



# Mid-Year Review 2016-17



## Introduction and Overview

*I hope you find this mid-year update on the National Adoption Service for Wales informative. It gives us all an opportunity to reflect on the great work that is happening across Wales to improve adoption services<sup>1</sup>.*

*Adoption services make a major contribution to securing good outcomes for looked after children in Wales.*

*During 2015-16 adoption services worked with at least 950 children, made up of*

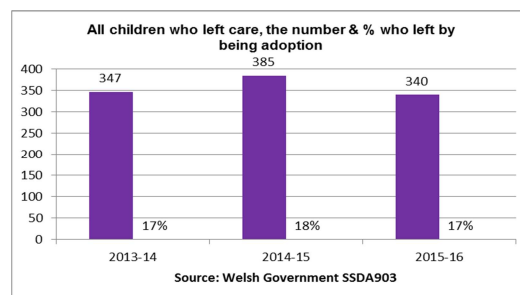
- 340 children whose adoption order was granted;
- 326 children who were placed for adoption during the year and
- 288 children for whom placements were being sought at year end.

*This is out of a total looked after children population of circa 5,662 children<sup>2</sup>; it is a significant proportion of our most vulnerable children and our aim is to ensure adoption services are the best they can be for them.*

*The figures above do not include children and young people receiving post adoption support services. A very conservative estimate is that this is at least another 500 children.*

## Context

*The number of children adopted in Wales fell by 45 children to 340 last year (12%) but the proportion of all children leaving care who left via an adoption order remained relatively consistent at 17%.*

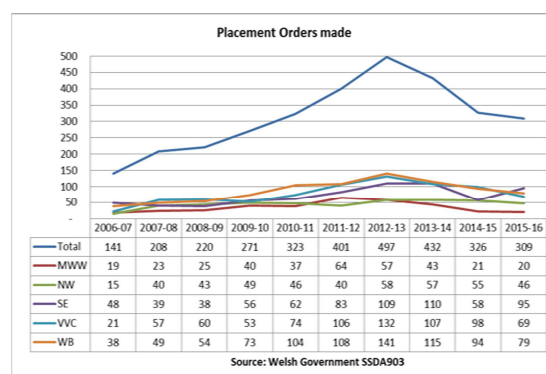


*The reduction in numbers of children adopted and the proportion of children leaving care leaving via an adoption order in Wales is comparable to the pattern in England at 12% and 15% respectively.*

*Adoption services are operating in a climate where their role in offering a positive option for children is being challenged in a number of ways:*

- the regulatory and policy context is no longer consistent with Welsh social care legislation;
- service budgets are reducing which is set to continue at a time when investment or re-direction of resources into adoption support is needed;
- the current legal context means that adoption is being considered less often for children whose long term care is the subject of court proceedings.

*Wales saw a further reduction in Placement Orders granted by the courts in 2015-16. In numerical terms however the reduction was significantly smaller than that experienced in the last two years since the current downward trend began.*



<sup>1</sup> It fulfils duties under regulation 13(2)(d) of the 'Directions Powers' for an interim report by December 31st each year.

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government Adoptions, outcomes and placements for children looked after by local authorities in Wales, 2015-16 – Revised 18/10/16

*309 placement orders were made in Wales during 2015-16 for 5% of the looked after children population compared to 8% of the looked after children population in England.*

*The decision as to whether adoption is the right plan for any child quite properly rests elsewhere; the role of adoption services in Wales is to provide a responsive and effective service when it is decided that adoption is the best plan.*

*Integral to this is ensuring that a good and supportive service is provided to prospective and approved adopters, birth parents and others affected by adoption.*

*The National Adoption Service has made good progress in improving services so far:*

- Fewer children are waiting;*
- Children are on average being placed with their new families more quickly;*
- Far fewer children are having their plan for adoption changed, their match not proceeding or disrupting;*
- The service in assessing prospective adopters has improved;*
- The offer of support to birth parents has improved.*

*There are also improvements in adoption support services but there is still much more to be done to get this to where it needs to be. We are at an exciting stage in co-ordinating the ongoing development of this albeit that it is likely to take some time.*

*Our plan to improve services is completely rooted in what adopters, adopted children and young people have told us they want and need. This is particularly true for our*

*plans to develop adoption support services and we will continue to listen and work with them as move forward.*

*We continue to acknowledge the size of the improvement task ahead of us and the challenge of maintaining the improvements that we have made.*

*The impact of different performance in regions and agencies on the service overall is becoming clearer and is shown in the chapters that follow.*

*Every NAS service is using data intelligently to change things for the better; without exception where regions or agencies focus on specific issues improvement follows. There are however different challenges in different areas or agencies; no consistent themes are emerging. It is important that regions and agencies are enabled to deal with this, so they reach the agreed benchmarks and consistency in the quality of service is achieved.*

*When we meet with adopters, children and young people they always tell us what could improve but there are always positives too.*

*“Being adopted means very little to me, it’s the 25 years of my life that’s important along with the care, love and support I’ve received...”*

*We are committed to doing all we can to ensure this is everyone’s experience.*



Suzanne Griffiths  
Director of Operations  
National Adoption Service

## Priority 1: Improving adoption support by

- Working with stakeholders and service users to draw up a plan to develop sustainable adoption support services across Wales to make it easier for adopters, children and young people to get the support and services they need;
- Lobbying to ensure the legal and policy context supports the development of adoption support;
- Working with education services to develop adoption aware education services across Wales;
- Influencing the implementation of the current CAMHS strategy and other health services to improve access to services for adopted children and their families;
- Implementing a common policy for the payment of financial allowances;
- Developing a strategy to improve life story work for adopted children in Wales.

## How have we done?

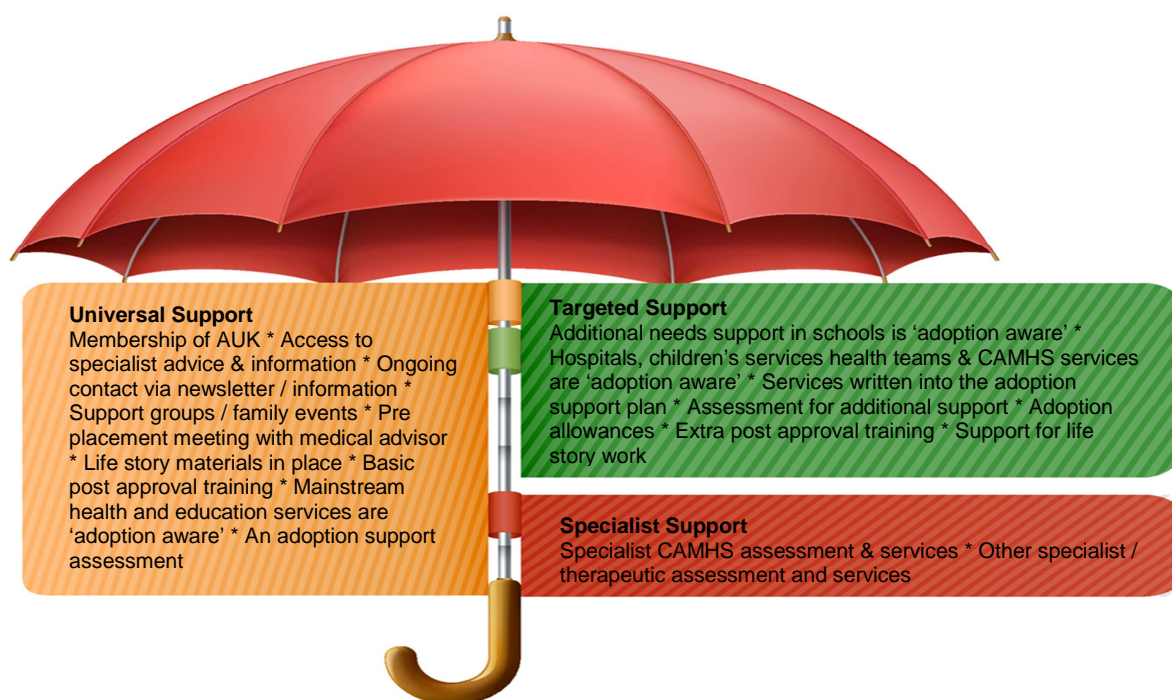
### ***Adoption Support Framework***

A workshop was held in July to produce a plan for adoption support, from which the Adoption Support Framework was developed and later agreed at the Governance Board in September.

The workshop heard the voices of adopters and adopted children and young people from the events and engagement across Wales since we were formed. Support is a significant issue for many with some feeling abandoned and unsupported by services.

Current research from the Wales Adoption Cohort Study confirms that this is the case for children being adopted now as well as for some that were adopted in the past.

The workshop advocated the 'Framework' which, for the first time, provides a coherent and clear way forward for the development of adoption support across Wales.



The regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies have made significant contribution to the development of the framework which sets out what is needed.

Ongoing discussions will empower staff and managers delivering services and provide the opportunity for innovative working.

We will continue to engage with adopters, children and young people about implementing the Framework.

We hope to attract grant aid to undertake the business planning that is required regionally and nationally. Much work is already happening, as outlined in the sections that follow. The Framework will enable us to better harness and target the services already in place as well as identifying and focusing areas for development.

- **Information and access**

- We have continued to improve the information available on the new 'adoption support services' pages on our website.
  - We are working with the new AUK and After Adoption partnership who are collating news about all the support groups and events available for adopters and their families across Wales (no matter who is providing them) and putting this on our website.
  - Discussions about the interface between local authority Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) and the regional adoption services has commenced.
  - NAS as an umbrella body, two regional collaboratives and Afa Cymru are live on DEWIS. We are working with the other regions and the VAA's to ensure they are too.
- South East Wales are piloting the regional service being the access point for adoption support assessments. Working with Vale, Valleys and Cardiff and Western Bay who already provide this service, they have reviewed their adoption support duty system and in particular responses to initial enquiries and referrals.
- **Direct support for adopters, children and young people**
    - The offer of a year's free membership of Adoption UK for new adopters is continuing.
    - Mid and West Wales are running Parenting with PACE groups and families have been identified to undertake the 'Parenting Our Children' training run by Adoption UK - a course being run in collaboration with Western Bay.
    - Activity days run in Ceredigion during the summer were well attended with positive feedback.
    - The availability of 'Talk Adoption' – a support group for adopted children and young people has increased. In addition to the longstanding group which meets in Cardiff, additional groups are being run in the Swansea area in a partnership between Western Bay and After Adoption.
    - 'What does adoption support need to look like for families' was the theme at Western Bay's first adopter forum meeting. A number of suggestions and ideas are progressing from this e.g. creating a member page on the website, adopters participating in the design and delivery of support groups and other training and support.

- North Wales continue to purchase the 'Safe Base' adopter support programme for their adopters and their training officer is developing a locally adapted Kim Golding Parenting Programme. There are now three adopter support groups in North Wales, a mechanism to promote local adoption issues and to inform existing adopters about current practice and new developments. A well-attended engagement event for adoptive families took place in Colwyn Bay in September. A birth parent group is proving to be a good support mechanism to parents who have had children placed for adoption. North Wales commission After Adoption to facilitate birth parent counselling and section 98 services.
- Vale, Valleys and Cardiff hold monthly toddler groups which provide opportunities for early intervention as well as bi-annual fun days which are highly attended.
- Adoption UK is running a NVR training programme for 20 Vale, Valleys and Cardiff adoptive families with the support of regional staff.
- St David's provide NVR, Theraplay, Emotional Coaching and Emotional Base training post adoption for their adopters. They also facilitate 3 support groups, one of which is a summer celebration day.
- **Training for Staff** – a number of regions and VAA's have invested in training their staff to deliver elements of adoption support
  - Mid & West Wales have enabled 23 workers from a variety of services across the region to undertake Dyadic Development Psychotherapy (DDP) level 1 training to develop their ability to provide attachment focused parenting support.
  - Vale, Valleys and Cardiff have provided Theraplay level 1 training to some staff in conjunction with Western Bay. Non Violence Resistance (NVR) level 1 training in Vale, Valleys and Cardiff is also being provided to the larger staff team.
  - Western Bay has created a 12 month training programme following an attachment model equipping staff to deliver services. Training has been both practical and theoretical including parenting PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy), NVR, Theraplay, solution focussed, task centred and motivational interviewing techniques as well as self-directed online learning around, for example, case recording using the 'Write Enough' website.
  - Barnardo's has established an adoption and fostering therapeutic support service and now has access to a child psychologist, forensic cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) nurse, counsellor and a close working relationship with professor Gordon Harold who holds the Chair at the Rudd Centre at Sussex and Hove University.
  - St David's enabled 8 staff and managers to attend the DDP level one training and have subsequently used staff group supervision to determine how we transfer DDP principles into practice.
  - 57% of all professional training provided by Afa Cymru has been

aligned to the NAS priorities including Attachment and Resilience, Attachment and Secure Base and Life Story Work.

- **Lobbying in respect of the legal and policy context**

- We co-ordinated an approach to the Welsh Government to ask it to consider extending clauses 8 and 9 of the Children and Social Work Bill in England to Wales. If agreed this will ensure the lifelong needs of children are considered in court decisions as well as giving adoptive parents important rights to be considered as primary attachment figure for their children in contested adoption hearings. We were supported by Sarah Coldrick from Afa Cymru, Julie Doughty at Cardiff Law School and our VAA colleagues in doing this.
- We have been working with Welsh Government to consider how the regulations underpinning the assessment of adopters can be changed to streamline the process.
- We have provided initial advice to Welsh Government about how the adoption support regulations should be changed to bring them into line with the Social Services and Well-being Act Wales 2014. We were grateful for the support of Sarah Coldrick from AfA in developing this advice.

- **Education** - working with education services to improve the experience of adopted children and their parents is a key part of the adoption support framework. Using feedback from children, young people and adopters our Education Plan includes working with education services to develop 'adoption aware' education services

across Wales complementing the recent WG strategy 'Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales.'

- All the adoption regions now have links with their LACE (looked after children education) co-ordinators and the regional implementation groups for the Welsh Government (WG) development plan.
- We have been supporting and publicising the WG booklet 'Getting it right for every child; a schools' guide to working with adopted children and their families' which was written by Adoption UK in Wales.
- Mid and West Wales' Education through Regional Working (ERW) continues to focus on creating attachment aware schools.
- The Regional School Effectiveness Service for North Wales (GwE) has a robust relationship with their adoption service and ensures that adopted children and their families are clearly identified by schools and the correct support allocated via the pupil deprivation grant at the earliest opportunity.
- Education colleagues joined Western Bay on their Theraplay training as part of an increasing role for education within adoption support. In addition named workers liaise with LACE co-ordinators in each local authority which equips the service with a single point of contact to ensure services can be accessed for families.

- **Influencing the CAMHS strategy and other health services** - we have continued to engage with our health colleagues nationally to influence their



work with a particular focus on the 'Together for Children and Young People' strategy.

- South East Wales are building on their partnership with the psychology service which includes extending the provision to the whole service as well as to support adoption support cases.
  - Western Bay's regular meetings with health colleagues have assisted in providing assistance on cases and given a direction of travel for the coming period on how health colleagues might be best placed to assist with adoption support developments.
  - Mid and West Wales' emotional health screening process is becoming embedded in Carmarthen so that the consultation process, for children with should be placed decisions, about how best to meet their emotional needs is beginning to feed into the planning both the introductions and the support plan. The region aims to extend this to other authorities over time.
- **Financial Allowances** – All the regions have been working together to provide a one Wales approach. We believe this will be welcomed both for new placements and existing ones where there may be a need for financial support to be considered at a later stage.

The draft national allowances policy is based on a policy and process developed by Western Bay and builds on the 'best' that is available.

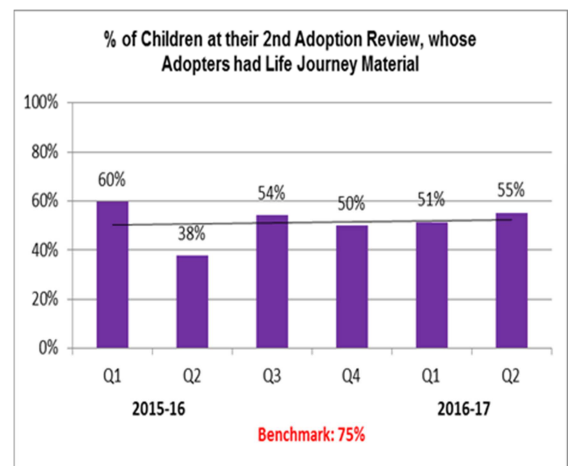
- The policy will provide a consistent framework, based on the legislation, for considering whether an allowance can be

paid and if so a common means test model for calculating the amount.

- A common report is being taken to all Councils for 'in principle' agreement to the national policy.
- Following a workshop plans for implementation are being developed.

- **Life Journey Work** - our stakeholders and Governance Board have agreed an action plan for delivering an improved framework for life story work for adopted children across Wales.

There is slow progress towards reaching an acceptable level in this being available when it should be but we have been frustrated by this and want to make a step change to improve availability, quality and the experience of children, young people and adopters with life journey materials.



- The new model will ensure that adoptive parents take on not only their child but their child's history from the very earliest stages of their journey together, greatly enhancing the attachment process



and therefore the prospects for the child's long-term well-being.

- The plan is based on a literary review of life story work undertaken by Joan Hunt of Afa Cymru. Full development of the model will take place as the year progresses leading to an implementation plan.
- Mid and West Wales and Western Bay have both begun to implement some elements namely life journey material being available at the matching panel; arrangements are in place for panels and reviews to check that work is evidenced. Other regions plan to do likewise.

### **Wales Adoption Study**

The Wales Adoption Study research team used a mixed-methods approach to examine the experience of adoptive families in the first two years of an adoptive placement. The aim of the study is to develop a better understanding of the early support needs of adoptive families and to provide evidence that contributes to the promotion of successful adoption in Wales.

Key findings from the study are presented in a YouTube video which can be accessed by searching for *Wales Adoption Study* or using the link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Sq19WANQsg>

Findings have also been published in a research article and in a practitioner journal for Health Visitors:

- Anthony, R., Meakings, S., Doughty, J., Ottaway, H., Holland, S., & Shelton, K.H. (2016). Factors affecting adoption in Wales: Predictors of variation in time between entry to care and

adoptive placement. *Children and Youth Services*, 67, 184-190.

- Meakings, S., Coffey, A.J. and Shelton, K.H. (2016). A study examining the concerns, support needs and experiences of newly formed adoptive families. *Journal of Health Visiting*, 4(11), 2-9.

The key finding of the study has been that the 'normalisation' of adoption support requires further emphasis (Meakings et al., in preparation). Adoptive families need to know that they are entitled to additional support in the first months of an adoptive placement and to feel able to ask for assistance when they need it thereafter. The majority of adoptive families have support needs, albeit in various forms, during early placement and this does not appear related to the age of children or the background characteristics of adoptive parents.

Support needs include promoting positives sibling relationships both for brothers and sisters placed together, those placed apart and for families negotiating new relationships as a result of the adoptive placement and in managing the relationships as a result of the adoptive placement. Support is needed in managing the relationship between adoptive families and foster carers and understanding the legal processes involved in adoption.

Some of the information provided by parents suggests that a proportion of children have adjustment problems consistent with internalised (e.g. emotional problems) and externalised (e.g. aggressive behaviour) distress. This again signals that specialised support may be required for some parents and their children.

Further information about the support needs of adoptive families and the Wales Adoption Study can be found here: <http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/adoptioncohort/>

### Other developments

- *Western Bay, South East Wales and Vale, Valleys and Cardiff* are working together on exploring caseload weighting as well as on the assessment documents for adoption support.
- *South East Wales* are developing models of intervention, programmes of work and levels of interventions with birth parents.
- *Vale, Valleys and Cardiff* are regularly reviewing adoption support services to assess ongoing service needs, shortfalls and resource implications. They are using temporary resources to improve management of the letterbox system and improve waiting times for access to birth records.
- *Western Bay* has implemented a new model for letterbox contact so now all cases are allocated to an adoption support social worker.

The Wales Adoption Support partnership between *Adoption UK and After Adoption* began operating in Wales in April 2016 supported by the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector grant from Welsh Government.

- The partnership is providing services and expertise across the adoption support agenda both directly to those affected by adoption and to professionals working with them.
- Services include TALK Adoption groups for children and young people.
- Free Adoption UK membership is provided for one year for all families with newly placed children ensuring that adopters start their journey with

support from a network of other adopters.

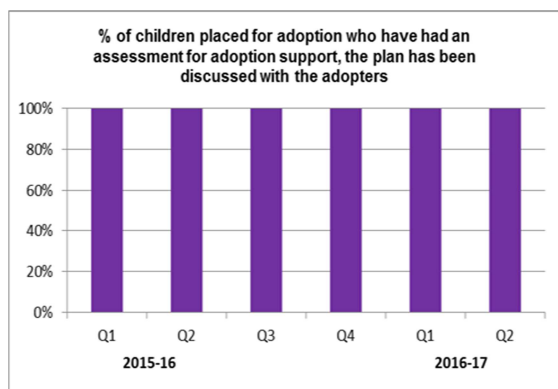
- Regular information and support for all those affected by adoption in Wales through the Wales helpline, bimonthly e-newsletters and support groups.
- The partnership also specialises in providing INSET training for schools and youth providers to raise awareness of the needs of adopted children and young people
- One to One support for families who are experiencing child to parent violence or controlling behaviour are provided by a qualified NVR practitioner.
- The partnership has delivered NVR training this year to the staff in the Western Bay Adoption Service and to adopters in the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff region.

### What is performance telling us?

The performance measurement system that was created for us did not include adoption support services. We are therefore developing this on an incremental basis.

Last year we introduced a measure to identify performance in respect of support plans for new children being placed for adoption. These measures tell us whether plans are in place and whether they have been discussed with the adopters. This is showing good performance so far.

- *100% of adoption support plans are discussed with adopters*



Additional new performance measures have been added this year in respect of adoption support. This is beginning to provide a helpful picture about activity. Not all the measures are yet collectable in all regions but IT systems have been revisited to ensure it can be captured and reports generated.

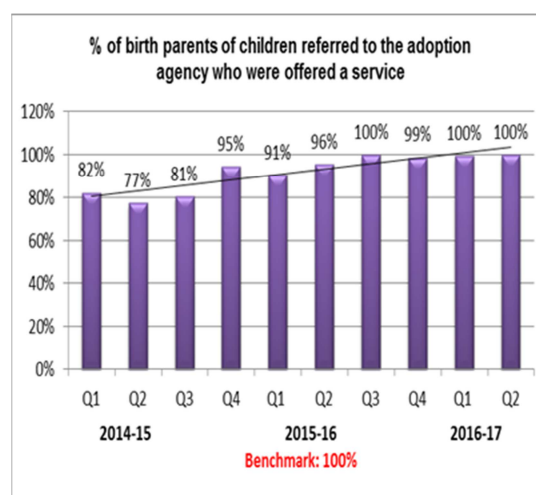
All Wales Adoption Support Referrals	Year to Date
Number of assessment of children currently not receiving an adoption support service	101
Number of adoption assessments started	124
Number of birth parents referred	467
Number of requests for assessment for post adoption support from birth siblings	23
Number of requests for assessment for post adoption support from other adults (relatives/ former guardians) affected by the adoption of a particular child	29
Number of requests for access to birth records	123
Number of requests for intermediary services	57
<b>Total</b>	<b>924</b>

The voluntary adoption agencies collect and provide some of this data and we are working with them to extend what they collect so that it complements but does not duplicate what the regions provide. It is too early to use this information in a meaningful way but it does provide an indication of new demand so far this year.

We have had data on services to birth parents since 2014-15. This was an area of service that required development to ensure that all birth parents that should be referred to the adoption service and offered a service.

There has been a significant 84% increase in birth parents referred to adoption services in Wales since NAS was established. The 476 referred to date this year is almost as many as referred in the whole of 2014-15. All are now being offered a service although take remains low.

- 100% of birth parents offered a service



## Priority 2: Place children effectively and quickly by

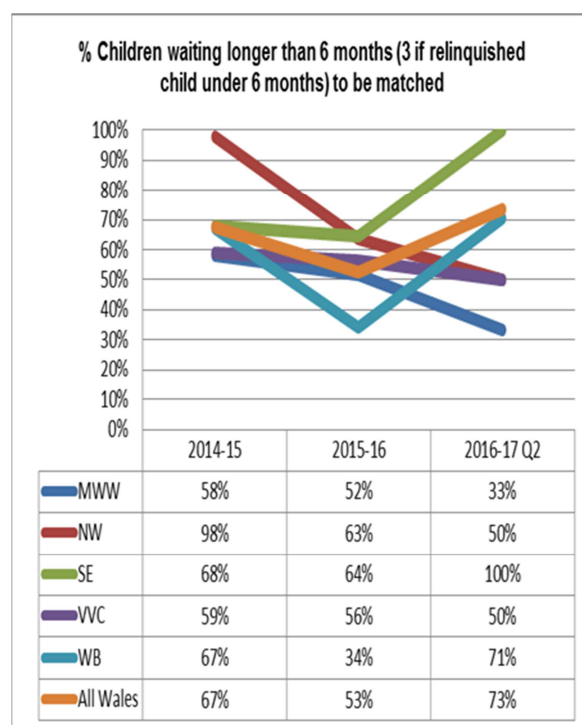
- Implementing the recommendations of the Wales Adoption Register review and multifunctional database project;
- Piloting the foster to adopt provisions outlined in the Social Services & Well-Being Act;
- Implementing the NAS best practice guide for family finding;
- Finding opportunities to participate in discussions with the courts and judiciary about the role of adoption within the family courts.

### How have we done?

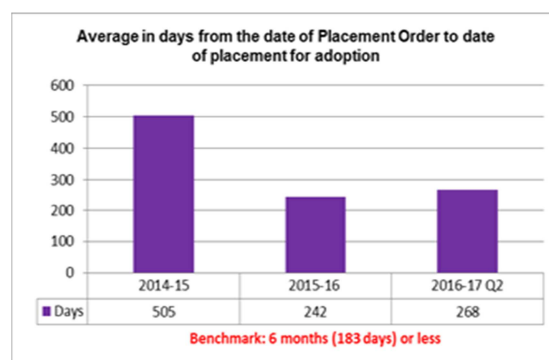
- We are working with the Welsh Government who are commissioning the new Wales Adoption Register and multifunctional database. The revised specification, based on advice and consultation provided by NAS, will go out to tender in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of this year.
- Initial guidance for Foster to Adopt has been developed in conjunction with Afa Cymru and made available to all Adoption services in Wales as well as all Local Authorities. A pilot has not been possible but a number of these arrangements are being considered across Wales.
- A programme of workshops to support the implementation of the best practice guide for family finding has begun. Sarah Coldrick from Afa Cymru is assisting in the facilitation of these.
- The Heads of Service in the lead authorities for the regional adoption collaborations meet regularly with their local Family Justice Board. There is a particularly good relationship in North Wales where the District Family Court Judge meets with the adoption service periodically.

## What does Performance tell us?

In three regions more children are being matched within 6 months of the 'should be placed' decision. The all Wales average in numbers and proportions of children waiting longer than this had been falling: at mid-year higher levels in two regions was pulling the average upwards.



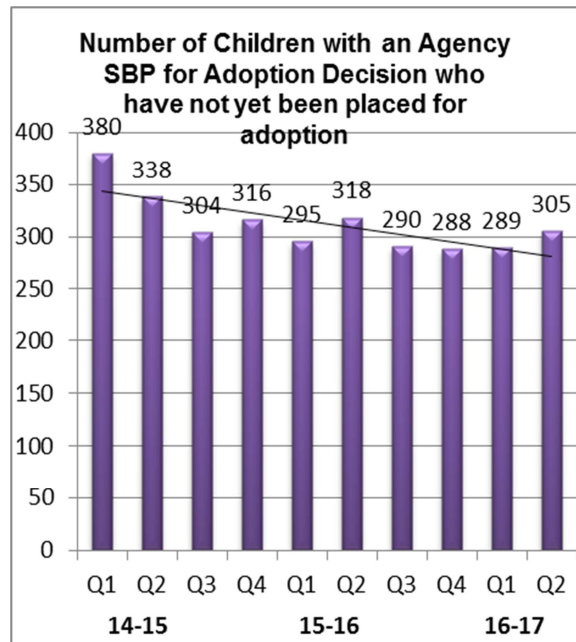
The average time it takes a child to be placed for adoption in Wales once the placement order is made is also falling although there is a small increase so far this year. Overall however this has almost halved since NAS was formed.



South East Wales, Western Bay and Mid and West Wales are meeting the benchmark for placing children within 6 months of the placement order being granted but the all Wales average is being pulled up by the performance in the two other regions.

There are emerging indicators that the improvements in the time taken for children to be placed at all stages of the process are beginning to reverse. This is something we are monitoring closely. Regions report that this is primarily due to court challenges, although complex children, foster carer adoptions, and other local issues are also cited. We will continue to focus on this.

Numbers of children waiting for a placement is on an overall downward trend although quarter 2 shows a small increase.



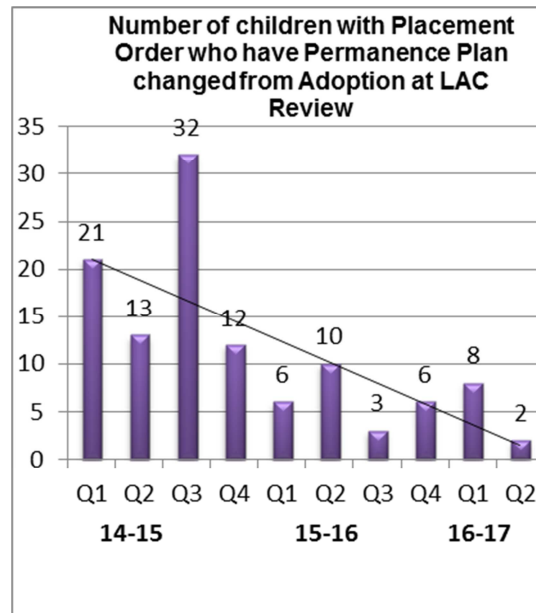
We have been concerned about the level of children waiting who have a placement order but no match. This has been consistently in the region of 80% of the children waiting with the remainder being

children who already have a match or do not yet have a placement order granted.

At mid-year

- 10% or 32 children did not yet have a placement order granted by the court
- 8% or 23 children had a placement order and already had a match agreed
- 82% or 250 children had a placement order but no firm match agreed. This ranges from 20 children in one region to 82 in a larger region. All the regions report that a significant proportion of these children have firm links although the formal matching decision has not yet been made. In North Wales for example only 20% of these children did not have a firm link progressing.

More children with a plan for adoption have that plan progressed with the numbers of plans being changed reducing significantly.



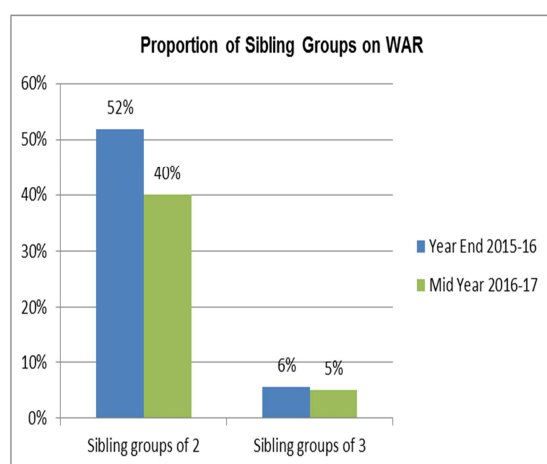
The number of matches made that do not proceed to placement remains very low; less than 10 so far this year.

## What is behind this?

### *Wales Adoption Register*

All children are referred or registered with the register to ensure delay is minimised in family finding if there are no suitable adopters available within the regions. The register is monitored closely and data is available to regions and agencies on a weekly basis.

Our aim is to further reduce the proportions of siblings and older children on the Register.



There is progress in reducing the proportion of sibling groups on the register and children aged 2-3 but the ability to place children aged 4-8 remains challenging.

Regions continue to report that sibling groups and children with complex needs are the most challenging to place. Our '#SeeTheWholeChild' campaign is aimed at helping recruit adopters for these children.

Children who have been on the register for more than 6 months are identified to the regions and followed up on a monthly basis. Numbers are small; at September 30<sup>th</sup> 2016 there were just 22 children who

had been on the Register for more than 6 months.

*Barnardo's* and *St David's* meet quarterly with the register staff to review the children who are waiting and work through possible matches with their approved adopters. By the mid-year point 4 children have been placed with Barnardos adopters and 13 with St David's.

### *Adoption Link*

The pilot of Adoption Link continued in the early part of the year providing an effective and efficient tool in placing children with complex needs or part of a large sibling group where placements in Wales could not be found. All regions have extended their licence with adoption link until March 2017.

### *Activity Days*

*Vale, Valleys and Cardiff* profiled 5 children at Coram BAAF activity day in Bristol in June.

### *Family Finding practice*

- *South East Wales* has established adoption planning meeting in each of its local authorities.
- *Vale, Valleys and Cardiff* have also reviewed their family finding function; a pre placement order meeting has been added to the process to reduce delay. Regular interface mechanisms have also been established with the local authorities to discuss specific cases / issues and regular dialogue and meetings with medical advisors ensure that issues which delay family finding medicals are resolved and strategies to reduce reoccurrence are in place. A family finding report is generated monthly which provides an analysis to inform ongoing family finding. A new

regional children's guide has also been created and provided to children and adopters.

- In *Western Bay* all children who have a placement order are considered at every linking meeting. The region are planning briefing sessions across their local authorities to give guidance and support to social workers to enable them to use the children's guide for the children where their care plan is adoption. They have also revised the CARB to improve the quality of information and training will be rolled out again across the 3 local authorities. A briefing session with one local authority has been provided around the adoption process.
- *Barnardo's* have a dedicated family finder who reviews all possible links on Link Maker, Adoption Link and the Wales Adoption Register, as well as communicating with the approved adoptive families.
- In St David's all social work staff are highly skilled at managing links and as an agency hold scrutiny meetings once a link is identified to fully explore potential strengths and vulnerabilities.



### Priority 3: Effective recruitment of adopters for the children who are, and are likely to become, available for adoption by

- Finalising and implementing a 2 stage recruitment model for prospective adopters in Wales;
- Rolling out the revised strategy for targeted recruitment #SeeTheWholeChild;
- Considering how we support and work with adopters who are waiting placements.

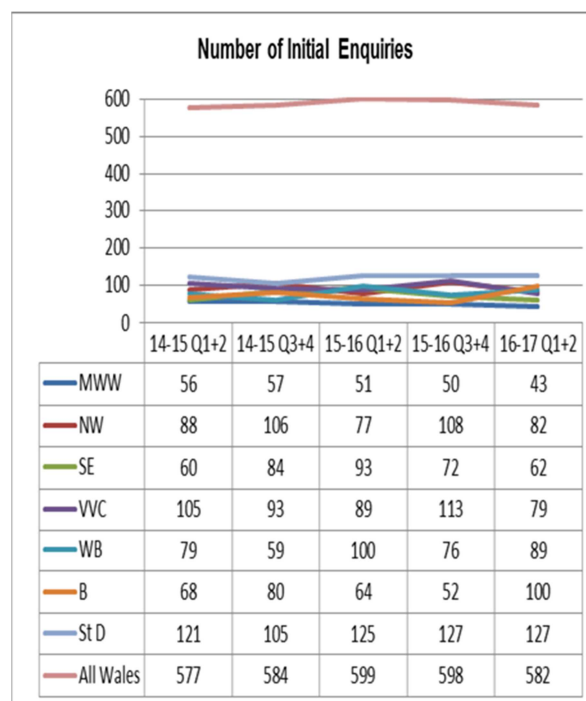
#### How have we done?

- Work has slowed down in relation to the 2 stage recruitment model due to legal advice from the Welsh Government that the proposals will require a change of legislation. We will continue to work with them on this.
- The revised strategy for targeted recruitment, #SeeTheWholeChild, was launched in July 2016 with early positive feedback from some agencies; we will keep it under review and develop linked elements such as a specialist scheme which is proving challenging to progress.
- Agencies are working with their approved adopters to ensure that they have updated information about the children available and the children likely to be available in future. The number of adopters waiting is currently reducing.

#### What is our performance telling us?

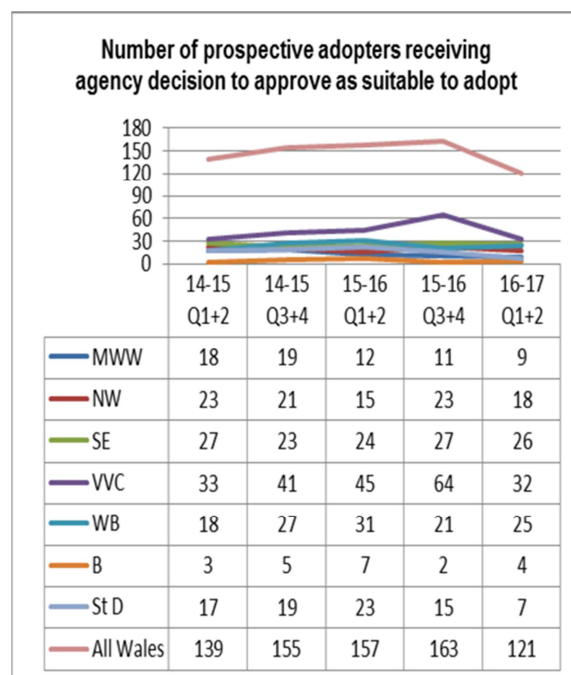
As the targeted recruitment campaign '#SeeTheWholeChild' becomes established we would expect that levels of enquiries progressing to an application to fall. There are early indications that this is the case so far this year. Levels of

enquiries remain relatively stable but some agencies report that fewer are converting into applications.

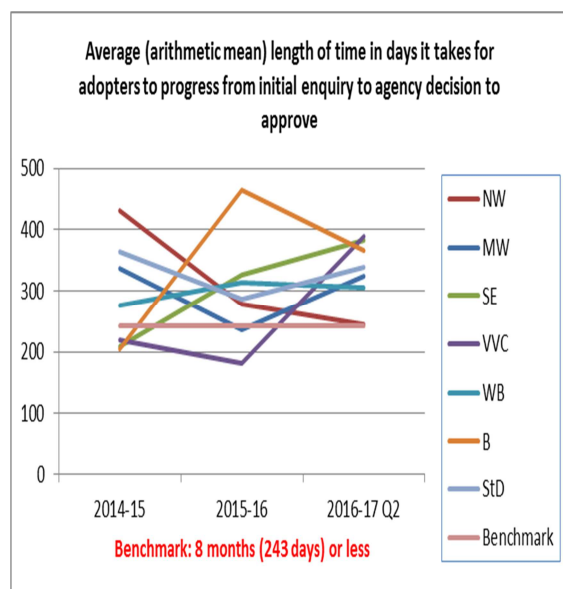


100% of these initial enquires are responded to within 5 working days.

121 adopters have been approved by the mid-year point. This is fewer than at the same stage in the past two years.



The average time taken to approve an adopter has increased in the early part of this year and moving away from the 8 month benchmark which was being met by 2 regions at the end of last year. So far this year only the North Wales regional service is meeting this benchmark.



There is significant variation amongst agencies and regions; the range is currently between 15 months and 8 months. The issues behind this are linked to working at the pace of adopters or operational issues only some of which is directly controllable e.g. all experience delays with DBS checks being returned. All are working to ensure that approvals are completed in as timely a way as possible.

One agency has calculated that on average there is a 5 months delay between the enquiry and a formal application being made by the prospective adopter. We are looking at introducing an additional measure so that it can also measure how long it takes between application and approval.

## What is behind this?

### **Information and training for prospective adopters**

Regions and agencies have been working hard to ensure the training they offer is regular, of good quality and relevant to current needs.

- In *North Wales* the adopter pre approval training takes place every month to ensure the wait to allocate cases for assessment is minimised. The service has maintained their improvement in timescales following last year's 'end to end' review of all processes.
- *South East Wales* have increased the number of 'preparation training' sessions to 6 per year with the capacity to train up to 12 sets of adopters on each course. A small focus group has been looking at improving the referral and assessment process with the senior practitioners meeting regularly to consider numbers and profiles of children.
- *Vale, Valleys and Cardiff* have revamped the format of their Information Evenings and it is felt that the adopters coming forward are more knowledgeable and understanding of the needs of children. This region has also invested in the service of our part time Marketing Officer, seconded from Barnardo's, to develop their website which will be a key tool to promote the service and promote recruitment.
- The adopter pre approval training in *Western Bay* has been developed significantly. With adoption support being a significant and vital focus they have ensured their training, assessment and preparation of adopters reflects this with a section relating to the adoption support network added to the PAR. Applicants

are encouraged to participate in a family group meeting where scenarios of the types of children and situations are shared. The region is in the process of exploring an online training module for prospective adopters and also working on a toolkit for adopter assessments which groups together resources for all assessing staff to use with prospective adopters. This ensures staff are exposed to ideas and new resources, therefore, keeping practice fresh and innovative. It also equips less confident staff with the necessary 'road map' to assist in the development of their assessing skills. In the last 6 months a number of assessments have been highlighted as being of exceptional quality with panel.

- St David's facilitate 6 preparation to adopt courses per year and also facilitate post approval workshops including topics such as linking and introductions, brothers and sisters and talking to children about adoption.

### **Recruitment**

The National Adoption Service communicates effectively via social media and now has a day a week dedicated part time marketing post, seconded from Barnardo's, supporting the whole service. In conjunction with the marketing and media sub group we are effective in exploiting opportunities to publicise adoption services.

The launch of the '#SeeTheWholeChild' campaign in July was the culmination of development work which included marketing collateral such as leaflets, banners and video case studies which are being well used and continue to be available on the website ([www.adoptcymru.com](http://www.adoptcymru.com)). Another element of the strategy is all regions and

agencies using an agreed marketing and recruitment 'script' for their localised recruitment containing information about children being referred to increase the confidence of prospective adopters about their ability to parent these children. Recruiting adopters able to meet the needs of the children likely to be available remains a challenge in some parts of Wales and we will continue to focus on this.

## Priority 4: Performance and infrastructure

- Working with the Welsh Government to develop a positive response to the recent NAFW 'Follow-up Inquiry into Adoption Services in Wales';
- Continuing to monitor performance and work towards the performance benchmarks;
- Developing a NAS workforce strategy for 2017-18 onwards with regions and training managers;
- Securing a revised central team budget that meets needs;
- Updating and implementing the strategy for engaging with adopters, children and young people and other adults who use adoption services.

### How have we done?

- NAS response to the NAFW Follow up inquiry into adoption service in Wales was agreed at September Governance Board.
- Quarterly performance reports continue to be provided and include new Adoption support performance measures.
- NAS met with new Chief Executive Officer of the Care Council for Wales and with the ADSS workforce lead as well as developing an initial position statement on workforce issues in adoption.
- Revised budget for the NAS Central Team has been secured for 2017-18 onwards.
- Revised strategy for engaging with adopters, children and young people and other adults who use adoption services was agreed at September Governance Board.
- Engagement events held in South East Wales and North Wales provided positive feedback in relation to

support from social workers, training and becoming a family. The adopters identified the areas they felt needed most attention: support at court; access to CAMHS; education services being adoption aware; and life story work.

### What else is relevant?

#### *Budgets*

Resources remain under pressure across all services in the context of the new legislation and increased demand. We are working towards a regular collection of financial information to help us understand this better. One region has experienced a reduction in its allocation this year and budgets very likely to be cut in other regional adoption services in 2017-18 and beyond. Changes will need to be made to services to accommodate and manage this.

#### *Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant*

The two successful bids across 3 of the VAA's brought £350,000 this year into adoption services in Wales from April 2016 plus an additional amount to support AFA Cymru in its whole sector role as a knowledge base and best practice centre for permanence. The key areas of delivery for the adoption grant aid include recruitment and assessment of adopters, matching and placement of children and adoption support. We continue to work with the VAA's to ensure this grant aid is aligned to the priorities of the national Adoption Service.

#### *Inter Country Adoption Charging Policy*

The Common Policies sub group have led a small task and finish group to revised and develop an all Wales charging policy for intercountry adoptions. This will soon be available for consultation.

### *Performance Data Collection*

All regions and agencies are developing their systems to be able to collect all data electronically. The Aspireview system has been updated so all the performance measures can be uploaded onto the system and the graphs can be copied into other documents as required. We have issued the 'Performance Measures Gazetteer' which has proven to be helpful as provides definitions for each measure and explains which measures are used to calculate the averages and percentages, thus providing more confidence in the consistency of data provided. The numbers of measures collected has increased since April mainly due to additional adoption support measures. Regions and agencies are using the data to inform development as well as for performance.

### *Wales Community Care Information Service (WCCIS)*

WCCIS is a National system that has been procured to supports all Community Health and Social Care services in Wales. It is currently being rolled out across wales with Bridgend going live in April this year followed by Ceredigion. The opportunity therefore is to develop national adoption process within WCCIS usable for both social services and the relevant health processes. The adoption module is being developed and an all Wales workshop will be held to agree it.

### *Governance of the National Adoption Service*

The National Adoption Service is a network of interdependent services operating at local, regional and national levels through local government and the voluntary sector. Decision making and

supporting the effective operation is facilitated through a number of meetings:

- The Governance Board provides strategic direction in the development and delivery of the NAS;
- The Advisory Group provides professional advice and support to the Governance Board in order to inform the overall strategic direction of the NAS and supporting the effective operation of the NAS to ensure that it promotes best practice;
- The Lead Authority Business Planning meeting supports the strategic, developmental and resource planning of the National Adoption Service, with a particular focus on the local government elements;
- Each collaborative has a Regional Management Board who manage and have oversight of the regional collaborative operation; and
- The Regional Adoption Managers meetings support the Governance Board and Advisory Group to achieve their functions primarily, by promoting as much consistency as appropriate in the implementation of the policies and procedures at a Regional level and by promoting and encouraging shared learning to achieve best practice in the delivery of adoption services.