Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Cenedlaethol | National Adoption Service

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

MID YEAR REVIEW
2015-2016

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

North Wales **Adoption Service** Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Gogledd Cymru

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

Western Bay **ADOPTION SERVICE GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU** Bae'r Gorllewin

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

Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant St David's Children Society

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

after adoption

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

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

Introduction and overview

This report has been produced to provide an update on the National Adoption Service at the mid-point of the 2015/16 business year. The report fulfils the requirement in regulation 13(2)(d)of the 'Directions Powers' for a 6-month interim report by December 31st each year and contains the following;:

- An analysis of the National Adoption Service Work plan for 15/16;
- Adoption in context – how adoption fits within the wider context of services to vulnerable children;
- A comment on the priorities for the rest of the year and beyond.

There are a number of places in this report where the performance of adoption services is referred to. There are however some highlights to summarise.

- ➢ Children with an adoption plan continue to be placed more quickly; so far this year we have seen a further 2.3 month reduction, to 14.3 months, in the average time between a child becoming looked after and being placed for adoption.
- ➢ Fewer children are waiting for a placement and fewer children are having their plan for adoption changed due to lack of placements. Levels of disruption remain low.
- ➢ A new indicator in relation to adoption support plans shows promising performance.
- ➢ Fewer children have been placed for adoption than at the same point last year. This is linked to court interpretation of a number of cases that were the subject of appeals in the High Court; this is resulting in fewer placement orders due to other permanence options being pursued for some children.
- ➢ 141 adopters have been approved so far this year; almost the same number as the same period last year. The average length of time it takes for an adopter to be approved has improved by a small margin to 9 months.
- ➢ The level of enquiries from prospective adopters is being maintained and increased numbers are receiving initial visits or attending information evenings although the average initial response time to enquiries, within 5 working days, to enquiries fell a little to 95%. The proportion of adopters not proceeding beyond an initial enquiry remains at around one third although reviews of this in two regions

and a VAA clearly indicate that this is primarily due to adopter choice rather than agency systems and processes.

➢ There is now much clearer evidence that the profile of the children that adopters wish to adopt does not match the profile of Welsh children waiting to be adopted.

➢ The performance of some aspects of service remains extremely challenging namely that related to 'life journey' materials for children and the service to birth parents; there are early signs of improvement but these are small and slow.

Another factor to note is that during the summer of 2015 the National Adoption Service was asked to take on the management of the Wales Adoption Register when the former provider went into administration. It was a considerable task to bring a functioning service into local government and involved transferring existing staff and IT systems in a very short space of time. We are pleased to say that this was achieved successfully with minimal disruption to service and with excellent support from our host authority.

There will be no significant changes to the priorities of the National Adoption Service for the remainder of this year. All the areas highlighted in the current plan need to be progressed although for some of these the information we now have enables us to specifically focus on certain features.

Suzanne Griffiths
Director of Operations
National Adoption Service for Wales

Analysis of the National Adoption Service work plan

We feel we are making good progress in implementing the plan that was set for this year. There were six priorities in the plan; an update on each priority follows.

Priority 1: Recruit more adopters, including more adopters for sibling groups and older children.
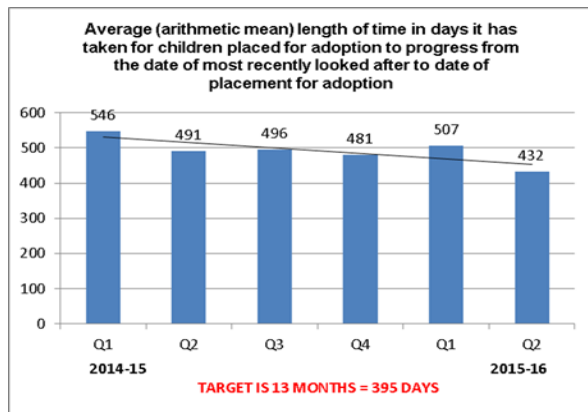
Why it matters: It will make sure we have the widest possible choice of adoption placements.

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.
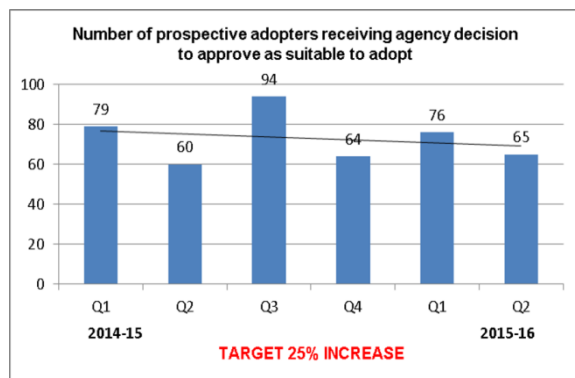
What we said we would do	What we have done so far?
Look at everything from someone's first enquiry to their approval as an adopter. Then develop a model of best practice. And then use the model nationally.	We are working with our regional collaboratives, the voluntary adoption agencies and the Welsh Government Innovation Team to review processes and develop the best practice model for Wales. Some of the regional collaboratives were already looking at their recruitment process which has been a great help. The work is progressing well and is on target to be completed by the end of the year; it is taking account of recognised best practice in the field but most importantly is also being informed by adopters who are involved in the work.
Agree a national adopter recruitment strategy.	Our media and marketing subgroup have developed a National Marketing Strategy. The Welsh Government have provided grant aid to us to develop a suite of flexible tools and messaging to support this. We are about to commission the development of these tools which will be available for national and agency use over time.

Think of different ways to market adoption, and use those different ways.	As above there is good progress so far in developing this although we foresee some challenges in co-ordinating the resources currently deployed to marketing in a different way.
Change the culture of organisations, and the way organisations do things.	This is a long term strategy and we have begun to make inroads into it by the work described above and in the work being done to meet our other priorities

What did we say success would be?	How are we doing?
The time between a child going into care and being placed for adoption is 13 months (or less). Average (arithmetic mean) length of time in days it has taken for children placed for adoption to progress from the date of most recently looked after to date of placement for adoption Q1 2014-15: 546, Q2: 491, Q3: 496, Q4: 481, Q1 2015-16: 507, Q2: 432 TARGET IS 13 MONTHS = 395 DAYS	**Timeliness in placing children for adoption continues to improve**. The overall average length of time between a child becoming looked after and being placed for adoption has reduced further to an average of 14.2 months. This is a 12 month improvement since April 2014 and an in year improvement since the end of year figure for 2014/5 of 16.5 months. There are regional variations in how quickly children are on average placed; the Mid and West Wales Adoption Service and Vale, Valleys and Cardiff regions were achieving the target we set (of 13 months) at mid-year.

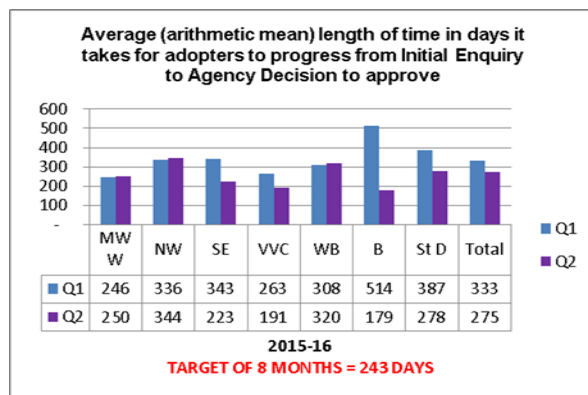| What did we say success would be?	How are we doing?
There are at least 25% more adopters. **Number of prospective adopters receiving agency decision to approve as suitable to adopt** Q1 2014-15: 79 Q2: 60 Q3: 94 Q4: 64 Q1 2015-16: 76 Q2: 65 TARGET 25% INCREASE	**141 adopters had been approved by the mid-year point.** This is a very similar number to that approved in the same period last year. This and the fact that there has been a similar level of enquiries to the same period last year, would indicate that we are likely to achieve a similar number of approvals as last year but not the increase we were seeking. Considering the recent down turn in numbers of children needing adoption, this should not impact on the availability of adoptive placements. It does concentrate our focus on recruiting adopters for children with additional needs, sibling groups and older children who are currently waiting for adoption placements
Average time - first enquiry to approval of adopters is 8 months or less. **Average (arithmetic mean) length of time in days it takes for adopters to progress from Initial Enquiry to Agency Decision to approve** 		MWW	NW	SE	VVC	WB	B	St D	Total
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Q1	246	336	343	263	308	514	387	333
Q2	250	344	223	191	320	179	278	275 | 2015-16 TARGET OF 8 MONTHS = 243 DAYS	**The average length of time it takes for an adopter to be approved has improved further by a small margin.** The mid-year average was 9 months, compared to 9.4 months for 2014/15 and our target of 8 months. There are significant variations from quarter to quarter and between agencies that are being examined; we anticipate that in future the best practice model will also help reduce these. At the mid-year point a number of agencies were within or near to the target; Mid and West Wales, South East Wales, Vale Valleys and Cardiff and Barnardos.

There are fewer sibling groups and older children waiting for adoption.	There are indicators of progress on this but a better measure is likely to be at the end of a full year when we can more confident about the data on this from the Wales Adoption Register. At the mid-year point the Wales Adoption Register was showing 31 children for whom there was no or a very limited potential match; all part of a sibling groups or older. This compares to the end of March 2015 when there were 62 children on the Wales Adoption Register available to be matched of which three quarters were part of a sibling group and over half aged between 5 and 8 years.
We have agreed and use the best practice model for the recruitment of adopters.	As above this work is progressing
We have agreed a multi-media recruitment campaign.	As above this work is progressing

What has been happening around Wales about this?
Vale, Valleys and Cardiff's regular programme of information evenings and training are focussing upon the needs of older children and sibling groups. The region has also undertaken an audit of their approved adopters. The profiles of the children currently awaiting placement do not match their current adopters so they are planning to change their approach to recruitment.

Western Bay is on target to achieve a 30% increase in the number of adopters approved; attributed to harnessing increased awareness of adoption through the media, an improved website and use of more social media as well as combining the strong reputations of the three adoption services. The regions pre approval training has also been expanded to include a 4th day which looks at support needs and services with contributions from the medical advisor and adopters. This has resulted in more adopters for older children, sibling groups and children with complex needs.

St David's Children Society has specifically targeted recruitment activity to those children who wait the longest for families – sibling groups and older children - through the website, National Adoption Week 'Opt to adopt' campaign and clear messaging. They have also have revised their information booklet for prospective adoptive families and have specifically targeted training (brothers and sisters).

Priority 2:   More children are placed without delays.

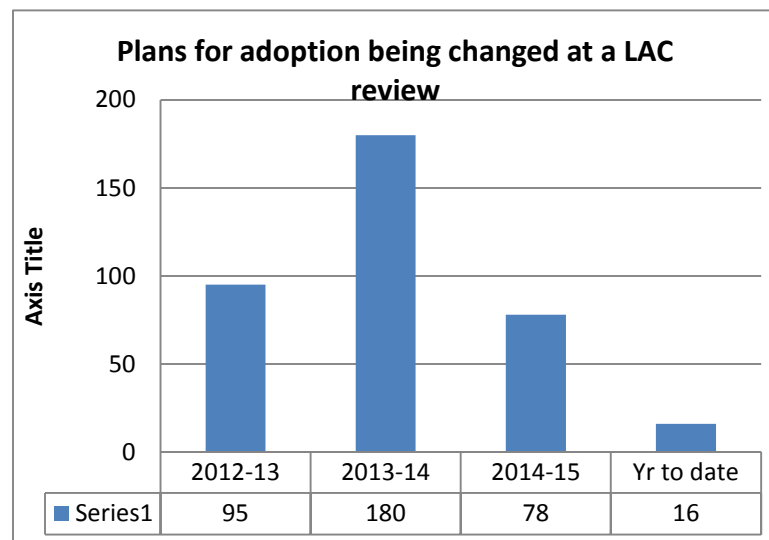**Why it matters:**   It means we have got better at matching children with potential adopters.

It means the adoption process is working more smoothly. This includes improving how social workers work together.

What we said we would do	What we have done so far?
Agree and use a national way to find children an adoptive family.	The work on this best practice model is nearing completion. We are putting the final touches to it which includes ensuring that it is fully up to date with the provisions in the new Social Services and Well Being Act (Wales). After a final round of agency consultation we will be seeking to implement it as soon as practicable. Alongside this we have been ensuring that agencies have available to them all appropriate tools / mechanisms to support them in the family finding task. So as well as reviewing use of magazines that have traditionally been used we are currently piloting the use of an on-line system called 'Adoption Link'. Elsewhere we refer to the fact that over the summer we were asked to take on management of the Wales Adoption Register; this is obviously also key tool for family finding in Wales. We need to work on ensuring this is used effectively alongside thinking about its future in a review that is planned.
Work with local councils to help them plan for children's long term futures.	All of the work we are doing is contributing to this. Additionally however the National Adoption Service is involved in work, being led by Welsh Government, aimed at improving outcomes for children. We are a member of the Strategic Steering Group and involved in relevant task groups so this will inform any other work we do directly with local councils. We have also been working with Welsh Government to influence the content

of the regulations and codes of practice that sit under the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014 so that the implications for adoption services are clear and included in the codes of practice where they need to be. Some, but not all, of our recommendations have been included and we continue to work on this.

What did we say success would be?	How are we doing?
There is a NAS Family Finding process for all children in Wales who need an adoptive family.	As above work on this is well advanced
No more than 4 out of 10 children wait more than 6 months from a decision that adoption is the best option (a "should be placed" decision) to their match with approved adopters.	**We are achieving a gradual reduction in this with the mid-year average figure at 47%.** This compares to year - end performance for 2014-15 of 67.49%. There are quarterly as well as regional variations. 42 children waited longer than 6 months during quarter 2 which is the lowest quarterly figure since April 2014 and represents a 39% reduction since then. Western Bay achieved the target of 40% in quarter 2 while Mid and West Wales were also close to it.

% of children matched who have waited longer than 6 months (or 3 months for a relinquished child under 6 months) to progress from date of SBP for adoption decision to date of agency decision to approve match

	MWW	NW	SE	VVC	WB	Total
Q1	40%	56%	80%	65%	50%	60%
Q2	44%	50%	58%	50%	32%	47%

2015-16
TARGET IS 40%

We have halved the number of children whose plan for adoption is changed.

Plans for adoption being changed at a LAC review

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	Yr to date
Series1	95	180	78	16

(Axis Title, values from 0 to 200)

Fewer children are having their plans for adoption changed.

This has been the case for less than 20 children so far this year.

We have found that where this happens it is usually because a suitable adoptive placement cannot be found although for a small number of children it because a good alternative for them has been found through another means e.g. a Special Guardianship order. There currently are no discernible regional trends in when this occurs.

Indications are that if the rate at which this is happening stays as it is the target to reduce this by at least half will be met.

What has been happening around Wales?

North Wales has achieved a significant decrease in the number of children waiting for placements this has made it easier to match newly referred children quickly.

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff, *Western Bay* and *Mid and West Wales* are involved very early on in planning for children so both regions are building up a good knowledge of the needs of the children likely to require placement and regular meetings consider all children waiting against the available adopters before looking outside the region.

In *Vale Valleys and Cardiff* a designated officer in each local authority secures any necessary agreement for external funding thus avoiding delay. The Region also co-ordinates the 'should be placed for adoption' process on behalf of the four local authorities enabling them to streamline the child referral and decision making

process.

Western Bay has seen a reduction of the time taken to identify links for children with complex needs and in sibling groups being placed in a timely manner. In addition, there are some excellent good news stories where children with complex needs have, after a number of years without links have been linked and placed.

Managers in **Mid and West Wales** take the lead in constantly promoting the importance of timescales alongside good practice.

South East Wales has been able to 'fast track' some assessments for adopters that meet the needs of children with very specific needs e.g. sibling groups so these children have waited a shorter time than usual.
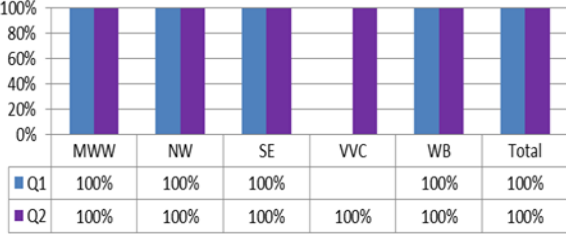
Priority 3:   Better adoption support

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

What we said we would do	What we have done so far?
Do what is says in our framework for thinking about adoption support services.	An overarching strategy has been agreed which provides for the development of a three tier service to adopters across Wales, consisting of universal services, targeted services and specialist services. It is an area of the adoption service that we are working hard on nationally and locally. All of the regional collaboratives are working to develop services within the overall framework and, supported by a Welsh Government grant, we recently announced an initiative to offer all new adopters this year a chance to join Adoption UK, a support organisation run by other adopters providing a range of peer support services. Alongside this Adoption UK will be providing training for us to develop the skills of social workers and adopters in managing more difficult behaviour. In doing these two things we hope we are ensuring that there is some universal support available plus something more specialist thereby plugging some immediate gaps while we work on everything else. We are also looking at some of the models of best practice in provision of support services with a view to considering whether any of these can be developed in Wales over time. There are however examples of good practice both within the voluntary sector, St David's Children Society and in the regional collaboratives, Mid and West Wales for example which are in line with the overall approach and are informing it.

What we said we would do	What we have done so far?
Make sure everyone knows what has already been agreed about adoption support	What is already being provided has been mapped across Wales and we are in the process of making this information widely available so adopters and children and young people know what is actually there for them at the current time. This is posted on the National Adoption Service website and agencies are working with us to draw adopter's attention to it.

We are currently scoping the potential to develop a data base of adopters that can be used to keep in touch with all adopters who desire this and be the mechanism for keeping in touch, provision of information and updates about services.

We also plan to develop the National Adoption Website to create a section about adoption support services. |
| Make it easier to get an assessment for adoption support services | As part of the consideration of models for Wales, we will be reviewing where, and by whom, assessments for adoption support services are done. This will have a particular focus on new requests when a child is a bit older and come back for some support. This is with a view to developing proposals for the future consistent management of these. |
| Make sure adopters are treated consistently in terms of financial support | We are mid-way through a review of the use of financial allowances which will also provide proposals for a more transparent and fair use of these across Wales. |

What we said we would do	What we have done so far?
Listen to what adopters and children and young people are telling us about their priorities	We continue to engage with adopters and adopted children and young people so that we know what these are. We are aware that adopters are watching the levels of investment that are happening in other parts of the UK, particularly just across the border in England and asking why the same isn't happening in Wales. It is difficult to provide a justification for this. Unfortunately this is not something the National Adoption Service can address but our focus is ensuring we are using the resources currently available in the best way.
Agree plans to develop support for adopted children and their parents from health and education services	We have focussed so far in ensuring that these services are represented in discussions nationally and regionally so that we can work with them in the future. We have also been investing in creating good relationships with the relevant parts of Welsh Government to influence policy direction etc. Success in this has varied so far and we know that there is more work to do to develop and focus this. Some good initiatives are however in hand nationally and regionally. We know that the support from medical advisors to adopters during matching is developing very well and the links made with CAMHS services nationally and in some regions provide a promising platform for the future. Some regions have developed good links with psychology services and are piloting schemes which show promising outcomes. With the help of one of the VAA's, the education department in Welsh Government is developing materials to help schools understand their adopted children better and has extended a grant schemes to cover adopted children. Some regions have developed good links with looked after children education co-ordinators as a result of which better support to those children who go on to be adopted is being developed.

What did we say success would be?	How are we doing?
All children placed for adoption have been assessed for adoption support services, there is a plan in place, and the plan has been discussed with the adopters % of children placed for adoption whose plan for adoption support has been discussed with adopters 		Q1	Q2
---	---	---
MWW	100%	100%
NW	100%	100%
SE	100%	100%
VVC		100%
WB	100%	100%
Total	100%	100% | TARGET IS 100%	**Initial indications are that performance is positive in terms of these plans being put in place.** This is a new measure was agreed to give some indication of this important aspect of the service, albeit just for new placements, while other more comprehensive measures are developed. We should, by the end of the year, have some qualitative information available from the Wales Cohort Study being conducted by Cardiff University which will help us understand how effective the support provided by these plans is. We already know from research that the way these plans look is not helpful.
There is a system for adopters to stay in contact with adoption services, if this is what the adopter wants	As outlined above we are currently scoping the potential to develop a data base of adopters to do this.
A newsletter, at least once a year, to all adopters.	The media and marketing group is working on a template and mechanism for this at the current time. News and Events across Wales are being collated, published and promoted on our website. This will be developed into a newsletter linked to the database of adopters.

Adopters say it is easy to get information about adoption support services.	We will need to ask adopters about this when some of these initiatives are this in place.
We have reviewed ways to get an adoption support assessment	This review is included in the work on adoption support models which is currently being commissioned.

What did we say success would be?	How are we doing?
At least 3 out of 4 children placed for adoption have life journey materials before their 2nd adoption review. 	**Performance in relation to the provision of 'life journey' materials remains in need of considerable improvement.** The framework measures the availability of life journey materials at the 2nd adoption review. This is itself later than best practice guidance which says that this should be made available over time and be completed by this point. The vital importance of this to children and parents in supporting transition and settling within a new family is well known. At 38% at the mid-year point there is some improvement on 23% last year but performance remains short of the target of 75% and Q1 performance which was 60%. There are ongoing issues with this definition and data collection that we are working to resolve alongside improving practice.

What has been happening around Wales?
South East Wales Adoption Service has a number of Initiatives on-going to improve this area of service. These include an open afternoon/ information sharing session event with the local authorities' independent reviewing officers, bringing consistency to the five local authority adoption planning meetings, raising

awareness at the preparation training and scoping out the potential to deliver training on this to child care social work teams and foster carers. This region has specific CAMHS and psychology time available to children in need of support pre and post adoption.

Improving adoption support is an important element of the **Mid and West Wales** business plan; it is anticipated that aided by their new management committee which has Health, Education and VA representatives they will move to implement the strategy for adoption support that has been agreed. The region is also currently piloting, in one local authority, a scheme to refer all children with a 'should be placed' decision to a service offering psychology input and an emotional needs panel for children. This service is also available for post adoption support and provides a range of services to support the carer, adopter and services involved with the child to work within an individualised plan to meet each child's emotional needs.

Two managers at **Vale Valleys and Cardiff** have completed Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) training and the region currently has a play therapy student on placement providing direct work with some children. The region also facilitated a support group for adoptive families with speakers and discussion on NVR for the first time. A fun day for adoptive families was held in July, with another planned for December and a monthly toddler group has been maintained which is well received.

One of **Western Bay's** local authorities have developed an Attachment Aware School Project using Kate Cairns Associates, providing whole school training in trauma and attachment. The region can also access Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) intervention for children who meet the criteria; an intervention through which a trained practitioner uses video recordings of interactions with the family to enhance communication and relationships. Generally the harmonisation of provision across Western Bay has resulted in more access for adopters and children to groups that meet their needs and the region is developing a regional 'Talk Adoption' group for young people in partnership with After Adoption Wales. A staff member from After Adoption has been seconded to the service for six months; this has provided a valuable resource for the adoption support function but also the opportunity to strengthen working relationships with this VAA.

Adoption UK has been helping the NAS to make the adoption support which is available more widely understood and accessible to those who need it by creating an adoption support flyer and a calendar of

support events for use on the NAS website. Adoptive families are telling AUK that whilst the process for recruiting and assessing adopters and placing children with them has improved since the NAS began, there is still much to be done in the area of post adoption support for those new families and for the families created in the more distant past.

Research has identified that some adoptive families find that their children struggle with their 'big' emotions and that aggression and child to parent violence is something that parents may need to address. *Adoption UK* is currently delivering workshops across Wales for parents and professionals to raise awareness about this difficult subject and is developing a 10 session training programme based on Non Violent Resistance techniques which will be available to families from 2016.

North Wales offers the 'Safe Base' training in partnership with After Adoption to their adopters.

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

What we said we would do	What we have done so far?
Agree how to do this locally and nationally, and then do it	A strategy for engagement with adopters and adopted children & young people for this year was agreed very early on and is being implemented. Some nationally led events have occurred and others are planned for the second half of the year. A key part of this strategy is to work with regions and VAA's to develop ongoing arrangements for the longer term to ensure that there is consistent ongoing engagement. There are already good arrangements in place in some regions and VAA's.

What did we say success would be?	How are we doing?
We have involved people who use adoption services at the national level	We have been working with adopters who have been prepared to tell us their stories and, in some cases be filmed. This helped us with the publication of the Annual Report and keeps the case studies on the website interesting and new. Others have volunteered to be involved in or consulted about the development work that we are doing through our subgroups. We have also been working with VAA partners and the regional services to plan further events for the second half of the year.

We have held at least one event to listen to, learn from and work with adopters.	A meeting with a group of adoptive fathers was held during the summer. Other events with adopters are being planned for the second part of the year.
We have held at least one event to listen to, learn from and work with young people.	An event will be held in the Autumn.
We have agreed how people who use adoption services will be involved in the running of the five regional collaboratives and the five national adoption voluntary organisations.	This work is in progress
A full strategy for how to listen to, learn from and work with people who use adoption services	This work is in progress
Every birth parent is offered counselling. Make sure at least half of the birth parents accept the offer of counselling. 	**The service to birth parents remains in need of improvement.** 301 birth parents have been referred to adoption services so far this year; in Q2 96% of these had been offered a service and 28% took this up. There is variation on a quarter to quarter basis and between regions. Numbers of birth parents being offered a service has improved and is close to the target but take up remains low and short of the target of 50%. There are also some issues with this definition and data collection that we are working to resolve alongside improving practice.

What has been happening around Wales?
North Wales continues to send out questionnaires to all adopters involved in all aspects of the adoption process on an annual basis and when they attend panels. This information is collated, used in the annual review and for improvement. **St David's Children Society** achieve consultation through a number of ways: adoptive parent (25%) representation on Board of trustees (Chair and member)and are Adoption panel members; adoptive parents contribute to website design /content, newsletters and information literature as well as contributing to delivery of training /preparation courses and the recruitment strategy. **South East Wales** have birth parent support groups which are very well attended. The **Vale, Valleys and Cardiff** service to birth parents has improved significantly in that it is now offered on two occasions to birth parents upon referral to the service. Take up of the counselling remains low but there is a clearer system to monitor this and an opportunity to look at ways to improve the service.

Priority 5: Doing better overall

Why it matters It will help us consistently provide high quality adoption services are in Wales

What we said we would do	What we have done so far?
Make sure we know how and when to use data and information	We have put a lot of effort into being able to use effectively the data we have in the Adoption Performance Management Framework. This has included looking at how this complements data that is collected by others and making arrangements to work with them and use this data. We are continually developing this nationally and have used the data in annual reports and at other times when the spotlight has been on adoption services e.g. when out annual report was published and when we took over the Wales Adoption Register.
Develop better data	This is linked to the above and our work with the regions and the VAA's to support them with data collection and use. A workshop was held to ensure that data analysis and reporting was consistent; we also agreed to change how some measures were collected. We recognise that there is more work to do on this and we are considering how we can do this so that there is effective performance measurement in all parts of the National Adoption Service.
Think of ways to measure what is achieved, and not just what is done	We haven't started looking at this yet but are watching with interest the pilot of the Welsh Government Outcomes Framework in 3 local authority children's services departments. This will inform how we begin to develop an outcomes approach for adoption services.
Support the work of the Wales Adoption Register	Our original intentions to work closely with the register, ensure our data was consistent and produce some joint publications were overtaken by us being asked to manage the Register when the organisation that previously managed it went into administration. It was a considerable achievement that the service was able to complete the transfer 'in' of

the Register, with the complexities brought by IT systems, data security and TUPE for staff within a 5 week period, with minimal disruption to service.

The register has been managed by us since September 4th 2915 and we are working on ensuring this it is used effectively alongside thinking about its future in a review that is planned.

What did we say success would be?	How are we doing?
At least 4 reports a year. The reports are easy to read and use.	Reports have been produced to show performance at Q1 and Q2 for the consideration of the Advisory Group and Governance Board. This is in addition to the annual report and this mid-year report that are provided to Welsh Ministers. Production of reports also takes place at regional and agency level for the purposes of Management and Trustee Boards.
There is a system for collecting and analysing local and regional information.	This is in place through the Aspireview Performance Measurement System and some additional data collection that has been agreed.
We have a plan for when the Aspireview contract ends.	This work is in progress. We now know more about the system's capabilities in order to exploit them fully and are aware that on the longer term horizon are the developments of the Wales Community Care Information System (WCCIS) that will support local authority adoption services. Our plan will need to ensure that we are able to take advantage of this major national development alongside having minimal disruption.

What has been happening around Wales?
Vale Valleys and Cardiff is unique in having a Joint Committee which meets twice a year to complement the Management Board which meets bi-monthly and is fully compliant with the membership required by the Directions Powers. The Joint Committee secures the on-going commitment of elected members. ***St David's Children Society*** has commenced a comprehensive review of internal systems re data collation.

Priority 6:   The National Adoption Service is well run

Why it matters   It means local councils, adoption agencies, health and education can work together well

What we said we would do	What we have done so far?
Make sure the national and regional arrangements for running the service are working	There have been 3 Advisory Group meetings and 1 Governance Board meeting up to the mid-year point. All the regional collaborations have established management committee arrangements that have also all met at their agreed frequency. The subgroups that do much of the work of the service have met as needed to undertake the work that is allocated to them.

What did we say success would be?	How are we doing?
The legal rules for running the service at the regional and national level are being followed.	As above the governance arrangements are established and operating. In line with the regulations a conflict of interest protocol has been agreed for the Advisory Group and Governance Board; this is being put in place. The annual report was published on time and made available to

	Welsh Ministers as required. The central elements of the National Adoption Service currently has a fixed budget; it has been challenging to undertake all the tasks required of us within that and we have only recently began to commence some more significant pieces of development work following receipt of a grant from Welsh Government. The budget report for the mid-year point is attached as an appendix.
The voluntary sector, health, education and others are fully involved at the regional and national level	For the most part this has been very successful but there remains some work to do to make this fully functional and there are different challenges nationally and regionally. The relationships nationally with the Health Service and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies in Wales are worthy of note in that both are represented by three 'seats' on the Advisory Group. The current vice chair of the Advisory Group is a manager in one of the voluntary adoption agencies. The Voluntary Adoption Agencies are also represented on the Governance Board by two agencies sharing the role. This is replicated at regional level where these agencies are also included in the membership of the partnership or management board for each regional collaborative; it is acknowledged that these relationships at regional level are less well established and need to develop over time to maximise the impact on service delivery.

What has been happening around Wales on this?

Each Region's management committee or partnership board has met on a regular basis. The Directions require representation from the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and are as follows:

- Mid & West Wales Adoption Service – Afa Cymru
- North Wales Adoption Service – After Adoption
- South East Wales Adoption Service – Barnardo's
- Vale, Valleys & Cardiff – St David's
- Western Bay – Adoption UK.

Progress is being made in relation to health and education representatives being identified but this work in progress.

Agenda items at the meetings cover a wide range of topics and include:

- Partnership agreement;
- Performance and activity information;
- Budget;
- Training;
- Sharing good practice and developments across the region
- Information from NAS;
- Priorities for and progress of business plans;
- Changes in operational practice to improve performance;
- Staffing;
- Restructures;
- Adoption panel;
- ADM decision making;
- Adoption allowances.

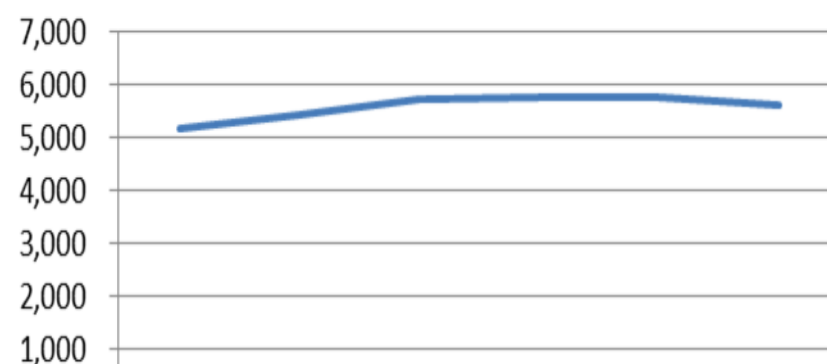# Adoption in context - other important performance information

This mid-year review of Adoption Service performance comes just after the publication of the Welsh Government statistics for 2014/15, and that of the other UK administrations, in respect of looked after children and adoption.   This provides a valuable opportunity to set performance within this wider context.

2014/15 saw a further reduction in the overall numbers of looked after children in Wales at year end.

When children cease to be looked after it is important that this is because permanence with parents who can continue to provide good outcomes is available – whether this is within the child's birth family or by other means including adoption.

The focus in Wales has been on ensuring that adoption is considered as a permanence option when a child cannot return to birth family and ensuring that placements are available for those children for whom it is the plan. There has been a further increase in the number of children adopted in Wales and in the percentage that of the looked

Numbers of Looked After Children & Children Adopted in Wales

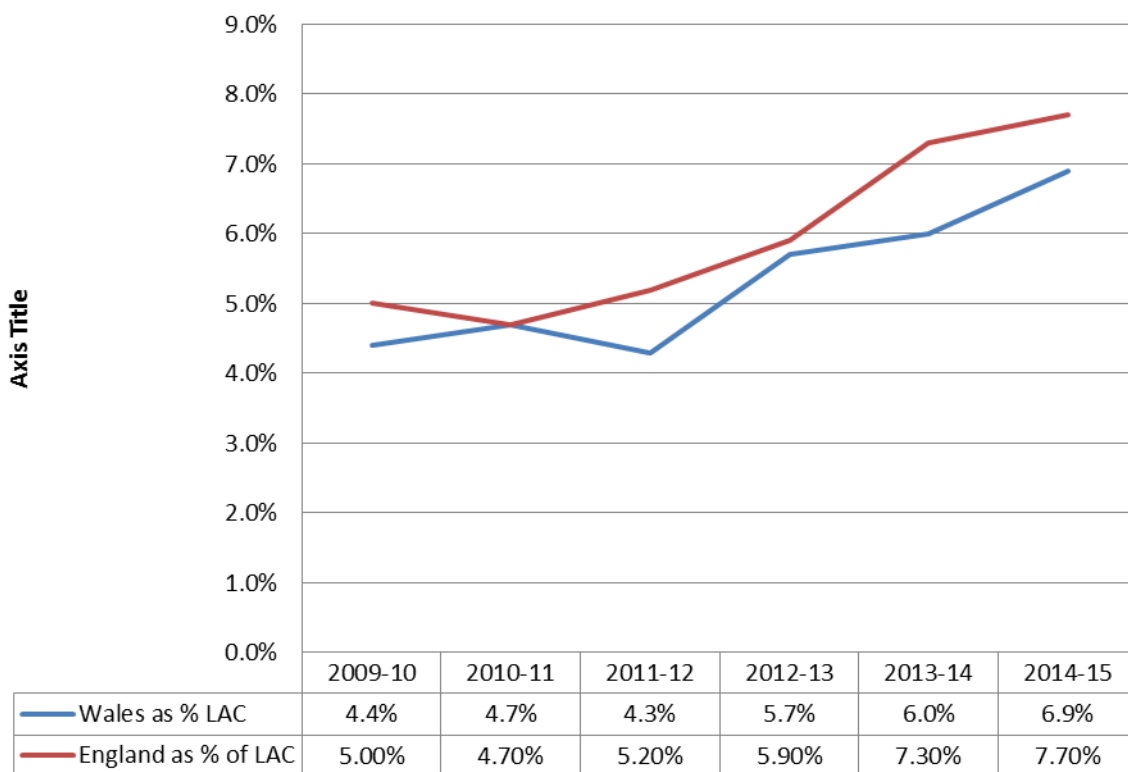|	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Looked After Children	5,160	5,410	5,720	5,765	5,755	5,615
Children Adopted	230	255	245	330	345	380
%		4%	5%	4%	6%	6%	7%

after population that this represents, continuing an upward trend for Wales.

The published government data allows us to compare the proportions of looked after children adopted in Wales and England.

There is an upward trend in both countries over the last 6 years, likely as a result of the focus within government policy on increasing the use and availability of adoption although the nature of the policies and the levels of investment have differed between Wales and England.

There is no 'right' proportion; adoption is only right for those children for whom it is agreed through detailed and careful consideration.

Children adopted as % of looked after population Wales & England

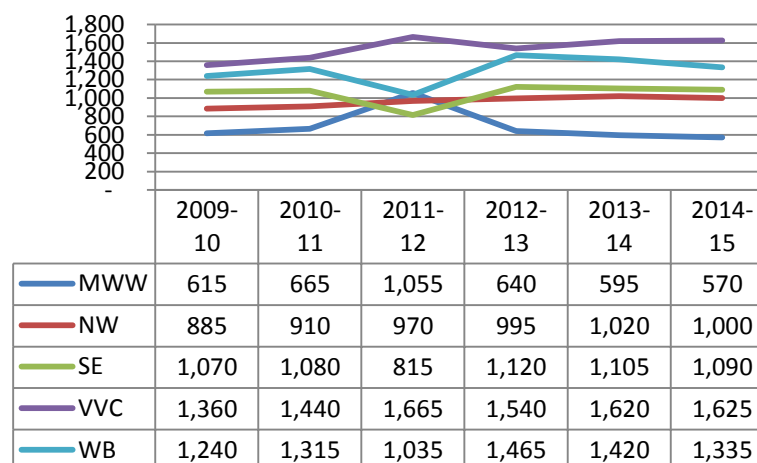|	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Wales as % LAC	4.4%	4.7%	4.3%	5.7%	6.0%	6.9%
England as % of LAC	5.00%	4.70%	5.20%	5.90%	7.30%	7.70%

The overall increase in the use of adoption in Wales is not evenly distributed. The differences in the overall percentage of children adopted in the areas that now form the regional collaboratives can be seen in Graph A below. Clearly this relates to differences in practice in their constituent local authorities over time albeit set against the backdrop of a Wales and UK wide focus on increasing the use of adoption.

There has been an increase in the use of adoption in all but one area although there has been a recent down turn in its use in one other and it has levelled off in another. The latter is almost certainly due to local policies in some authorities focusing on early intervention, prevention and family support in a different way long before children become looked after.

Graph A: Children adopted as % looked after population each regional area

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
MWW	2%	2%	4%	6%	8%	6%
NW	3%	3%	1%	3%	2%	3%
SE	2%	4%	4%	5%	6%	10%
VVC	4%	4%	3%	5%	4%	6%
WB	4%	4%	5%	6%	7%	7%

Graph B: Regional area LAC population trends

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
MWW	615	665	1,055	640	595	570
NW	885	910	970	995	1,020	1,000
SE	1,070	1,080	815	1,120	1,105	1,090
VVC	1,360	1,440	1,665	1,540	1,620	1,625
WB	1,240	1,315	1,035	1,465	1,420	1,335

The trend in proportions of children adopted in each regional area does not appear to bear a strong relationship to the changes over time in their aggregate looked after population (Graph B) although the 3 regions where usage of adoption has reduced or stayed the same have a similar recent pattern in numbers of looked after children.

The variation is however something for the Welsh Government to consider in the context of its emerging strategy for looked after children alongside the National Adoption Service and partners considering the practice issues.

We know there is a need to develop adoption support services to better support the children and families who need some extra help.

Working on the figures for the last 18 years we have estimated that there are about 4,300 adopted children under the age of 18 in Wales.

Research tells us that about 2/3rds of children placed will need a level of support at some stage although only 1/3rd likely to need ongoing services for periods of time.
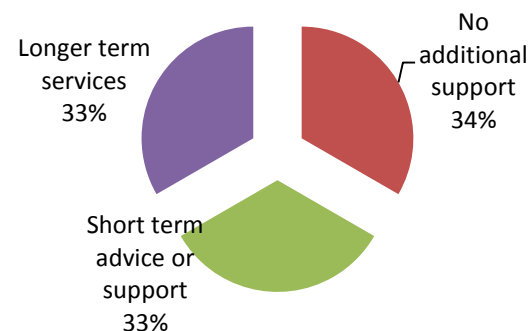
We can use these figures to plan the services we need.

Adoption Support estimates

Longer term services 33%

No additional support 34%

Short term advice or support 33%

As noted above there were 383 children adopted in Wales last year – 6.8% of the looked after population.
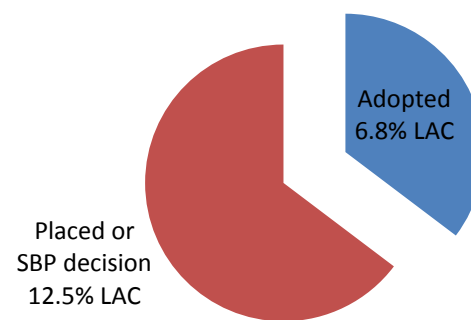
In addition to this, at the end of the year there were a further 386 children who had been placed for adoption and were awaiting the final adoption order plus 316 children who were subject to a 'should be placed' decision who had not yet been placed.   This equates to a further 702 children who were being actively worked with by adoption services at the end of the year - a further 12.5% of the looked after population at the year end point.

When you consider other children on early referral to adoption services and children receiving adoption support it is likely that at any given point adoption services in Wales are working with more than 1,000 children.

Children being worked with by Welsh adoption services 2014/15

Adopted 6.8% LAC

Placed or SBP decision 12.5% LAC

We know that there are fewer children being considered for adoption currently. A number of Appeal Court decisions in adoption cases linked to adoption has impacted on the number of placements orders being made by the courts. This is a UK issue and although the figure is currently lower than in England, Welsh courts made 20% fewer placement orders in 2014/15; this equates to circa 80 children. Some of the impact of this would have been seen in 2014/15 placements and orders granted but we can still expect adoption services in Wales to place fewer children this year.

There is an increase in other permanence options being considered for children, where a return to birth family is not possible; an increased use of special guardianship, kinship and stranger foster care even for relatively young children. Whilst adoption is not necessarily the right plan for all looked after children there is a need to guard against these changes in practice having unintended consequences of steering children for whom adoption would be the most appropriate plan into other permanence options that do not provide them with what they need. Recent research on disruption rates (Selwyn et al 2015) shows that other permanence options do not necessarily provide the durability and positive outcomes that adoption can.

What are the priorities for the rest of the year and beyond?

There will be no significant changes to the priorities of the National Adoption Service for the remainder of this year. The focus in all the areas highlighted in the current plan need to be progressed although we can focus some of these more specifically for the remainder of the year.

Priority 1:   Recruit more adopters, including more adopters for sibling groups and older children.

We now have much better information with which to be much more confident about our recruitment activity and how we need to target this to the children that we have coming through the system. We also know that numbers of children with plans for adoption is reducing at the moment.

We are very aware that we now need to move quickly into different recruitment practice and messaging. This will need to support targeted recruitment of adopters where this is needed but also recognise that there are children with a range of needs still coming into the system. We need to develop and put into place a coherent strategy that encompasses targeted recruitment across Wales in a way that exploits the strengths of the various providers, ensures that we can meet the needs of all children who require and adoption placement alongside ensuring that all prospective adopters have accurate and up to date information about the needs of the children who are, or may be in future, available.

This is alongside finalising and implementing the best practice model for recruitment.

Priority 2:   More children are placed without delays.

We need to maintain the positive focus in regions on this alongside finalising the work on the best practice model and implementing that.

Priority 3:   Better adoption support

We are very conscious that although there is a lot of work going on most adopters may not have seen a significant difference yet and adoption support needs to be the main priority for the rest of this year and into next year. We can use the figures we have and research findings to develop services.

We have to change the culture around adoption support from one which assumes that parents don't and probably shouldn't need help to one which accepts that support will be needed for some children as a response to the ongoing impact of the children's early life experiences. What goes with this is making this support easily accessible, when needed, by universal, targeted and specialist services that are 'adoption aware'. Recent research (Selwyn et al 2014 and 2015) has shown us what needs to improve and the current research in the Wales Adoption Cohort study will help us keep a contemporary eye on how change is impacting on new adoptive families.

Priority 4:   Listen to and work with children and adults who use adoption services

We need to use the planned events in the second half of the year to influence the detail of the development plans nationally and regionally.

Priority 5:   Doing better overall   and   Priority 6:   The National Adoption Service is well run

We need to carry on doing what we have been doing and fully implement our plans

2015-16 National Adoption Service Budget – Month 6	Budget Allocated	Position Statement at Month 6 Actual & Committed Expenditure	Variance
Total Staffing	230,762.32	227,071	- 3,691.10
Total Other Costs	41,238	44,929	3,691.10
Total Cost	272,000	272,000	-