practice model.</p> <p>We have agreed a multi-media recruitment campaign.</p>	<p>It makes sure we have the widest possible choice of adoption placements.</p> <p>It means children can be placed for adoption with minimum delay.</p> <p>It makes sure all potential adopters get high quality training and assessment without unnecessary delays. This will be true wherever they live in Wales.</p>

Priority 2:	What we will do	Success means...	Why it matters
More children are placed without delays.	<p>Agree and use a national way to find children an adoptive family.</p> <p>Work with local councils to help them plan for children's long term futures.</p>	<p>There is a NAS Family Finding process for all children in Wales who need an adoptive family.</p> <p>No more than 4 out of 10 children wait more than 6 months from a decision that adoption is the best option (a "should be placed" decision) to placement with approved adopters.</p> <p>We have halved the number of children whose plan for adoption is changed.</p>	<p>It means we have got better at matching children with potential adopters.</p> <p>It means the adoption process is working more smoothly. This includes improving how social workers work together.</p>

Priority 3:	What we will do	Success means...	Why it matters
Better adoption support.	<p>Do what is says in our framework for thinking about adoption support services.</p> <p>Make sure everyone knows what has already been agreed about adoption support.</p> <p>Make it easier to get an assessment for adoption support services.</p> <p>Make sure adopters are treated consistently in terms of financial support.</p> <p>Listen to what adopters and children and young people are telling us about their priorities.</p> <p>Agree plans to develop support for adopted children and their parents from health and education services.</p>	<p>All children placed for adoption have been assessed for adoption support services, there is a plan in place, and the plan has been discussed with the adopters.</p> <p>There is a system for adopters to stay in contact with adoption services, if this is what the adopter wants.</p> <p>A newsletter, at least once a year, to all adopters.</p> <p>Adopters say it is easy to get information about adoption support services.</p> <p>We have reviewed ways to get an adoption support assessment.</p> <p>At least 3 out of 4 children placed for adoption have life journey materials before their 2nd adoption review.</p>	<p>It keeps adoption breakdown to a minimum by providing the right adoption support services.</p>

Priority 4:	What we will do	Success means...	Why it matters
Listen to and work with children and adults who use adoption services.	Agree how to do this locally and nationally, and then do it.	<p>We have involved people who use adoption services at the national level.</p> <p>We have held at least one event to listen to, learn from and work with adopters.</p> <p>We have held at least one event to listen to, learn from and work with young people.</p> <p>We have agreed how people who use adoption services will be involved in the running of the five regional collaboratives and the five national adoption voluntary organisations.</p> <p>A full strategy for how to listen to, learn from and work with people who use adoption services.</p> <p>Every birth parent is offered counselling. Make sure at least half of the birth parents accept the offer of counselling.</p>	It consistently provides high quality adoption services throughout Wales.

Priority 5:	What we will do	Success means...	Why it matters
Doing better overall.	<p>Make sure we know how and when to use data and information.</p> <p>Develop better data.</p> <p>Think of ways to measure what is achieved, and not just what is done.</p> <p>Support the work of the Wales Adoption Register.</p>	<p>At least 4 reports a year. The reports are easy to read and use.</p> <p>There is a system for collecting and analysing local and regional information.</p> <p>We have a plan for when the Aspireview contract ends.</p>	It consistently provides high quality adoption services throughout Wales.

Priority 6:	What we will do	Success means...	Why it matters
The National Adoption Service is well run.	We have made sure the national and regional arrangements for running the service are working.	<p>The legal rules for running the service at the regional and national level are being followed.</p> <p>The voluntary sector, health, education and others are fully involved at the regional and national level.</p>	It means local councils, adoption agencies, health and education can work together well.

# APPENDIX ONE

## Members of the National Adoption Service Task and Finish Group

Organisation	Name	Main job title
Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru	Phil Evans	Director of Social Services Vale of Glamorgan
Welsh Local Government Association	Naomi Alleyne	Director, Social Services and Housing
North Wales Regional Collaborative	Susan Evans	Head of Children's Services Wrexham
Mid & West Wales Regional Collaborative	Stefan Smith	Head of Children's Services Carmarthenshire
Western Bay Regional Collaborative	Dave Howes	Head of Children's & Family Services Swansea
Vale Valley and Cardiff Regional Collaborative	Suzanne Griffiths then Rachel Evans	Head of Children's Services Merthyr Tydfil Head of Children's Services Vale of Glamorgan
South East Wales Regional Collaborative	Tanya Evans	Head of Children's Services Blaenau Gwent
CSSIW	Nigel Brown Ann Ferris Sandy Pearce	Deputy Chief Inspector Area Manager Inspector
Adoption UK	Ann Bell	Development Manager Wales
BAAF	Wendy Keidan	Director BAAF Cymru
St David's Children Society	Gerry Cooney	Chief Executive
Cardiff University	Heather Ottaway	Lecturer in Social Work
Coactiva.com	Richard Morton	Associate
Welsh Government Health and Social services	Heather Payne Emma Coles then Liz Lockwood	DPH - Maternal & Child Health Senior Official
Public Health Wales	Carolyn Sampeys	Designated Doctor

## APPENDIX TWO

### Members of the National Adoption Service Advisory Group

#### Independent Chair – Mr Phil Hodgson MBE

Organisation	Name
Director of Operations NAS	Suzanne Griffiths
ADSS Cymru	Phil Evans
WLGA	Naomi Alleyne
North Wales Regional Collaborative	Susan Evans
Mid & West Wales Regional Collaborative	Stefan Smith
Western Bay Regional Collaborative	Dave Howes
Vale Valley and Cardiff Regional Collaborative	Rachel Evans
South East Wales Regional Collaborative	Tanya Evans
Adoption UK	Ann Bell
BAAF	Wendy Keidan
St David's Children Society	Gerry Cooney
CASCADE	Katherine Shelton
Designated Doctor (Public Health Wales)	Carolyn Sampeys
Medical Advisor	In process of being appointed
CAMHS Services	Peter Gore-Rees
Association of Directors of Education in Wales	Owen Richards Ceri Bater
Children's Commissioner for Wales	Andy Wallsgrove
Legal advice	Host LA (City of Cardiff Council)

## APPENDIX THREE

### Members of the National Adoption Service Governance Board

Organisation	Name
WLGA Spokesperson for Social Services (chair)	Clr Mel Nott
WLGA Deputy Spokesperson for Social Services	awaiting election
North Wales Regional Collaborative	Clr Lloyd Kenyon
Mid & West Wales Regional Collaborative	Clr Darren Mayor
Western Bay Regional Collaborative	Clr Peter Richards
Vale Valley and Cardiff Regional Collaborative	Clr Chris Elmore
South East Wales Regional Collaborative	Clr Haydn Trollope
Voluntary Adoption Agency - BAAF	Wendy Keidan
City of Cardiff Council	Clr Sue Lent
City of Cardiff Council	Tony Young
ADSS Cymru	Phil Evans
WLGA	Naomi Alleyne
Independent Chair of Advisory Group	Phil Hodgson

## APPENDIX FOUR

### Summary of expenditure 2014/15 (Welsh Government Grant)

National Adoption Service - Central Team	Amount Identified in Grant	Total Spend 2014 - 15	Variance
Staffing Cost	138,706	72,982.46	65,723.54
One Off Costs	112,000	165,249	53,248.89
Ongoing Costs	12,240	21,814	9,574.29
Totals	262,946	260,046	-2,900.36



Western Bay  
ADOPTION SERVICE  
GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU  
Bae'r Gorllewin



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



**Mabwysiadu**  
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru  
**Adoption**  
Mid & West Wales



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**

Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant



St David's Children Society



**adoptionuk**

ar gyfer pob teulu sy'n mabwysiadu  
for every adoptive family



**Credwch  
mewn plant  
Believe in  
children**



**Barnardo's**  
Cymru



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service

National Adoption Service Central Team  
c/o City of Cardiff Council  
Room 327 County Hall  
Atlantic Wharf  
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