

## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CABINET**

**25<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2018**

#### **NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE WALES ANNUAL REPORT 2016-2017**

#### **REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR C LEYSHON**

**Author:** Ann Batley, Service Director Children's Services Tel. No: 01443 744044

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to share with the Cabinet the National Adoption Service Wales Annual Report 2016-2017

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report.

#### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The report attached at Appendix 1 is the National Adoption Service for Wales Annual Report that as part of Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007 and Section 15(c) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 ( Joint Adoption Regulations)(Wales) Directions 2015, that is required to be brought before Cabinet.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The National Adoption Service for Wales (NAS) was launched in November 2014 bringing all local authorities in Wales together into a unique collaboration for the delivery of adoption services. The legal basis underpinning the service is the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) which gave Welsh Ministers the power to direct how local authorities in Wales deliver their adoption functions. This was enforced through a set of regulations, The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 [generally referred

to as the 'Directions Powers'] which require local authorities to collaborate on a set foot print to create Regional Adoption Collaborative.

4.2 The National Service establishes governance arrangements provide national direction and co-ordination. Its broad aim is to improve and make consistent the arrangements for timely placements of children, training and assessment of adopters, adoption support and collaborative working

4.3 The attached Annual Plan sets out the work undertaken by the National Adoption Service Wales in 2016-2017.

## **5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 This is an information report and therefore no Equality and Diversity screening is required.

## **6. CONSULTATION**

6.1 Consultation was undertaken by the National Adoption Service Wales in the preparation of the Annual Plan with children, young people, families, a variety of partner agencies and staff from the Regional Services.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

7.1 There are no adverse financial implications associated with this report.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

8.1 The Social Services and Wellbeing Act (2014) requires very significant changes to the way social services are planned, designed, commissioned and delivered. The primary duties of this Act that impact on the future commissioning arrangements for children looked after include:

- promoting the upbringing of children within their family whenever it is safe to do so;
- consideration of the most appropriate placement where it has not been possible to place a looked after child either with a parent or connected person which will include: foster care; adoption; residential provision; alternative arrangements (for example, supporting young people aged 16 or over to live independently in rented accommodation or in supported lodgings).

## **9. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

9.1 The provision of effective responses to the needs of children and young people is a key priority for the Council and is supported by the contents of this Annual Plan.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

- 10.1 Overall fewer children were placed for adoption in Wales during 2016-2017 but those who needed adoptive placements faced fewer delays in being placed.
- 10.2 The number of children where the plan was for adoption had started to rise during 2016-2017 with the trend continuing into the current year. This highlighted the gap between the level of adopters being recruited and the number of children becoming available for adoption, thus emphasising the need to increase recruitment.

### **Other Information:-**

***Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Children and Young People***

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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CHRISTINA LEYSHON**

**Background Papers**

None

**Officer to contact: Ann Batley, Service Director Children Services.  
Tel. No: 01443 744044**



Gwasanaeth  
**Mabwysiadu**  
Cenedlaethol

National  
**Adoption**  
Service

Achieving More Together /  
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd



Western Bay  
ADOPTION SERVICE  
GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU  
Bae'r Gorrlewin

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



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



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



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



**after**  
adoption



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



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



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



Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant  
**St David's Children Society**

# Independent Chair Foreword

The Annual Report provides a welcome opportunity to reflect on another successful year and review our achievements as well as looking forward to future challenges. The progress made by the National Adoption Service continues to deliver a positive response to the needs of children, young people and adopters. The report reflects well on all those involved in adoption across Wales whilst acknowledging there is more to be done.

Understanding the adoption business in Wales is supported by a system of performance monitoring and management. This remains a crucial priority and provides a context of what is being completed well and where further focus is required.

The combination of legislative requirements, local government and voluntary adoption agencies working collaboratively and collectively continues to be a force for change. Collaboration is undoubtedly complex and requires commitment to change by everyone who has responsibility to deliver relevant and dynamic adoption services. Achieving consistent high performing delivery can be challenging and rewarding.

Engagement and listening to adopters, adopted children and young people has reinforced key messages from research. Dynamic support through universal, targeted and specialist intervention remains an important priority. This year has delivered The Adoption Support Framework which provides an opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of children and parents. The task in 2017–18 is to secure resources and intervention across services that is dynamic and responds positively and proactively to the needs of adopters, children and young people.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank staff across all agencies involved in their respective roles and responsibilities to improve the adoption experience whilst acknowledging the significant and important contribution adopters and children have made in providing clarity about their experiences and how services could and should continue the journey of change.

Philip T. Hodgson

## **Phil Hodgson**

Independent Chair, National Adoption Service  
Advisory Group



# Director of Operations

## Introduction

I'm very pleased to provide this report which outlines the further progress and successes for the National Adoption Service (NAS) in 2016–17. We can rightly be proud of having achieved an enormous amount and doing many things well.

I am particularly proud of the work we have done with adopted children, young people and their parents to ensure the changes we make are what they want and need. Additionally we have made significant improvements to performance albeit that these are beginning to prove challenging to extend.

There is, however, still some way to travel to meet the aspirations of those involved in the early design of NAS and the duties set out in legislation. The significant development agenda that we have, reflecting the original National Assembly for Wales's Inquiry and research findings, is going to take a number of years to achieve; it is just 2.5 years since NAS was established.

The National Assembly for Wales Fourth Assembly Legacy report 2016 notes that the Children, Young People and Education Committee follow-up inquiry into adoption report outlined that.

*"whilst much progress had been made by the National Adoption Service, especially in respect of the earlier stages of the adoption process, there was still much work to be done to make sure that families got the help they needed once the adoption had taken place".*

This is a fair analysis.

We have made good impact on the strategic and policy agenda which has been essential to put NAS in a position to meet the aims and aspirations. Making changes to how services are provided is a major task with many strands to it; staff and agencies across Wales are working hard to do this.

We have identified a number of challenges linked to collaborative working, the changing context within which we work and the inability to direct resources. Alongside being realistic about timeframes and the challenging context, these need to be tackled as we continue to focus on improving services which is, of course, the most important thing.



**Suzanne Griffiths**  
Director of Operations



# Background

This is the 3rd annual report of the National Adoption Service for Wales.

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

**Locally**, each local authority:

- continues to provide services to all looked after children.
- identifies and works with children for whom adoption is an appropriate plan.

Local authorities still provide post-adoption support themselves in two regions.

**Regionally**, local authorities work together in five collaboratives. Every region:

- places children for adoption.
- recruits and assesses adopters.
- offers counselling to birth parents.
- offers advice to adopted adults.
- Links with voluntary adoption agencies, health and education.
- has a Regional Board to oversee its work.

All five regions provide some post adoption support services. Three regions undertake the assessments for requests for support.

**Nationally**, we have:

- the Central Team led by a Director of Operations. The team is hosted by the City of Cardiff Council on behalf of all local authorities. The central team provides national direction, development and co-ordination.
- the Wales Adoption Register (managed by the Central Team).
- the Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership set up by:
  - Barnardo's Cymru
  - St David's Children's Society
  - Association for Fostering and Adoption in Wales
  - Adoption UK
  - After Adoption
- a Governance Board and an Advisory Group to oversee the work of the National Adoption Service.

Together, our role is to work towards the National Adoption Service vision:

- Increase the range of adoptive homes available to meet the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan.
- Make sure placements are made in a timely way, including placements for children with additional needs and siblings who are being placed together.



- Make sure prospective and approved adopters receive good quality, timely assessment and support.
- Implement our Framework for Adoption Support which aims to provide:
  - better access to advice, information and some services to all
  - better access to more targeted and specialist support for children and families who need ongoing support
- Improve adoption services overall across Wales.



# Key Facts 2016–17

## Total adoptions in Wales

About 4,500: adopted children are living in Wales (under the age of 18)

About 3,000: adoptive families

## Adoption Activity this Year

Over 900: worked with children who had a plan for adoption or where a plan was being considered

Over 300: children joined adoptive families

86% matches arranged through Regional Services

Over 230: adopters approved

## Support this Year

Over 500: children and families getting adoption support services

Over 3,100: letterbox contact arrangements

Over 989: birth parents offered counselling

Over 380: birth parents accepting counselling



# The Wales Adoption Register

The Wales Adoption Register was launched in 2014. It became part of the National Adoption Service during 2015.

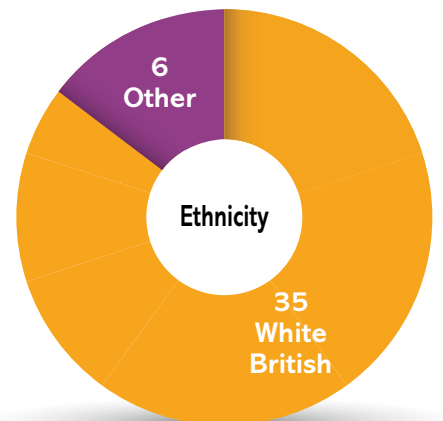
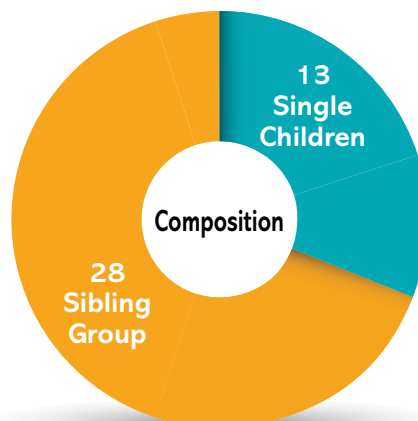
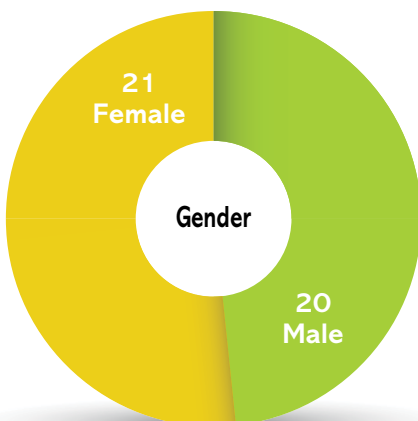
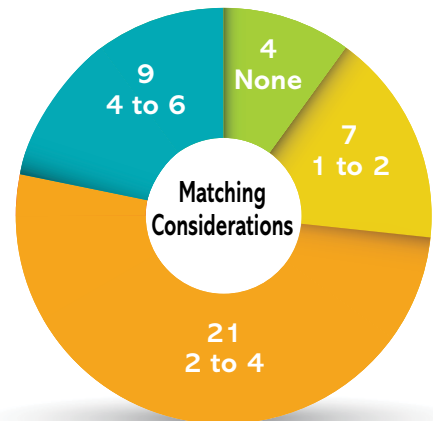
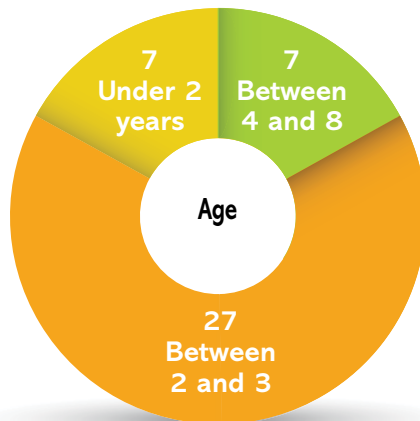
Key facts:

- The Register helps match children with adopters throughout Wales.
- All Regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies use the Register.
- If a child or adopter has not been matched within three months, they must be referred to the Register.

We also use the Register to:

- bring professionals together to make matches between children and adopters.
- hold days for adopters to find out about children on the Register. In November, 50 adopters attended an exchange day, and eight children were matched because of the event.
- hold Adoption Activity Days where adopters and children waiting for adoption can meet each other in a supported, safe, fun environment. The first day was in March 2017, supported by colleagues from Coram BAAF.

In 2016–17, the Wales Adoption Register was involved in 41 (14%) of adoption matches.



# Have we achieved what we put in our 2016-17 plan?

Our 2016-17 plan had two main priorities:

- **Priority 1.** Improve adoption support
- **Priority 2.** Develop a new database to keep in touch with adopters and be the new Wales Adoption Register

We also gave ourselves three challenges:

- **Challenge 1.** Place children more effectively.
- **Challenge 2.** Increase the range of adoptive homes available to meet the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan
- **Challenge 3.** Make sure the National Adoption Service is well run



## PRIORITY 1

# Improve adoption support

What we said	What we did
Draw up a plan with children, young people and adopters to develop adoption support services across Wales.	<p>The Adoption Support Framework has been agreed by the National Adoption Service's Advisory Group and Governance Board. It has gone to all the Regional Management Boards.</p> <p>In October 2016, the Welsh Government gave us a grant to agree a business plan for the Framework. We asked the Institute of Public Care to develop the plan for us. Since January 2017, members of the advisory group, our voluntary adoption agency partners and adopters have all been involved in this project.</p> <p>We have started collecting data about adoption support. Now we have a baseline, so next year we can know if adoption support has improved.</p>

What we said	What we did
<p>Make it easier for adopters to get the support and services they need by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making sure each local authority Information Advice and Assistance, Service gives useful information about adoption support, and directs people to the right service if they need specialist adoption advice or an assessment for support.</li> <li>• developing a plan for the Regions to do adoption support assessments.</li> <li>• making other services 'adoption aware'.</li> </ul>	<p>We have put more advice and more about support and training on our website. Some Regions have done this on their websites too.</p> <p>DEWIS is an all-Wales online source of information about social care. We have added our own information to DEWIS. Our central team advised DEWIS about online information for children.</p> <p>South East Wales Region is piloting doing adoption support assessments rather than each local authority doing their own. We want all regions to do this in the future.</p> <p>We are working with the Welsh Local Government Association to get Education more involved.</p> <p>We have made links with the Welsh Government 'Positive Parenting' strategy. Regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies will be able to use 'Positive Parenting' resources to support adopters.</p> <p>All Regions and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies are working to improve adoption support, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid and West Wales and Western Bay worked together to offer adoptive parents 'Parenting Our Children' training. Adoption UK used their grant to run the training.</li> <li>• South East Wales is doing even more with the Health Board's psychology service. All staff get four days training and are part of a reflective practice group.</li> <li>• The new TalkAdoption group for Western Bay has been very successful. The monthly meetings have helped young people to speak about their adoption stories and be heard by us and others.</li> <li>• North Wales has a new support group, and continues its contract with After Adoption for some services and training.</li> </ul>
<p>Lobby to make sure Wales has the right laws and policies for developing adoption support.</p>	<p>Section 8 and 9 of the Adoption and Children Bill in England are going to be extended to Wales. This means courts will have to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• think about the lifelong needs of adopted children.</li> <li>• consider adoptive parents as their children's primary attachment figure in contested adoption hearings.</li> </ul> <p>We are represented on the Welsh Government Ministerial Advisory Group for Improving Outcomes for Children. Adoption support is now a priority in its plan.</p> <p>We have talked with the Welsh Government about its Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Bill. We have helped adopters and adopted children and young people to take part in the consultation.</p> <p>We have advised the Welsh Government about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making the Adoption Support regulations fit with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.</li> <li>• changes to regulations so the process for approving adopters can be streamlined.</li> </ul>

What we said	What we did
<p>Use feedback from children, young people and adopters to help make education services more 'adoption aware'.</p> <p>Develop a detailed plan to go alongside the Welsh Government strategy 'Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales'.</p>	<p>The Welsh Government has a group looking at the education for looked after children and adopted children. We are part of this group, and have written an adoption plan to go alongside their 'Raising the ambitions' strategy.</p> <p>Adoption UK take the lead on working with education services for us.</p> <p>We regularly meet with Welsh Government Looked After Children Education staff.</p> <p>We publicise 'Getting it right for every child: a schools' guide to working with adopted children and their families'. The guide was written for Welsh Government by Adoption UK.</p> <p>Each local authority area has a Looked After Children Education co-ordinator. Regions have good links with them.</p> <p>North Wales Region and Mid &amp; West Wales education consortia developed attachment training in schools. This training is increasingly used across Wales.</p> <p>The North Wales Region training officer has run training for head teachers.</p> <p>A member of Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Region has delivered similar training to schools.</p> <p>Adoption UK have delivered INSET training to more than 400 education participants across Wales this year.</p>
<p>Use feedback from children, young people and adopters to influence how CAMHS improve access to services for adopted children and their families, including neuro-developmental services.</p>	<p>The Regions and CAMHS have talked about formalising links. The aim is to make advice and access to services clearer for adoptive families.</p> <p>We had hoped to develop a joint leaflet, but CAMHS is already developing a leaflet. We will promote the leaflet when it is completed.</p> <p>In the future, adoptive parents, children and young people will be able to take part in CAMHS service user consultations.</p>
<p>Implement a common policy for the payment of financial support.</p>	<p>We are still working on this. It should happen from 1 April 2018.</p>

What we said	What we did
<p>Work with children, young people and adopters to develop a strategy to improve life story work for adopted children in Wales.</p>	<p>This work is funded by our Welsh Government grant. It is progressing well.</p> <p>The group running the project includes adopters, regional adoption staff, voluntary agencies and childcare social workers. The group gets advice from children and young people via 'TalkAdoption'.</p> <p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• held a workshop of adopted children and young people led by 'TalkAdoption'.</li> <li>• finalised a framework for life journey work and a toolkit.</li> <li>• identified children with whom to try out the new toolkit.</li> <li>• collected good practice examples. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in Mid &amp; West Wales Region, life journey materials are required before a child goes to the matching panel. Adoption staff are working with childcare teams across the region to help this to happen well. Western Bay is working towards this too.</li> <li>- in North Wales Region, a pilot group is ready to test the framework. Their Training Officer is developing a local training framework for it.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Other work to improve adoption support

### Adopter's guide to adoption:

This is something adopters wanted. We developed the guide with the AFA Cymru lawyer and Cardiff University Law School.

### Knowledge Transfer Partnership:

St David's Children Society and Cardiff University secured funding to take research knowledge and try to put it into practice. This could help transform how services are delivered.

## Stats on adoption support

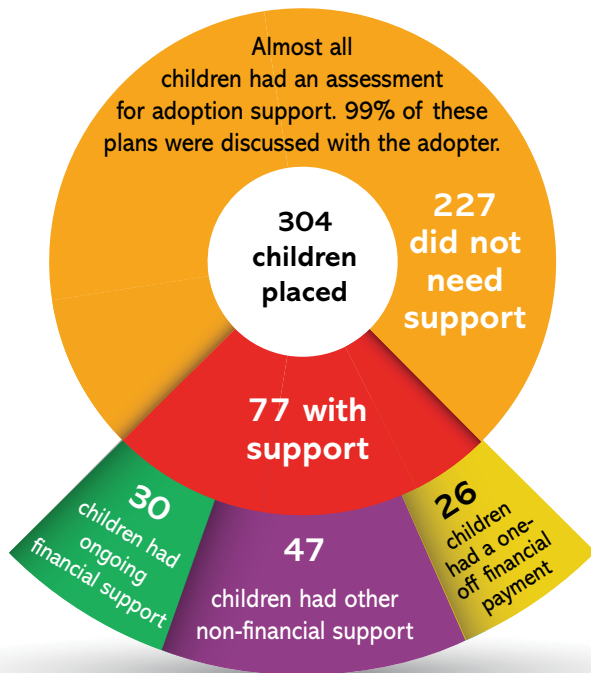
### Adoption support for children placed during 2016–17

More than 500 children received adoption support services this year and there were more than 3,100 letterbox contact arrangements in place. We know support can mean many things, including financial support, practical or therapeutic services; some children will need support to help them understand why they have been adopted, and some parents need help to manage some difficult emotions and behaviours. Our data now tells us the level of support being made available to children who were newly placed this year, as well as other new requests for help that were received.



## This is the picture for children placed this year

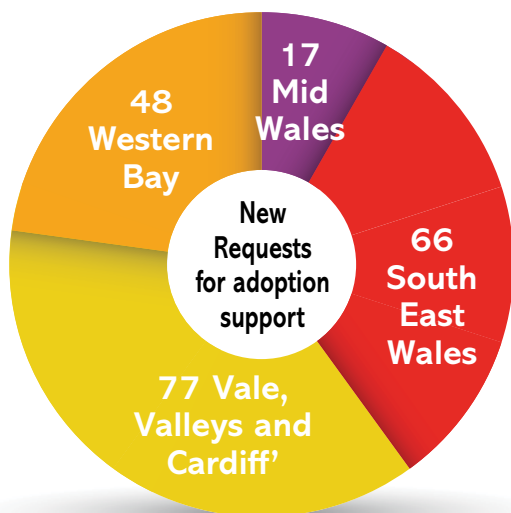
Percentage of children getting support ranged from 10% to 38% across the Regions.



This adds up to more than 77 because some children received more than one type of support.

## 208 new requests for adoption support for children placed before April 2016

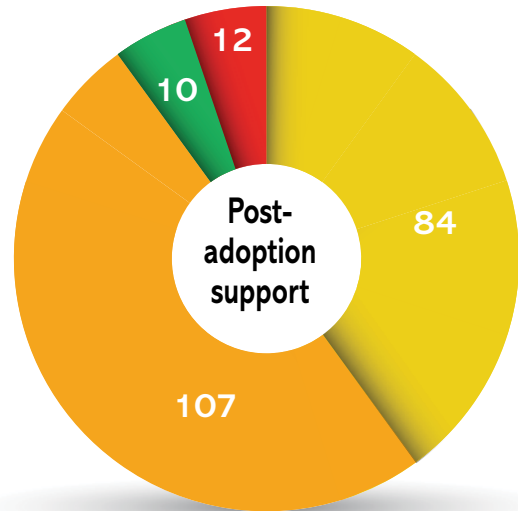
As well as the above, this is new demand this year.



We do not have information about North Wales.

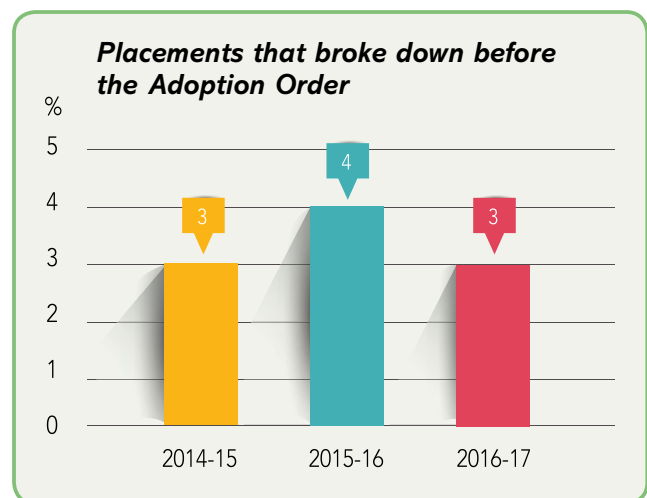
## All 208 children had an assessment for post-adoption support.

84 of the requests are still in progress, as only 124 have been completed. The outcomes of the 124 totals 129 as some children will have more than one service.



- 84 assessment in progress at end of year.
- 107 had non-financial support (eg access to therapy and practical help)
- 10 had one-off financial support
- 12 had ongoing financial support

## Placement breakdowns



Timely support is critical for keeping this low.

Timely support also makes sure the adoption works well for the child and the whole family.

Our voluntary adoption agency partners provide valuable support.

Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant



St David's Children Society

Credwch  
mewn plant  
Believe in  
children



Barnardo's  
Cymru

Support  
for adoptive  
families

### Helplines and Training

**adoptionuk**

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

after  
adoption

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

357  
enquiries by phone  
and email, from  
professionals and  
members of the  
public

450+  
professionals and  
adoptive parents given  
training, including in  
non-violent resistance

### Other Support

**adoptionuk**

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

after  
adoption

TalkAdoption  
groups – 90 adopted  
children and young  
people in SE and SW  
Wales meeting in four  
groups

Adoption  
support groups –  
243 attendances in  
31 meetings

1:1 support  
from a non-violent  
resistance  
practitioner for 55  
adoptive parents of  
70 children

1:1 support  
for 200 adults  
who had been  
adopted, birth  
parents or other  
birth relatives  
supported



## Research about adoption support

The Wales Adoption Study aims to understand more about the support needs of adoptive families in the first three years of an adoptive placement. The research will provide the evidence we need to improve adoption support.

The research team is led by Dr Katherine Shelton, School of Psychology, Cardiff University. Links to publications are on her university webpage and include:

- Doughty, J., Meakings, S. and Shelton, K.H. (in press, 2017). The legal and administrative processes in adoption: Views and experiences of newly formed adoptive families. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*.
- 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 Review*, 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.
- Meakings, S., Coffey, A. and Shelton, K.H. (in review, 2017). The influence of adoption on sibling relationships: experiences and support needs of newly formed adoptive families. *British Journal of Social Work*.

We will use the evidence already available from the study to plan and improve adoption support. For example, the evidence tells us:

- Nearly half (47%) of the children in the Wales Adoption Study had experienced four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) before they were placed for adoption. We know these early experiences have serious implications for later life.
- Adoption support should become the norm, whatever the age of the child or background of the adopters.
- Adoptive parents need to know they are entitled to extra help in the first few months.
- Adoptive parents need to know they are welcome to ask for help later.
- Everyone needs support to manage the changing relationships when a child joins a family, including:
  - siblings who are placed together
  - siblings placed apart
  - children joining the family
  - children already part of the family
  - previous foster carers
- Some children have adjustment problems. They and their families may need specialised support.
- Everyone needs to understand the legal processes involved in adoption, and many will need support for this.

### PRIORITY 2

## Develop a new database for the Wales Adoption Register

This database will have two functions:

- to keep in touch with adopters
- to become the Wales Adoption Register

What we said	What we did
Look at the review of the Wales Adoption Register and database project. Do what the review recommended.	<p>We have worked with the Welsh Government to make sure any new system will meet our needs.</p> <p>We will continue to work with the Welsh Government to procure this system during 2017-2018.</p>

## CHALLENGE 1

# Place children more effectively

What we said	What we did
Pilot 'Foster to Adopt'.	<p>We worked with AFA Cymru to develop practice guidance for local authorities.</p> <p>Use of the scheme was too low for a pilot. We were told this was due to legal difficulties. The Welsh Government is looking at changing the laws and guidance to make it easier.</p>
Make sure our best practice guide for family finding is being used.	<p>We ran workshops in all five Regions. Staff from Regions and local authorities came to the workshops.</p> <p>Some Regions focused on improving systems for tracking and monitoring family finding.</p> <p>Vale, Valleys and Cardiff now produce a monthly report of placements made and children still waiting. This helps family finding work for children still waiting.</p> <p>This year we used an Adoption Activity day to support matching for the first time. This has been very successful. The event identified many potential links that are being explored.</p>
Find opportunities to participate in discussions with the courts/ judiciary about the role of adoption within the family courts.	<p>The Central team keeps the Lead Judges informed about developments in Wales. At the request of the Lead Welsh Language Judge, we promoted the use of bilingual applications.</p>

## Other work to place children more effectively

Western Bay developed a Transition/Moving on programme. The programme aims to improve how practitioners and foster carers work with children who are being placed for adoption. The Region has 'transition champions'. Their approach is being rolled out across the local authorities, in that area. We are encouraging other regions to take a similar approach.

Western Bay re-looked at how they make adoption order applications. The aim is to have a process that does not allow adoption decisions to drift.

## Stats on placing children more effectively

Fewer children (304) were placed for adoption in Wales during 2016–17.

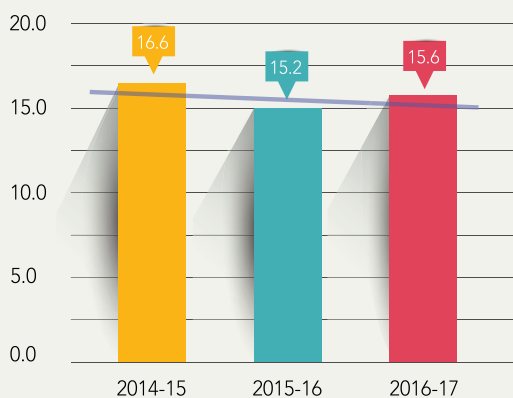
This is because the number of placement orders dropped by 38% between 2013 and 2015.

The number of placement orders has started to rise (up by 15% in 2016–17) so we expect more children will be placed for adoption next year.

Children are facing fewer delays now than they were before the National Adoption Service was formed. However, we still have not achieved the timescales we want:

- Average time for a child from going into the care system to being placed for adoption is now 15.6 months (still above the 13 months we want to achieve).
- Average time from a placement order to being placed for adoption is 8.2 months.

**Average in months it has taken from the date of most recently looked after to date of placement for adoption**



Our Regions are doing better at placing sibling groups and children with complex needs. It still takes longer than average for these children to be placed for adoption. Reasons for this include:

- complexity of the child's needs.
- difficulty of finding adopters to take siblings.
- links that do not proceed.
- legal challenges, sometimes after the placement order has been granted.

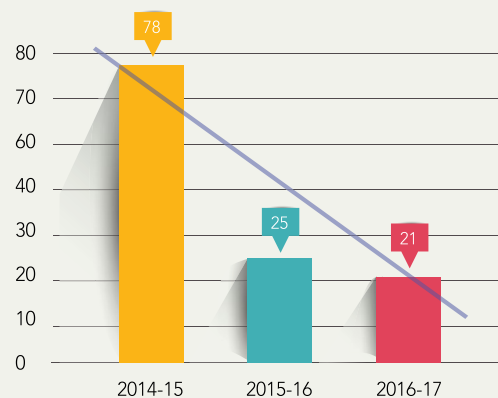
Fewer children have their plan changed from adoption to an alternative way to provide them with a permanent home. This has dropped from 78 children in 2014–15 to only 21 in 2016–17. This means we have met the target we set ourselves.

However, at the end of the year:

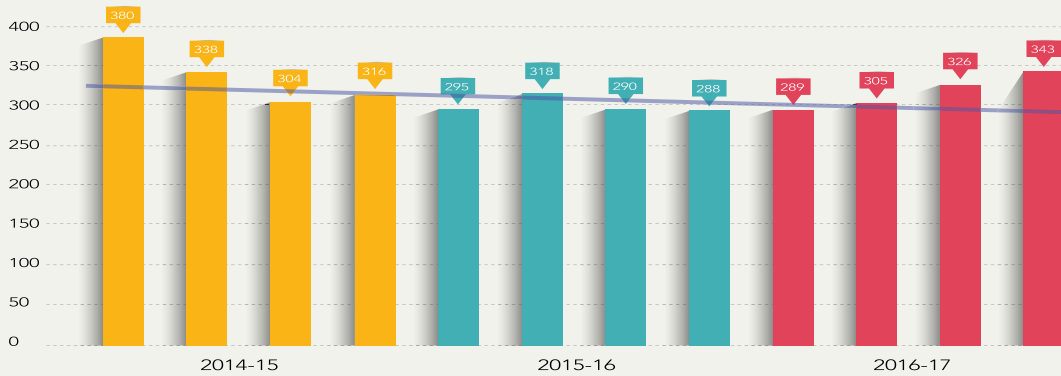
- the number of children where the plan is for adoption had risen.
- 80% of these have a placement order.
- there are more children on the Wales Adoption register unlikely to be matched with the adopters who are currently available.

This is still better than the position before the National Adoption Service was created, but we hoped to see the numbers reducing further.

**Number of children with a placement order who have a permanence plan changed from adoption at a LAC review**

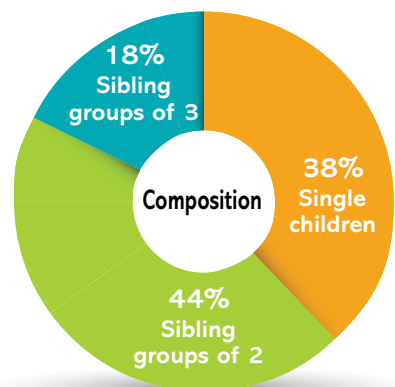
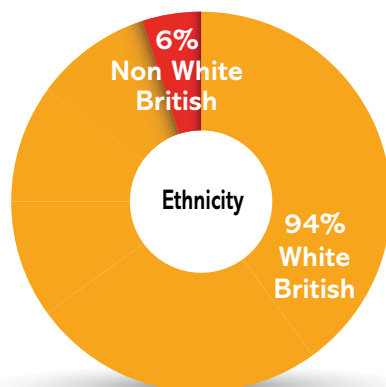
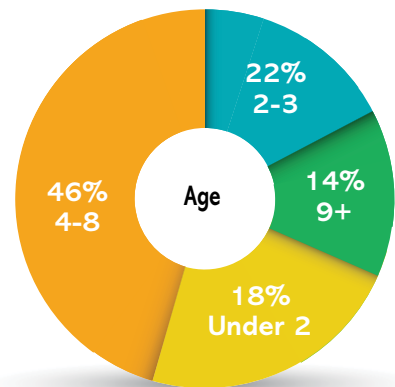
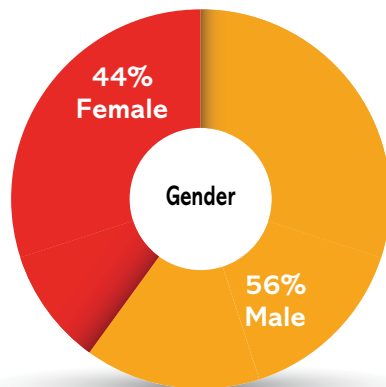


**Number of children with an agency SBP for adoption decision who have not yet been placed for adoption**



**Children waiting on the Wales Adoption Register at 31 March 2017**

This has been accompanied by a rise in the number of children on the Wales Adoption Register at the end of the year.



- About half of the children could not be matched with what adopters could offer.
- There were more sibling groups of three.
- There were fewer sibling groups of two.
- More children with additional needs were waiting, whatever their age, except for children aged between two and four.

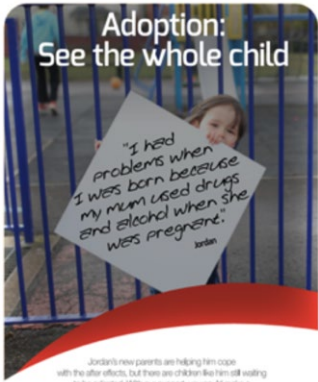
There were 68 adopters available, but unable to be matched with these children.

The needs of these children will continue to drive our recruitment strategy.

We are piloting Link-maker for children who cannot be matched in their region or through the Wales Adoption Register.

## CHALLENGE 2

# Recruit the adopters who can meet the needs of the children available

What we said	What we did
<p>Roll out the revised strategy for targeted recruitment.</p>  <p>Adoption: See the whole child</p> <p>"I had problems when I was born because my mum used drugs and alcohol when she was pregnant." Jordan</p> <p>Jordan's new parents are helping him cope with the after effects, but there are others like him still waiting to be adopted. With our support, you could make a difference to a child like Jordan. Contact us.</p> <p>Welsh Adoption Service www.adoptcymru.com #SeeTheWholeChild</p>	<p>We used information about children waiting to be matched to target recruitment towards suitable adopters.</p> <p>We launched a campaign with a suite of marketing materials, '#SeeTheWholeChild', in July 2016.</p> <p>There is an all Wales 'script', so prospective adopters get a realistic picture of the needs of children waiting for adoption from the start.</p> <p>Enquiries from prospective adopters for harder to place children are dealt with first.</p> <p>Two Regions said prospective adopters are better informed.</p> <p>We reviewed the campaign and planned more recruitment activities for 2017–18.</p> <p>Our Voluntary Adoption Agency partners worked on a specialist recruitment scheme. This is being developed further after discussions with the Regions.</p>
<p>Finalise and use a two-stage recruitment model for prospective adopters in Wales.</p>	<p>The Welsh Government has advised our proposals will require a change of law.</p>
<p>Consider how we support and work with adopters who are waiting placements.</p>	<p>Fewer adopters are waiting for placements.</p> <p>There is still a mismatch between adopters who are waiting and children who need to be adopted.</p> <p>The Regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies actively supported waiting adopters to understand the needs of children who need or are likely to need to be adopted.</p>

## Stats on recruiting the right adopters

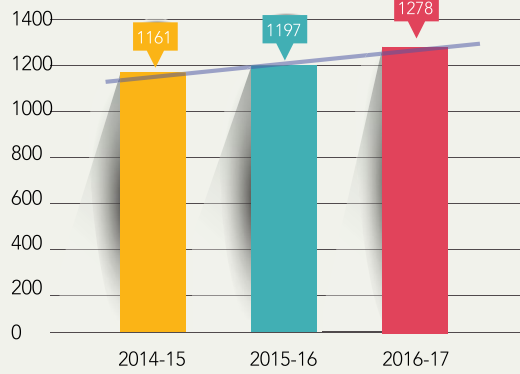
### Initial enquiries

The number of initial enquiries is still going up. This year there were 1,278 initial enquiries.

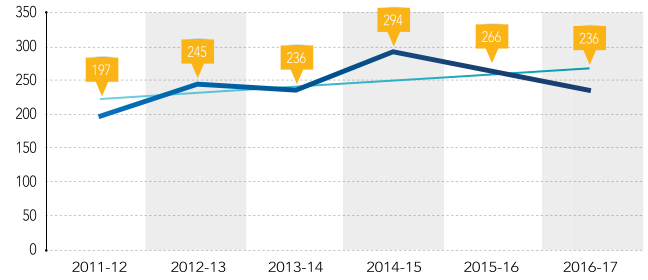
99% of initial enquiries get a response within five working days.

A high proportion of enquiries are from people wanting to adopt very young children and/or single children but these children are a lower proportion of those waiting for placements.

### Number of initial enquiries

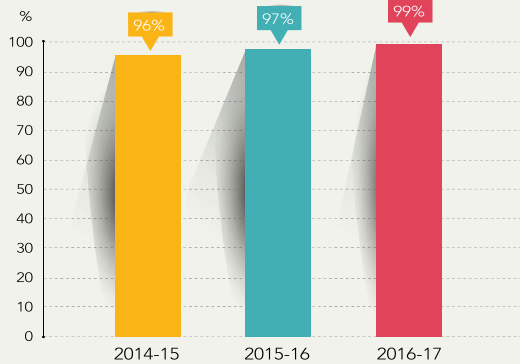


### Adopters approved



Adjusted from the number previously published

### % of initial enquiries which received a response within five working days

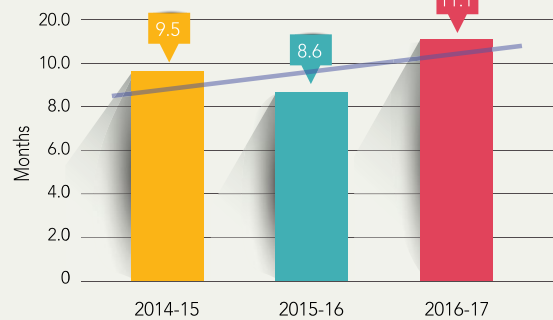


### Time frame

The time from initial enquiry to approval has lengthened to 11.1 months (was 8.6 months in 2015-16). This was more about adopters' preferences than the process itself.

On average, adopters took five months from their initial enquiry before making a formal application to adopt.

### Average time for adopters to progress from initial enquiry to agency decision to approve



### Approvals

Fewer adopters were approved in 2016-17. This was because we were targeting recruitment to children's needs and aiming to reduce the number of adopters waiting.

### At the end of the year:

- 68 adopters were available on the Wales Adoption Register
- only 26% of adopters would consider sibling groups
- more adopters were willing to consider older children. However most older children are part of a sibling group.

### Available adopters 31/03/17 in %




## CHALLENGE 3

# Make sure the National Adoption Service is well run

What we said	What we did
<p>Continue to collect data about adoption and the work of the National Adoption Service.</p> <p>Work towards targets we have set ourselves.</p>	<p>We produced a booklet explaining how to collect the data we need, to make sure it is collected the same way across Wales.</p> <p>Every three months, we produced a Wales report from the data.</p> <p>Twice a year, we produced Regional reports.</p> <p>The reports were used nationally and regionally to check how we are doing.</p> <p>We asked people to start collecting data about adoption support services. This annual report is the first to have data about adoption support.</p> <p>Regions are improving their own systems to collect data. Some regions could not give us all the data we ask for.</p> <p>We worked with Voluntary Adoption Agencies on ways to collect data about their adoption support work.</p>
<p>Develop a National Adoption Services workforce strategy for 2017–18 onwards. We will do this with the Regions and training managers.</p>	<p>We consulted with the Regions, and have written an initial paper.</p> <p>This makes it clear what training and development is needed for all staff involved in adoption-related work, whatever organisation they work for.</p> <p>We held a really successful conference in March, 'Improving Outcomes in Adoption – Moving on and managing relationships'. There were over 120 delegates. It was funded from our Welsh Government grant aid. We talked with professionals and adopters about supporting children during transitions, especially from foster care to adoption.</p> <p>Presentations included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an adoptive father speaking of his experiences</li> <li>• Lynne Cudmore on 'keeping the child in mind' during transitions</li> <li>• Dr Ruth Sellers on the influence of family relationships</li> </ul> <p>A birth parent was involved in a workshop. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive.</p> <p>The Mid &amp; West Wales Region held a very successful and well attended conference in January 2017, 'Permanency planning – Achieving the best outcomes for adopted children and their families'. It was aimed at adopters and professionals. The conference included perspectives from an adopter, children and young people as well as workshops on topics such as positive play, life story work, attachment and adoption support.</p>

What we said	What we did
<p>Continue to work with Welsh Government and Social Care Wales to influence the development of a workforce that are 'permanence/adoption aware'.</p>	<p>We established links with the Chief Executive of Social Care Wales and their Director of Workforce and Improvement.</p> <p>We are part of the Ministerial 'Improving Outcomes' group.</p> <p>These give us a chance to influence workforce development and engage with the review of social work training.</p>
<p>Work with Welsh Government to develop a positive response to the recent National Assembly for Wales 'Follow-up Inquiry into Adoption Services in Wales'.</p>	<p>Our Governance Board agreed our response in September.</p> <p>With the Welsh Government we will work through the recommendations.</p>
<p>Secure a suitable Central Team budget.</p>	<p>This was secured for 2017–18 onwards. Our core costs will be met.</p> <p>'Budgets in all Regions' are under pressure. Some have been frozen or reduced. This will have implications for the National Adoption Service's work.</p>
<p>Update and use the strategy for engaging with adopters, children and young people and other adults who use adoption services.</p> 	<p>We developed an engagement strategy to fit with our workplan for 2016–17.</p> <p>North Wales Region and South East Wales Region set up family fun days with opportunities during the day to consult adopters on national and regional issues.</p> <p>Over 100 families attended, and both we and adopters found the days useful and fun.</p> <p>This was the first time the North Wales Region has organised an event like this, and they plan to hold a similar event in 2017–18.</p> <p>The family fun days gave positive feedback:</p> <p><i>'our social worker 'excellent'- we know we can pick up the phone any time. Training preparation sessions were excellent.</i></p> <p><i>Training and preparation was excellent</i></p> <p><i>Adoption support group – excellent friendship and advice forum for both parents and children'.</i></p> 



What we said	What we did
	<p>The family fun days also gave us challenges to focus on for 2017–18:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>'The quality of life story work</i></li> <li><i>Talking to adopted children about their siblings</i></li> <li><i>More support at court stages</i></li> <li><i>Better post adoption support</i></li> <li><i>Need to sort out Fostering for Adoption so subsequent children can be placed more quickly</i></li> <li><i>Education – raising awareness of needs of adopted children'.</i></li> </ul> <p>We began to work with children, young people and adopters using 'co-production'. We used this for the life journey work and in developing a response to the Additional Learning Needs Bill.</p> <p>This approach was well supported. The views of children and young people have been fed in via TalkAdoption.</p> <p>We used some of our grant funding to develop young people's web pages and a young person's app. We aim to 'go live' in 2017–18.</p> <p>We are encouraged that engagement is becoming the norm in the Regions. Western Bay and Mid &amp; West Wales started focus groups to develop services.</p> 

# Compliments and Complaints

## Compliments

Four Regions told us about compliments. They reported 77 compliments from:

- professionals.
- birth relatives.
- adopters.

Compliments included:

- the quality of support through the application process.
- good experiences with the adoption panel.
- courts praising the quality of work.

The South East Wales Region report compliments about their new arrangements for assessing post adoption support.

## Complaints

People applying to adopt are given information about how to complain. Other people who use adoption services also have information about how to complain.

In 2016–17, ten complaints were reported to Regions. The Central team helped respond to a few of these. Nine complaints were dealt with at the informal or stage one level. One complaint went to the Independent Review Mechanism.

Issues included:

- decisions about whether an application could continue.
- disagreeing with decisions.
- delays.
- adoption support services.

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# Finance

## Budgets for the Regions and the Central team

This is the first year we have information about the Regional and Central team budgets.

### *Regional and central team budgets for 2016–17*

Mid Wales	North Wales	South East Wales	Vale, Valleys and Cardiff	Western Bay	Central Team	Totals
£915,495	£1,494,042	£1,345,940	£1,270,330	£2,847,800	£272,000	£8,145,607

Some of the difference between Regions can be explained by:

- Not all Regions provide the same functions. For example:
  - Western Bay's budget is higher because they manage the staffing, adoption support and interagency fee budgets for the local authorities.

- Vale, Valleys and Cardiff, South East Wales and Western Bay assess adoption support needs and provide more services directly.

- Not all Regions have the same workload. The workload is higher in Vale Valleys and Cardiff, Western Bay and South East Wales.

Across Wales, budgets are under pressure. Some Regions are having their services reviewed and all may have less budget in the future.

## Voluntary Adoption Agency budgets

Three of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies shared two Welsh Government Third Sector grants, totalling £350,000.

AFA Cymru (Association for Fostering and Adoption) has funding to support the whole sector.

Most of the adoption grant aid is for:

- recruiting and assessing adopters.
- matching and placing children.
- adoption support.

We work with the Voluntary Adoption Agencies to make sure grants they get help achieve the National Adoption Service priorities.

## Welsh Government development grant

We explained to Welsh Government why we needed extra money for the Framework for Adoption Support. The Welsh Government gave a grant of £90,000.

The following pieces of work were supported from that £90,000 grant. Without the grant, none of this work would have been possible.

## Development grant spending



# Our priorities for 2017-18

Our core work is to:

- Increase the range of adoptive homes available to meet the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan.
- support both children and adults who are affected by the lifelong implications of adoption.

We will continue with our core work.

We will continue to do most of our work through the National Adoption Service regions and Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

Our vision for the future is outlined in the introduction.

It will take time and commitment from everyone to achieve this vision.

We have two priorities for 2017-18.

## **Priority 1: Keep improving adoption support**

We will:

- make the case for extra money to fund improvements to adoption support.
- use the new framework for life journey work.
- keep working with health and education so adopted children and their families get the right support.

## **Priority 2: Place children well**

We will:

- concentrate on recruiting adopters for the children who are likely to need to be adopted.
- aim to improve all the processes.

## **Making this happen**

To make this happen, we will need to:

- work to change laws and policies, where that is needed.
- continue to use coproduction as one of our ways for working with service users, and develop how their views inform our governance arrangements.
- make sure we have the right arrangements in place to oversee the National Adoption Service.
- encourage everyone whose work affects adoptive families, potential adopters and looked after children to know more and have more skills about permanence and adoption.
- aim for ongoing improvement overall.

