



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

Achieving More Together /
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd



Western Bay
ADOPTION SERVICE
GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU
Bae'r Gorrlewin

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



AFA CYMRU
association for fostering and adoption
cymdeithas ar gyfer maethu a mabwysiadu



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



Mabwysiadu
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru
Adoption
Mid & West Wales



after
adoption



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
North Wales
Adoption
Service
Gogledd Cymru



Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant
St David's Children Society

Overview by the Chair of the Governance Board and the Independent Chair of the Advisory Group

"I am pleased to see the publication of the National Adoption Service for Wales' Annual Report for 2015-16.

It reflects the ongoing success of the new arrangements for adoption services which were put in place by local government in Wales, with its partners, in 2014.

It has been another busy year for staff working in adoption services in Wales as they continue to develop the services delivered regionally and nationally. It is good to see the continued improvement in performance alongside the other projects which are developing practice.

The feedback from adopters, children and young people is of particular importance. We have used their feedback to improve services, and we will continue to do so.

Good adoption services are a vital part of how local government provides effective Corporate Parenting for children who need permanent, loving homes. Local government in Wales remains committed to developing adoption services to better meet the needs of those who use the services and to meet the challenges identified in this report."

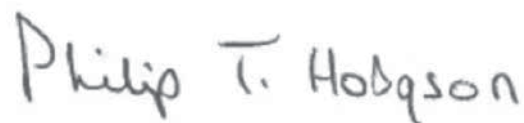
Councillor Mel Nott,
Chair Governance Board

"The National Adoption Service has, through the organisations in the statutory and voluntary sector that are under its umbrella, delivered improvement and change in the service to adopted children and their parents.

The National Adoption Service has networked with researchers, adopted children and adoptive parents to gain valuable information and insight of first hand experiences of the adoption service provided in Wales.

Practitioners and managers in the public and voluntary sector have collaborated positively to meet the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The future focus will be on providing adoption support services, making the best use of money, and maintaining or improving performance. Voluntary Adoption Agencies and regions will further develop how they work together.

I would like to thank adopters and adopted children for the critique of their experiences, and I would like to thank the adoption workforce for their continued hard work and dedication."



Phil Hodgson,
Independent Chair National Adoption Service
Advisory Group

Introduction

This is the 2nd annual report of the National Adoption Service for Wales.

It says what we have done up to March 2016.

As a reminder.....

The **National Adoption Service** was launched in November 2014. It is an umbrella that brings together local, regional and national organisations and activities.

Locally, each local authority continues to provide services to all looked after children. Each local authority identifies and works with children for whom adoption is an appropriate plan.

Regionally, local authorities work together in five regional collaboratives to provide a range of adoption services.

Every region:

- places children for adoption
- recruits and assesses adopters
- offers counselling to birth parents
- offers advice to adopted adults
- has links with voluntary adoption agencies, health and education

Adoption support services are either provided regionally or by each local authority.

Nationally, we have a Director of Operations and a small central team. They are hosted by the City of Cardiff Council on behalf of all local authorities. The Director of Operations and the central team provide

national direction, development and co-ordination. Since September 2015 the central team has also managed the Wales Adoption Register.

The voluntary adoption agencies have set up a **Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership**. This includes:

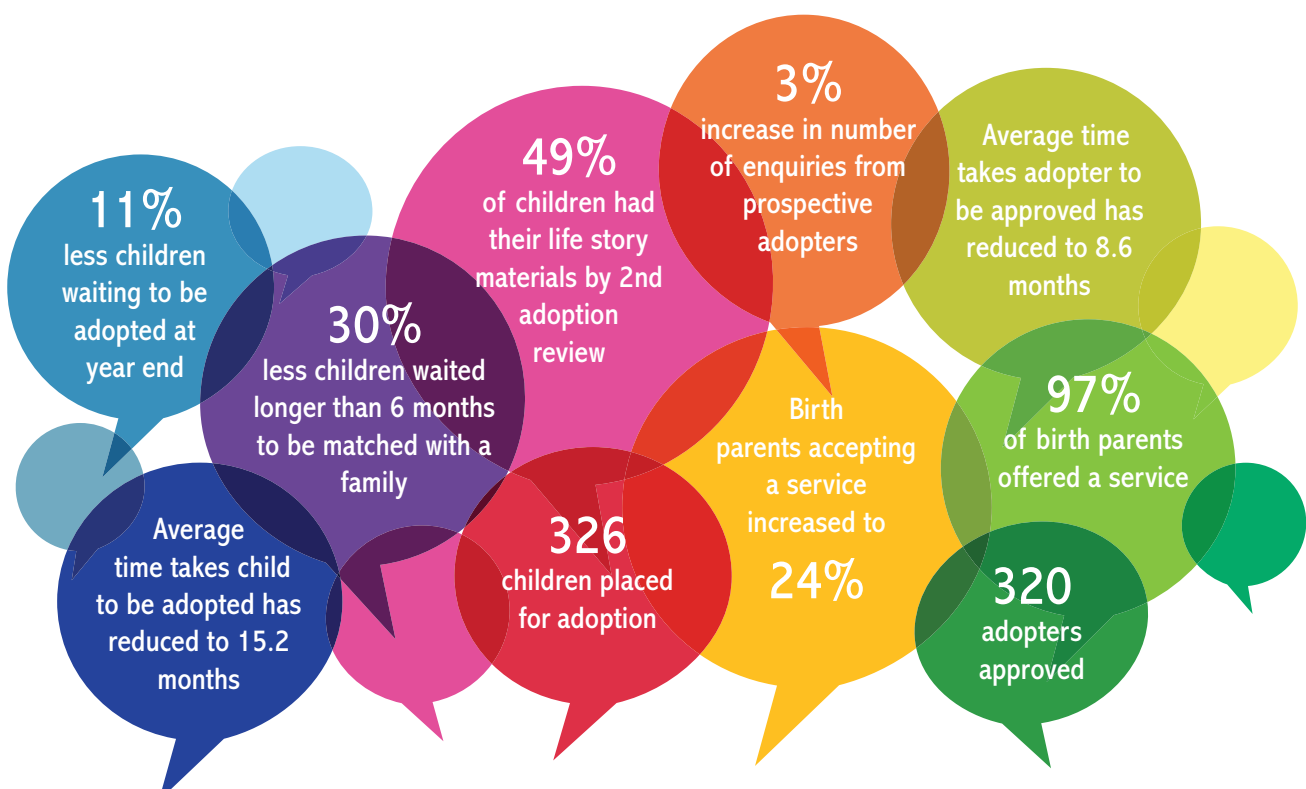
- St David's Children's Society (including the Association for Adoption and Fostering in Wales)
- Adoption UK
- After Adoption
- Barnardo's Cymru

In the forward to the last annual report I said this was 'just the beginning.....'

This year much work has been done to improve adoption services in Wales, and much progress has been made. We have got better at listening to adopters and adopted children and young people. Many have told us what they think. What they say influences how we change adoption services. I am in their debt. I am confident we can keep listening and talking regionally and nationally.

We set ourselves six priorities for 2015-16. Overall we have made good progress with all six. There are still big challenges ahead, particularly to improve adoption support services. We started some projects this year which we think will improve things in the future.

Our performance tells us a good story.



We now have a reliable way to measure how we are doing. We can see there are differences during the year and between regions. This gives us ideas for how to work towards performing well all over Wales, all year round.

The role of the National Adoption Services is to provide good services to children who are or will be adopted. To do this, we must also provide good services to adults who want to adopt, birth parents and other adults affected by adoption.

Research (Selwyn and Meakings, 2015) shows us that adoption is still usually the best way to give children lifelong stability if they cannot live with their birth family. It is not the right option for all looked after children, but it is important that social workers and courts continue to consider adoption as an option when making plans for children who cannot live with their birth family.



Suzanne Griffiths,
Director of Operations



WHAT WE DID LAST YEAR

PRIORITY 1

Recruit more adopters, including more adopters for sibling groups and older children

Why it matters

- It will make sure we have the widest possible choice of adoption placements.
- It will mean that children can be placed for adoption with minimum delay.
- It will make sure all potential adopters get high quality training and assessment without unnecessary delays, wherever they live in Wales.

How did we do?

1. We aimed to increase the number of adopters being approved, particularly for sibling groups and older children.

We were aiming for 25% more adopters. In September 2015, the Welsh Government released statistics showing that the trend is for fewer children to have a plan for adoption. So we revised our recruitment plans and target.

Regional and Voluntary Adoption Agency recruitment strategies are now better informed about the children who require placements. This means people being assessed about adopting are more likely to be suitable adopters for the children who need an adoptive family.

- Vale, Valleys and Cardiff approved 42% more adopters this year, because they have a lot of children who need adopters.
- Western Bay approved more adopters so they did not need to rely as much on buying adoptive placements from other organisations.

- The North Wales and the Mid Wales adoption services approved fewer adopters because these regions had fewer children needing adopters.

Overall, the number of adopters being approved has gone up again. This year it was 320 adopters. We think this is about right in the current context.

More people enquired about adopting. 97% of people had a reply to their enquiry within 5 working days.

About a third of people enquiring chose not to take it any further. This is similar to last year. We checked, and this is mostly that people change their minds when they know more about what adoption involves, rather than a problem with how their enquiry is dealt with.

The Voluntary Adoption Agencies have been focusing their skills and expertise on older children, sibling groups or children with other additional needs. These are the children who we know wait longest to be adopted.



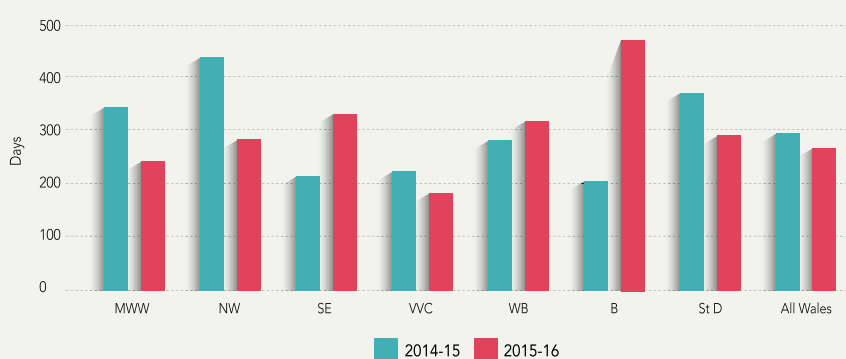
2. We wanted to cut the time taken for adopters to be approved.

We were aiming for an average of 8 months (243 days) from first enquiry to approval. Overall in Wales, we managed to cut the average time from 9.5 months to 8.6 months.

The time varied during the year and between agencies.

- Vale, Valleys and Cardiff cut the average time to 5.8 months.
- In Mid and West Wales, managers looked closely whenever it took over 8 months. This helped them to cut the time.
- In North Wales, they realised they needed to offer training more often. Doing this cut the average time from 11 months in the first 3 months of the year to 7.2 months in the last 3 months of the year.

Figure 1 - Average time from initial enquiry to approval as adopters



3. We wanted to see fewer sibling groups and older children on the Wales Adoption Register.

The situation has improved for children aged 4+.

More children in sibling groups were on the Wales Adoption Register at the end of March 2016 than at the end of March 2015.

North Wales targets the right potential adopters by publicising the needs of children who are waiting for adoption, an approach we plan to extend across Wales.

We will keep using the information from the Wales Adoption Register to make sure the right mix of adopters is approved.

Our national marketing strategy

Our strategy for targeting recruitment at suitable prospective adopters is based on #SeeTheWholeChild.

Key features of the strategy are:

- giving information about the children likely to be available for adoption
- increasing general awareness of adoption, and dispels myths
- a common recruitment 'script' so people making first enquiries are given the same messages about the children waiting, children likely to become available and how recruitment works

Our aim is for the strategy to lead to a choice of placements, particularly for children who currently wait the longest, and that children can be placed with minimum delay.



How did the development work go?

What did we say we would do?	What did we do?	How did we do?
<p>Review the process for approving adopters by looking at everything from someone's first enquiry to their approval as an adopter.</p> <p>Develop a model of best practice for use across Wales.</p>	<p>Adopters from across Wales and the Welsh Government Innovation Team helped us with this.</p> <p>A two stage model for Wales has been developed. It is ready to be tested and implemented.</p>	
<p>Agree a national adopter recruitment strategy.</p> <p>Think of different ways to market adoption, and then use those different ways in our marketing.</p>	<p>Early in the year we developed a National Marketing Strategy.</p> <p>Later in the year we received a Welsh Government grant. We used some of the grant to develop new images, messages and resources about the children likely to be available for adoption. We will start using these in Spring 2016 as part of everyone working together on a new, targeted recruitment strategy.</p> <p>One of our voluntary sector partners has lent us a member of staff for a day a week. This gives us 'in house' expertise as well as the advice we get from a PR company.</p>	
<p>Change the way organisations think about adoption and the way they deliver some of their services.</p>	<p>This is a long term strategy. This year's activities have begun to make inroads into it.</p>	

PRIORITY 2

More children are placed without delays

Why it matters

- It means we have got better at matching children with potential adopters.
- It means the adoption process is working more smoothly. This includes improving how social workers work together.

How did we do?

1. We aimed to cut the time between a child going into care and being placed for adoption.

Our target is 13 months. This year we cut the time further from 16.6 months to 15.2 months. We still need to do more work to cut the time to 13 months.

The time varies between regions and at different times of the year. We want to be more consistent as well as cutting the time further.

2. We wanted to reduce the number of children who waited more than 6 months from a decision that adoption is their plan (a 'should be placed decision') to their match with adopters.

At the end of last year, almost 7 out of 10 children had to wait more than 6 months. By the end of this year, we had cut it to just over 5 out of 10 children. The numbers waiting more than 6 months varies during the year and between regions. We need to cut the amount of variation.

Overall, the number of children waiting for a placement shows a steady decline. At the end of March 2016 it had fallen by 92 to 288 since the

end of June 2014. Most children are now matched within their region although we placed the same number of children with Welsh voluntary agencies.



Cofrestr Fabwysiadu Cymru
Wales Adoption Register

The Wales Adoption Register is one way of family finding for children. It is used mainly for those children for whom a match is harder to find in their region. The Wales Adoption Register also manages the protocol for matching children and adopters in different countries of the UK. The number of children matched by the Register has gone up from 41 children (11% of all children adopted in Wales) in 2014-15 to 51 children (15%) in 2015-16.

When the Wales Adoption Register was launched, active searches for placements were being made for 139 children on the register, and there were only 22 adopters on the register. At the end of March 2016, there were active searches for placements for 54 children, and 110 adopters available.

A small number of children on the Wales Adoption Register are unlikely to be matched with the adopters available. It is usually around 30-35 children.

On 31 March 2016:

- 38 children had little or no chance of a match with the adopters available. 19 were part of a sibling group. 16 had more complex needs or were older.
- Of the 110 adopters, almost all (90%) wanted just one child, and about a third (34%) wanted a child aged under 2 years.

3. We wanted to cut the number of children whose plan for adoption is changed by 50%.

Our target was to cut the number of children whose plan for adoption was changed by 50%. We managed to cut the number by 68%.



How did the development work go?

What did we say we would do?	What did we do?	How did we do?
<p>Agree and use a national way to find children an adoptive family.</p>	<p>With the input of staff from all regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies' we have developed a 'Best Practice Guide for Family Finding'.</p> <p>The guide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasises the importance of individualised early planning for the placement of every child with an adoption plan • outlines a variety of matching tools that can be utilised for family finding <p>We have piloted an on line system that adopters can also access (Adoption Link) as an additional way of family finding for children. We have improved how the current Wales Adoption Register works.</p>	
<p>Work with local authorities to help them plan for children's long term futures.</p>	<p>The regions and local authorities have an ongoing dialogue about the role adoption can play.</p> <p>All regions meet with their local authorities regularly to focus on developing and improving the service. Examples are reducing the time it takes to place children for adoption, improving the provision of life journey materials and increasing significantly the take-up of adoption support by birth parents.</p> <p>Both we and AFA Cymru have been members of the Welsh Government's Strategic Steering Group for 'Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children'. We have been involved in task groups, such as developing a National Fostering Framework.</p>	

Better adoption support

Why it matters

- It will make good outcomes likely for all adopted children and help families where extra help is needed.

How did we do?

1. We wanted to make sure that all children being placed for adoption were assessed for adoption support services. We wanted to make sure that, where needed, there is a support plan in place which has been discussed with the prospective adopters.

We started measuring this in 2015-16. We have developed some other measures that we will use in 2016-17.

This year, all children placed for adoption had their needs for adoption support services assessed. Where there is an adoption support plan in place, it has been discussed with the adopters.

We have looked at research about adoption support services and adoption support plans. Some adopters (between 8% and 23%) feel they are not given all the practical and psychological support they need (Wales Adoption cohort study, Katherine Shelton).

The process and format of the plans is not working for adopters or children (Kempenaar, M 2015).

2. We wanted to increase the number of children placed for adoption who had their life journey materials before their 2nd adoption review.

In most parts of Wales, life journey work is done by the child's social worker. This means meeting this target is not completely within the control of the

adoption service. Regional services were asked to focus on working with their local authorities to make improvements.

This is beginning to improve. This year, almost half of children placed had life journey materials. Last year, it was less than a quarter of children.

Mid and West Wales say their improvement is because of:

- ongoing monitoring by the independent reviewing officers and managers
- adoption social workers working closely with childcare teams

Adoption services understand that life story materials are important to children and parents. Life story work supports their transition and settling within a new family. It is also a lifelong resource to help adopted children and adults make sense of their past.

Last year, we did not improve as much as we had hoped. This is still an ongoing priority for us.

3. We wanted levels of adoption disruption to remain low.

We measured two things:

- Does an agreed match not become a placement? This only happened for 3% of children.
- Does the placement break down before the adoption order is granted? This only happened for just 4% of children.

The number of looked after children who had previously been adopted went down to 8 this year. It had been 34 last year.

These levels are roughly what research says we should expect (Selwyn et al 2014 and 2015).

4. We wanted to improve the service to birth parents by making sure that all are offered a service and more take up this offer.

This has begun to improve. The number of birth parents being referred to adoption services went up. Of these, almost all (97%) were offered a service. This means we nearly achieved our target.

We want at least half of birth parents to accept the offer. This year it was almost a quarter (24%). This

is an improvement on last year (18%). The take-up improved in all regions but we need to improve this across Wales.

How did the development work go?

Our aim is to make improvements to how children, young people and their parents are supported so that people can get support if they need it. This is the area of adoption services in Wales that needs the most development and we needed to do some 'behind the scenes' work first. This should help us make improvements in the future.

How did the development work go?

What did we say we would do?	What did we do?	How did we do?
Do what it says in our framework for adoption support	<p>There is an agreed strategy to develop adoption support services within a 3 tier framework of universal, targeted and specialist services.</p> <p>We used grant aid from the Welsh Government to complement the work that is happening across wales to develop adoption support services. We used the money to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Fund a year's initial membership of Adoption UK (AUK) for new adopters approved in 2015-16. This is being continued. (ii) Provide (via AUK) 14 awareness raising and training for adopters and adoption staff in a method of managing difficult behaviour that is called Non Violence Resistance (NVR). <p>Most of the regions have been working on implementing a strategy to develop adoption support. Mid & West Wales and South East Wales both reviewed their services and have development plans in place. Western Bay has been working on restructuring their existing resources and identifying training needs in readiness to create a therapeutic model of service delivery.</p> <p>AUK has designed courses in NVR for practitioners and for parents which will be delivered in 2016-17.</p> <p>St David's and Barnardos continue to deliver and develop the adoption support they offer to families.</p>	
There is a system for adopters to stay in contact with adoption services, if this is what the adopter wants	We have been considering developing a multi-functional database to enable us to offer this to adopters but that can also do other things for us. We consulted with adopters about this idea, as well as with professionals and have received a report with recommendations that we will take forward this year.	

<p>Make sure everyone knows what has already been agreed about adoption support</p>	<p>A downloadable information sheet has been developed to be available on the National Adoption Service website.</p> <p>A variety of support groups and events happen across Wales all the time. These are publicised on the National Adoption Service website. Agreement has also been reached across Wales to 'open boundaries' for basic support services so that adopters can access support groups and events within their local area which may not necessarily be part of the agency to which they 'belong' (their approving agency).</p> <p>We will soon have an 'adoption support' section on our website www.adoptcymru.com which will include the above and other up to date information about adoption support, including where to go for information and advice.</p>	
<p>A newsletter, at least once a year, to all adopters.</p>	<p>The media and marketing subgroup have developed a newsletter which will include updates and information about adoption support across the regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. This will be published on our website and promoted using our social media.</p> <p>Some regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies also have newsletters for the adopters they have approved.</p>	
<p>Make it easier to get an assessment for adoption support services</p>	<p>We commissioned some development work to give us some ideas about the best way to develop adoption support services across Wales. This included a review of access points for assessments. We have a detailed report with a range of recommendations which are being considered. Many of these recommendations will form the basis of a clear plan to develop adoption support in Wales.</p> <p>The South East Wales region is piloting access to assessment and services through the regional collaborative in the early part of 2016-17. This is the model that the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff region already uses.</p>	
<p>Make sure adopters are treated consistently in terms of financial support</p>	<p>It is good to be able to report that we have reviewed the use of financial allowances across Wales and have gained an 'in principle' agreement to a single policy for Wales. This has been endorsed by the Governance Board and we have an All Wales policy in draft.</p> <p>Work on this continues. We will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consulting on the draft policy, including consulting adopters and • mapping the implications with a view to having an implementation plan in place by 1st October 2016. 	

<p>Agree plans to develop support for adopted children and their parents from health and education services</p>	<p>We have had mixed success nationally and regionally in establishing and embedding constructive links with health and education. It remains an ongoing priority.</p> <p>The South East Wales region (with health) and Mid Wales region (with education) have piloted different ways of assessing and meeting the emotional needs of children who are, or will be adopted.</p> <p>We have supported Adoption UK to continue to lead on work with policy colleagues in Welsh Government. A new booklet for schools 'Getting it right for Every Child – a schools guide to working with adopted children and their families' has been developed and will be published in the Spring of 2016. The booklet was written following a period of consultation with adopted children, parents and teachers.</p>	
<p>Listen to what adopters and children and young people are telling us about their priorities</p>	<p>We have continued to engage with adopters and adopted children and young people so that we know what these are. 5 events have been held with adopters and 1 with adopted children and young people this year. Detail about this is in the next section.</p>	



PRIORITY 4

Listen to and work with children and adults who use adoption services

Why it matters

- It helps us to know whether high quality adoption services are consistently provided in Wales.

How did we do?

1. We said we would agree an approach to get this going nationally and regionally. We would hold at least one event with both adopters and children and young people.

We have achieved a lot this year. We have laid good foundations for working with adopters, children and young people. More than 170 adopters and 140 children and young people have been involved with us this year.

At the start of the year we agreed that the central team would:

- work with the regional services and Voluntary Adoption Agencies to start talking with adopters, adopted children and young people
- develop a longer term strategy.

We:

- held events
- attended meetings
- involved adopters in pieces of development work
- visited some well-established support groups to meet with adopters and young people

- Phil Hodgson, Independent Chair of Advisory Group, met with group adoptive fathers in summer 2015
- Suzanne Griffiths, Director of Operations, and Phil Hodgson met with a South Wales 'Talk Adoption' group of young people in Nov 2015
- Phil Hodgson and Martina McCrossan (our Policy and Practice Officer) met with an adoption support group in Conwy in April 2016
- We held three family days, in Swansea, Powys and Vale of Glamorgan
- We used our social media sites and our website to engage with people. We see this as a great opportunity to respond directly to people, but also to tell people about adoption news and events around Wales.

We have also engaged adopters in:

- our work on revising the enquiry to assessment process (adopters from support groups in North and South)
- developing a model of adoption support
- the Review of Wales Adoption Register. A few adopters took part in telephone conversations. This added to what adopters told us at exchange days.

Messages from the family days

The family days were organised by AUK and After Adoption in partnership with regional staff. They were attended by 94 families, including 153 adults and 133 children. They were excellent fun for the children, and an opportunity for their parents to talk to us about what matters to them. Being part of local events meant that local issues were heard first hand by the regional collaboratives and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The issues people raised are shaping the direction of the National Adoption service.

We've listened and reflected on what we've heard. There were so many positive messages from families about what adoption has meant to them. Below are a few quotes.

"I loved the early years with my 3 children. Teenage years were/are difficult but with hindsight, I am proud of my contribution to making a difference".

"We have been so lucky to have been able to adopt a wonderful little boy. The support of our agency and other adoption bodies has been great, and it is wonderful to regularly meet and network with other adopters"

"My daughter is amazing and surprises me every day with her wonderfulness."

However, adoptive families also told us about challenges they've faced and what they want the National Adoption Service to focus on. Below are the themes that have emerged:

Recruitment and Assessment of adopters

- ***There is a general sense of people being satisfied with this part of the adoption journey, and there were lots of positive comments about individual teams and social workers during assessment and matching.***

Matching and Placing Process

- ***We learned that some newly approved adopters are concerned about the reduction in the the numbers of children available for adoption, and what this means for them 'waiting' to be matched. We heard***

that it was difficult to find out 'who are the children' and 'how many children are waiting'.

- ***Families told us about concern around delays and challenges in the legal process, and priority given to birth parents.***

Post Adoption Support

- ***There was a consistent message at every event and meeting about the lack of support, with an emphasis on a lack of therapeutic support.***
- ***People told us that they were unclear about what support is available and how to access it particularly several years down the line when they'd lost touch with their adoption agency who 'approved them'.***
- ***There was a constant message of adopters "feeling on our own" to manage very difficult behaviour, particularly in adolescence.***
- ***Education - there were many examples of schools not being able or willing to manage adoption support needs. We hear how traditional methods for dealing with behaviour leading to exclusion and/or frequent calls to parents to collect children, impacting on people's ability to work.***
- ***There are difficulties with accessing a service form CAMHS - linked to lack of therapeutic support.***
- ***It would help to have more skilled workers supporting families.***
- ***Families asked "Why does Wales not have an adoption support fund like England?"***

Children and young people told us

- ***Schools don't understand adoption- this includes peers and teachers***
- ***CAMHS are not accessible or adoption aware***
- ***They want to be involved in life story training***
- ***They want support groups/camps for older children***
- ***They want to meet/engage with NAS***

We listened to what we were told. We make sure our priorities reflect the priorities of adoptive families in every area of our work.

We have challenges ahead to make sure that families at local, regional and National levels

understand and support improvements to services that need to happen.

We also know that adoption affects many people. We need to engage with birth families, adopted adults and relatives in the future.

PRIORITY 5

Doing better overall

Why it matters

- It will help us consistently provide high quality adoption services in Wales.

How did we do?

1. We said we would develop better data and make sure we know how and when to use it. We would make at least four reports available each year. The reports will be easy to read and use.

It is new for adoption services to monitor their performance, analyse the information and use the information to manage and improve services. We worked hard to make sure that all agencies collect the data in the same way and use the data effectively. Our performance sub group meets regularly to advise on how to interpret the data and why there may be variation between agencies and during the year. These meetings have also helped improve data collection.

Every three months we provide detailed performance reports. Regions say that they are regularly using performance data in their management meetings and to inform reports to council members.

2. We wanted to think of ways to measure what is achieved, and not just what is done.

We had hoped to begin to think about how we measure outcomes. This is more complicated for adoption services because children stop being looked after when an adoption order is made.

We want to continue to look at how to do this. We have made links with the Welsh Government department and with the Social Services Improvement Agency who have been working with local authorities on this.

3. We said we would support the work of the Wales Adoption Register.

We took on responsibility for the Register mid year.

We reviewed the Register and made some changes to practice so that it works better for the agencies that use it. For example, we held practitioner days. The review made recommendations that we will be implementing in 2016-17.

4. We have a plan for when the Aspireview (our current performance measurement system) contract ends.

We have extended the current contract. We will get recommendations for future systems from the review of the Wales Adoption Register and the development project about a potential multi-functional data base.



The National Adoption Service is well run

Why it matters

- It means local authorities, adoption agencies, health and education can work together well.

How did we do?

It was important to make sure the national and regional arrangements for running the service were lawful and working well. This included having the voluntary sector, health, education and others fully involved regionally and nationally.

1. What has the Advisory Group and Governance Board been doing this year?

Our Advisory Group has met bi-monthly and the Governance Board met four times this year.

There is a list of agencies that need to be at these meetings. Most of them attend. We need to keep working to get education input into the Advisory Group.

We have a 'conflict of interest' protocol for the meetings. We have a protocol to support councillors that represent each collaborative on the Governance Board.

The agendas for these meetings are full and varied. The agendas always include information and discussions about performance and the budget.

The Advisory Group has discussed everything covered in the work-plan. They have shown a particular interest in what adopters and children and young people have been telling us.

The Governance Board is also particularly interested in what adopters and children and young people have been telling us. They also have a particular focus on education and making links to the Corporate Parenting roles of councils.

2. What have the regional management committees been doing?

Each region has a management committee or partnership board. These have all met regularly, and people have discussed:

- service performance and plans to improve services
- any projects or initiatives

The Voluntary Adoption Agencies share between them the links to each region and there is now health representation on all regional management committees and educational input on all but one.

The regions (and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies) have reported to the Director of Operations. This is very helpful. In turn, based upon this, the Governance Board has reported to Welsh Ministers. This report is part of what they report to Welsh Ministers.

3. What about the Voluntary Adoption Agencies in Wales?

There is a long history of a strong Voluntary Adoption Agency presence in Wales.

In 2012 the Voluntary Adoption Agencies began to work closely together as the Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership (SVAP). The SVAP contributed to the development of the National Adoption Service. They are committed to working nationally and regionally with the National Adoption Service. They continue to deliver services.

The voluntary sector has been affected by austerity, and by changes that local authorities have made to how they provide adoption services. In July, with no notice, the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) went into administration. Each of the remaining four voluntary agencies has had to look very carefully at its work and sustainability. The voluntary sector depends on grants, donations and local authorities purchasing their services.

St David's Children Society has enabled the BAAF Cymru legacy to continue in Wales by stepping in to host the new Association for Fostering and Adoption in Wales (AFA Cymru). The arrangement enables AFA to operate autonomously.

The SVAP also worked together to apply to the Welsh Government "Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant" fund for 2016-19. This led to two successful bids across four of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies. This grant aid will start in April 2016.

A 'road map' to achieve closer collaboration in the future is emerging. This includes:

- the development of a joint Adoption UK and After Adoption delivery organisation in Wales from April 2016
- joint working in respect of training and adoption support services

The Voluntary Adoption Agencies that recruit and assess adopters in Wales are exploring whether they can work together to develop specialist recruitment for the hardest to place children.

The coming year, 2016-17

Adoption in context

Welsh Government policy in recent years has focused on making sure social workers consider adoption when a child cannot return to their birth family. The National Adoption Service, albeit local government led, was part of the aim to make sure that adoption services in Wales improved. In the last six years, adoption has become more common in Wales and England, probably because of the government policy focus on adoption.

However, that has begun to change due to a number of high court judgements that have affected how adoption is viewed and used. Research tells us that adoption is more likely to give someone a stable home than any other option. However, adoption is only right for some children. In Wales the number of children being adopted is going up each year.

A new National Assembly for Wales was elected in May 2016. This is a chance for the National Assembly to consider what its future adoption policy for Wales is going to be. We think it will be important to consider what is happening in the legal system and levels of investment in adoption support services.

The National Assembly for Wales' Children, Young People and Education Committee published its "Follow-up Inquiry into Adoption Services in Wales" in March 2016. We welcome its publication. It reflects our ongoing priorities and points out the ongoing challenges in improving adoption services particularly around health / CAMHS services, education services and life story work. We know that more needs doing so that:

- everyone gets a better adoption service
- there is a high standard of service all across Wales

We are working on this with local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies and are thinking about the report recommendations. The full report is available on the National Assembly Website at <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10648/cr-ld10648-e.pdf>

Our priorities for 2016-17

We have two big priorities for this year:

1. Improving adoption support
2. Developing a database to keep in touch with adopters and be the future Wales Adoption Register

There are other things we need to do. We have written about them in our plan. But these are the biggest priorities.

1. Improving adoption support

There is a lot to do.

- We have just received the report with many recommendations. We need to consider the recommendations carefully. To do this we will be holding a workshop with agencies and then formulate a plan.
- We want to make it easier for adopters to get support when they need it. We plan to work with universal services so that they are 'adoption aware'. We also want to ensure that adopters and children & young people can get help with the parenting dilemmas that only affect adoptive families. We want help to be readily available through the regions and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies including their helplines. The offer of a year's membership of Adoption UK for new adopters is continuing.
- There is new social services legislation. This says local authorities must set up 'Information, Advice and Assistance' services. This new law has implications for the regions and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies. We want adopters and children & young people to have easy access to advice and information. This lets them make informed choices about the help they get. We also want to make sure that the 'Information, Advice and Assistance' services are an easy way to get informed advice from professionals who have adoption experience and specialist knowledge.
- All adoptive families have a right to have an assessment of their adoption support needs. We think this should be done by the regional

adoption services, ideally with services provided in conjunction with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies. One region is doing this already. Another is testing out this approach early in 2016-17. Our plan is to learn from these regions, with a view to this approach being used across Wales.

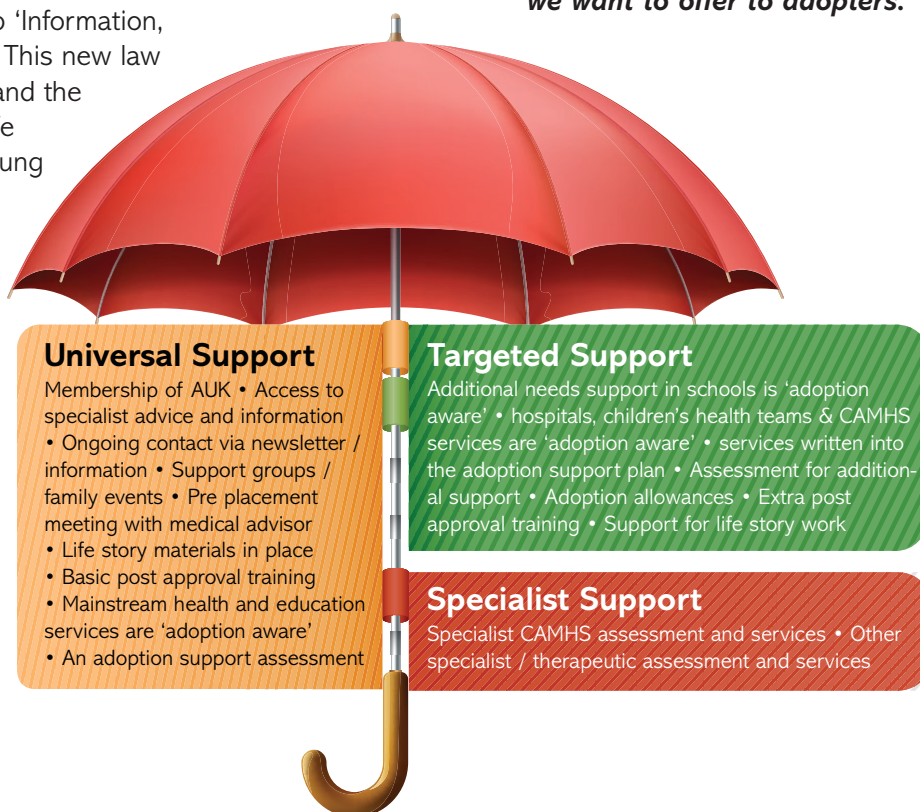
- Linked to this we would like to pilot a centre for adoption support in Wales. This could be a partnership between voluntary adoption services and one or more of the regions. This pilot would provide a range of targeted and specialist services, again with a view to the approach being used across Wales.

We plan to influence education services regionally and nationally. We plan to promote the recently published booklet 'Getting it Right for Every Child – Schools guide to working with adopted children and their families'.

Similarly through regional and national links with CAMHS services, we want to develop and publish an agreed pathway for accessing CAMHS services.

We also want to continue to influence Welsh Government to make sure that the legal, policy and resource context that they provide supports our efforts to improve adoption services in Wales.

The picture shows the minimum we want to offer to adopters.



At the moment, up to a quarter of children and young people (around 80 last year) need targeted or specialist support when they are adopted. Less than 4% are likely to have significant long term support needs.

Our aim is to make sure that families get effective support as soon as it is clear they need support. This makes it less likely that a need will escalate into a serious issue.

2. Developing a database to keep in touch with adopters and to be the future Wales Adoption Register

We have just received two reports about this and we are considering their recommendations. We want to develop a system for the future which:

- supports us to place all the children that need to be placed. The database will support family finding regionally, within Wales and then beyond if there is a need.
- enables us to keep in touch with adopters.
- provides all parts of the National Adoption Service with reliable, real time information to help us plan services.



Financial resources

The core cost of the National Adoption Service is fully funded by local government in Wales. This is primarily from local authority budgets. The central team is funded by a 'top slice' of the local government settlement before it is distributed to councils in Wales via the Welsh Local Government Association.

A fixed annual budget of £272k was agreed before the National Adoption Service was launched.

Central Team

The experience to date has demonstrated that the fixed budget does not meet the core costs of the central team. The fixed budget does not allow any flexibility for uncontrollable costs such as pay awards.

Budget Allocated	End Year Position
Total Staffing £230,762.32	£221,554
Total Other Costs £41,238.00	£35,481
Total Cost £272,000.00	£257,035

The end year position is likely to show a small underspend. We achieved this by making the most of our grant, and getting income from managing the Wales Adoption Register. This underspend will be carried forward to meet the shortfall in the budget for 2016-17.

The WLGA has been asked to consider an adjustment to the core budget so that it covers core costs as we cannot continue to rely on grant income.

The Welsh Government supported us with grant aid of £140k. This was to

- support the development of adoption support services
- engagement with adopters and adopted children and young people
- a professional marketing / PR approach to recruitment

The following projects were supported from that grant. Without the grant, none of this work would have been possible.



Detailed financial information about adoption services across Wales is not available. We can report on some aspects of the expenditure for 2014-15. This is the most recent verified data available.

This is not the total cost of adoption services. It does not yet include staffing and other costs. It shows elements of expenditure that we may wish to consider using differently in the future.

Expenditure	Mid Wales	North Wales	South East Wales	Vale, Valleys and Cardiff	Western Bay	Totals
Adoption allowances	£620,568	£559,442	£1,018,111	£828,076	£958,818	£3,985,015
Other additional expenditure	£56,221	£59,748	£27,073	£146,992	£103,781	£393,815
Interagency fees	£81,254	£160,000	£440,356	£1,442,400	£1,494,502	£3,618,512

Voluntary organisations have been awarded around £350,000 a year for the next three years to deliver adoption services from the "Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant".

Money has also been awarded to AFA to support looked after children's services including adoption.

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