

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COPORATE PARENTING BOARD

6TH NOVEMBER 2017

**VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE
2016-2017 ANNUAL REPORT**

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to share with Corporate Parenting Board, the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) Annual Report 2016-2017.

2. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that members:-

- 2.1 Consider the contents of the attached report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The report attached is presented to Corporate Parenting Board 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 require the Annual Report to be presented.

4. RELEVANT ISSUES

- 4.1 This report sets out the performance and issues that have arisen in the last year. The following areas have been highlighted for noting:

- The functions within the collaborative are presently being reviewed
- The Region has had to rely on short term agency cover due to a number of vacancies occurring within the staffing structure
- There has been a marked rise in the number of children being referred for adoption, 60%
- 62 children out of 81 placements were placed within the Region
- Due to the demand it is likely that more external placements will be required for the present year

- The Region received 150 enquires from prospective adopters in total which represents a 30% decrease
- A 54% increase for adoption support services has been received

VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE (VVC) ANNUAL REPORT: 1 APRIL 2016 TO 31 MARCH 2017

Author: Angela Harris - Regional Adoption Manager

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) provides a regional adoption service to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council. VVC is one of the five regional Collaboratives which form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS). The Vale of Glamorgan Council hosts the Collaborative.
- 1.2 All adoption services are required to provide an annual review of their service as set out in Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007. In addition, Section 15 (c) of The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 sets out the responsibilities of regional Collaboratives to report to the Director of Operations for the National Adoption Service on a quarterly and annual basis.
- 1.3 The legal agreement underpinning the operation of the Collaborative sets out the reporting requirements to partner local authorities. This report aims to encompass the various reporting requirements in one report.

This is VVC's second annual report and covers the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.

Appendix 1 to the report sets out the performance data by quarter and local authority.

2. SERVICE AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

- 2.1 Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative continues to be managed by a Regional Adoption Manager and three service specific managers for Family Finding, Adoption Support, and Recruitment and Assessment. The Adoption Support Manager's post has been increased to full time on a temporary basis during this period.
- 2.2 Staff within the service have increasingly moved to working to their functional specialism during the year within the expectation that they will pick up work in other areas as the need arises. Managers within the service have developed a more strategic overview of the performance of the region which has helped to embed this in the culture of the region.

- 2.3 The service reviews undertaken into the specific functions performed by the Collaborative have fully highlighted the increased demands within the service and the shortfall in staffing resource to meet these demands. An Options Paper detailing the capacity issues and pressures across the whole service was presented to Management Board in November 2016. This report detailed the original assumptions upon which the service structure and staffing within VVC was based, the current pressures and the increase in workload, and proposed a number of options to increase resource within the Collaborative to address the shortfalls in service.
- 2.4 This report was presented to the Directors of Social Services across the four authorities and Joint Committee in December 2016. The Directors agreed to the appointment of an additional staff member for Adoption Support utilising monies within the budget and to the extension of temporary staff within Adoption Support , pending the outcome of a Best Value Review of the whole service, that was then commissioned.
- 2.5 The Review is being undertaken by an Officer from the Vale of Glamorgan Business Improvement Team and a Finance Officer from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. A Project Brief and Plan has been put in place and a timetable set for finalisation and consideration of the Review.
- 2.6 VVC has experienced some resourcing issues during the second half of the year created by one full time Social Worker leaving to pursue agency work, one part time Social Worker leaving to pursue training and independent work, and three Social Work posts being reconfigured to accommodate a reduction in working hours. These vacancies were advertised and the region was successful in receiving a high number of applications for these posts which have enabled offers of appointment to be made. It is anticipated these posts will be filled by June 2017. The region has had to rely upon the employment of some short term agency cover in the interim.
- 2.7 The service has continued to be based in Ty Pennant, Pontypridd although RCT staff vacated the premises in October 2016 and the licence to occupy the building transferred to Trivallis as new owners of the premises .The licence is in place until September 2018. The transfer of ownership has meant additional costs being placed upon the Collaborative in terms of payment of rates etc.
- 2.8 The pooled budget for the Collaborative is managed by the Vale of Glamorgan as the host and is monitored on a regular basis and reported to the Management Board and Joint Committee. A Finance Technical Group has remained in place attended by the Finance Officers from each of the partner authorities.
- 2.9 VVC's governance structure is by way of a Management Board and Joint Committee. The Management Board has continued to meet bi-monthly. Board meetings have been well represented and supported by Heads of Service from the partner authorities and membership from a Voluntary

Adoption Agency and Health and Education representatives. The Chair of the Board transferred to the Director of Social Services for Merthyr Tydfil CBC in line with the legal agreement in July 2016.

- 2.10 Standing agenda items for meetings include performance reporting, budget monitoring, service user and stakeholder engagement, VVC's interface with local authority partners alongside reports from the Voluntary Sector, Health and Education representatives. The Board also considers any items referred from the National Adoption Service Advisory Group and Governance Board.
- 2.11 The Management Board has considered reviews of all the service areas provided by the Collaborative during the year and considered reports in relation to capacity issues within the service. Specific performance measures such as the provision of Life Journey Material for children placed for adoption have been highlighted by the Board as areas for improvement and actions have been put in place to address any shortfall in practice.
- 2.12 The Director of Operations for NAS attended the VVC Management Board in September 2016 to present the NAS plan to address areas of national improvement, and again in July 2017 to present the NAS end of year report in respect of VVC's performance.
- 2.13 A workshop on the role of the local authority Agency Decision Maker was commissioned by the Management Board and facilitated by AFA Cymru Legal Adviser in January 2017. This session drew upon the implications of case law and was attended by all Heads of Service and Agency Advisers.
- 2.14 The Joint Committee meets twice a year and is comprised of elected members from the four authorities. Joint Committee meetings were held in July and December 2016. The Joint Committee has responsibility for approving the annual plan for the service and annual budget.

3. SERVICE AREAS:

- 3.1 The National Adoption Service set the following priorities for service improvement during 2016-17:
 - *Placing children effectively and quickly*
 - *Effective recruitment of adopters who are and are likely to become available for adoption.*
 - *Improving adoption support.*

These priorities formed the basis of VVC's annual plan and the progress made in each of these service areas is evaluated below.

4. FAMILY FINDING

- 4.1 The Family Finding Manager undertook a review of the Family Finding function within VVC which was presented to Management Board in September 2016. This aspect of the service has seen a marked rise in the number of children being referred for adoption and increase in workload overall.
- 4.2 The region alongside other regional Collaboratives reports upon performance on a quarterly basis to NAS. The performance measures which make up the Performance Management Framework have increased during the year to take on board new measures particularly in relation to Adoption Support. The measures monitor performance in relation to key stages in the adoption process. Some of these relate directly to local authority performance and some are shared jointly between the local authority and the Collaborative.
- 4.3 The recording of the number of children referred for adoption is a new measure although VVC previously recorded this data. VVC received a total 280 referrals for the year which represents a 66% increase from 2015-16. 81 children were placed for adoption which is an increase from 70 in the previous year.
- 4.4 At the end of the reporting period 103 children had a 'should be placed' for adoption decision but had not been placed for adoption which is an increase on the previous quarter and previous returns and 95 children of these children were subject of a Placement Order.
- 4.5 The region has recorded 113 Placement Orders being made during the year which also represents an increase of 70% on 2015-16. The number of Adoption Orders granted during the period is 65. This is a decrease on the previous year which may partly be due to more protracted Court proceedings in some instances as a result of legal challenges from birth parents.
- 4.6 The measures in relation to the timeliness of the process from key decision making points to placement for adoption indicate an increase in the length of time it takes to place children. In some instances overall timescales were skewed by outliers i.e one or two children with more complex needs where it has taken much longer to place them for adoption. VVC is now more able to identify these children and explain the reasons for the delay as part of the reporting framework.

On 31 March 2017, there were **10** children who had been waiting longer than six months for a match which is an increase on the previous year. The reasons for the delay in the placement of these children can be attributed to their range of needs which could not be easily met within the available adopter resource.

- 4.7 There were 3 placement disruptions during the year and no matches disrupted during introductions, which is a decrease on the previous year.
- 4.8 In November 2016, the Adoption Support Manager undertook a review of early disruptions. This report covered a period of 4.5 years from April 2012 to October 2016 with the aim of assisting our understanding of the factors associated with disruptions of adoption placements.
- 4.9 The process involved collation of data regarding disruptions pre –Adoption Order and reviewing the relevant matching/placement documents in each of these cases. This revealed that out of 394 placements made during this period, 21 disrupted which represents 5.33%. A workshop was held for staff in late November 2016 to consider the findings and implications for practice.
- 4.10 The number of birth parents referred to the service for counselling is collected on a quarterly basis although the take up of the service is collated annually. Overall take up in this area continues to pose significant challenges for the region as out of 435 referrals for birth parent counselling received during the year only 126 parents took up the service. This represents a decrease on the previous year although the number of parents referred has increased by two hundred. The region has begun to pilot sending out information to birth parents in a less stigmatising form and so this will need to be evaluated to ascertain if this influences the level of take up in any way. VVC also continues to explore different venues and approaches to reach birth parents in an effort to improve performance. These figures take into consideration a number of parents who were unobtainable.
- 4.11 The provision of Life Journey Material for children at their second adoption review has been a consistent agenda item for Management Board and action point for regional partners. Some overall improvement in performance has been noted as a result of proactive measures taken by Heads of Service within the region; 61% of children had been provided with Life Journey Material at their second adoption review compared to 30% in 2015-16.
- 4.12 Some of the initiatives developed to improve local practice and performance include the development of a new regional family finding process which builds upon national guidance developed by NAS.
- 4.13 The process requires a minimum of 12 weeks between the child being referred for adoption and the agency decision on adoption to ensure that there is sufficient time for the adoption medical to be completed and that the decision is not delayed. A pre-Placement Order meeting between Child's Social Worker and VVC Family Finder has been added to the process to share information and complete paperwork prior to the making of the Placement Order in an effort to reduce delay. Staff resources within VVC and

staff turnover with local authority teams has inhibited full implementation of the changes in some cases but there have been ongoing discussions with LA partners as to how best to improve practice and reduce delay.

- 4.14 The Family Finding process developed within the region requires staff to be proactive in tracking plans and delays and to challenge Childcare Social Workers in relation to their family finding expectations. Childcare Social Workers will also sometimes reject profiles of adopters they have considered previously which often necessitates challenge by the Family Finder.
- 4.15 The Family Finding Manager and the Recruitment and Assessment Manager facilitate monthly Placement Meetings where children's referrals are presented, their needs discussed and suitable adopters are considered. This ensures that decisions in relation to the need for external placement funding are completed in a timely way.
- 4.16 A family finding report is generated monthly which provides an analysis of how many placements have been made, the children who are waiting, their ages and the potential reasons for this to inform ongoing family finding.
- 4.17 All children are referred or registered with the Wales Adoption Register to ensure that delay is minimised in family finding if there are no suitable VVC adopters.
- 4.18 The region also purchased the licence for Link Maker, a national data base of children waiting which prospective adopters can access directly. VVC staff also attended and profiled 16 children at two national Coram BAAF/ Welsh Adoption Register Activity Days during the year. Activity days involve participation of children, their foster carers and Social Workers and direct interaction with prospective adopters. This has been a new experience for VVC but which has been found to be a useful alternative means of family finding.
- 4.19 There is regular dialogue and meetings between the Medical Advisers and VVC Managers to ensure that issues which delay family finding /medicals are resolved and strategies to reduce recurrence are put in place.
- 4.20 A Children's Guide has been created and provided to children and adopters
- 4.21 The Family Finding Manager provided the following overview of the numbers, ages and range of needs of children subject of a Placement Order on 31 March 2017:

Currently there are 95 children with a Placement Order. This compares with 60 children with Placement Orders at the end of 2015-16. The profile of needs we are family finding for are as follows:

Sibling Groups:

40 of the children are in a sibling group of 2.

There is 1 sibling group of 3.

Matching Considerations:

6 children are defined as having an ethnicity which is not white British.

8 children have additional health needs i.e. genetic condition/ foetal alcohol syndrome.

3 children have behavioural needs which would be considered to require therapeutic parenting.

2 have to be placed outside of Wales due to risk from birth parents.

Care Planning:

3 children are on hold due to a placement breakdown.

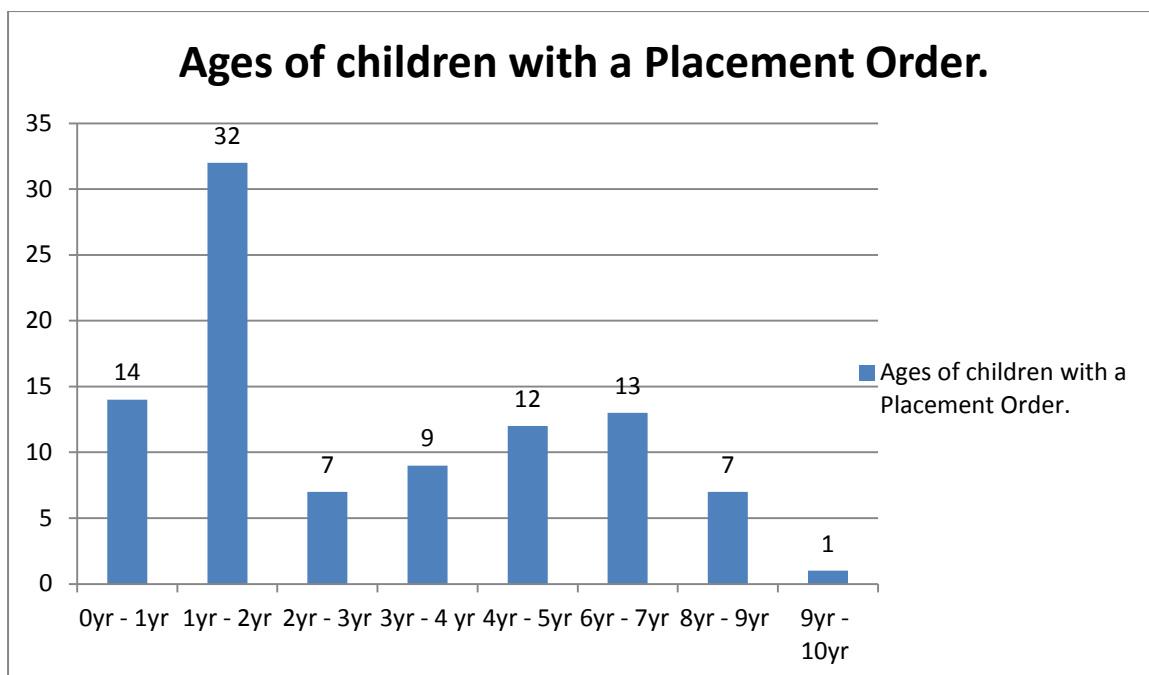
1 child is on hold due to a legal challenge from birth parents.

2 are on hold whilst a placement with siblings is being explored.

1 child is waiting due to a delay in receiving a profile to complete searches.

8 have matches which are proceeding within VVC.

2 children have a change of care plan to long-term fostering.



All of the children who are over 5 are either part of a sibling group or have needs which require therapeutic parenting.

In addition to the above children there are 16 children where it is currently anticipated they will be placed with VVC adopters.

It is anticipated that 63 of the above children will require placement outside VVC due to availability of adopters who can meet the needs of a sibling group, children whose ethnicity is not white British, children requiring placement outside of Wales for safety reasons and those with additional health and behaviour needs.

4. 22 During 2016-17 VVC was in fact successful in placing a high proportion of children within the region (62 out of 81 placements). Due however, to the reasons outlined above and a large percentage of the available stock of adopters having being used during the year, it is likely that more external placements will be required in the coming year.

5. RECRUITMENT & ASSESSMENT OF ADOPTERS

- 5.1 A review of Recruitment and Assessment activity within the region was presented to the Management Board in November 2016. This area of activity is a significant one for the region and one which presents its' own set of challenges in terms of being able to effectively recruit to meet our ongoing needs.

- 5.2 The Performance Framework records key activity around enquiries, response times to enquiries, applications and timeliness in respect of approval of adopters. The returns in respect of adopter activity during the year represent some worrying trends. The region received 150 enquiries from prospective adopters in total which represents a 30% decrease on the previous year. Part of the reason for this may be explained when it was discovered during quarter 3 that email enquirers were not always being captured in the same way. Improvements have therefore been made to recording mechanisms to ensure that all email enquirers are recorded accurately.
- 5.3 There has also been a slight decrease during the year in VVC's response to enquiries within 5 working days which at year end totalled 99%. VVC has however, been able to track the enquiry where information was sent outside of this timescale and report this as part of the performance reporting.
- 5.4 The region approved 47 adopter households compared with 55 in the previous year. Part of the reason for the decrease in approvals can be attributed to some of the capacity issues being experienced within the service resulting in staff involved in recruitment having to focus upon family finding. The other area of concern has been on relation to our overall performance in relation to the timeliness of assessments which has significantly deteriorated during the year to 12.2 months which is significantly below the national benchmark of 8 months. The region is able to account for the delays and is now supplying an explanatory narrative to accompany the return in respect of this measure. Again it is evident that the increased workload in other areas of the service has significantly impacted upon timescales in respect of this area of work.
- 5.5 Some of the measures VVC has put in place to address the gaps in recruitment have been to develop the initial approach to recruitment. In line with national direction, VVC has developed a targeted approach to recruitment with the intention of increasing the breadth of age range and needs that prospective adopters would feel confident parenting. Improved analysis of the children being referred and requiring placement has also informed this process.
- 5.6 The evidence which has also emerged from the analysis of adoption support within the region has also helped shape the information provided to prospective adopters at the initial stage. VVC has taken the approach that those interested in adoption should be provided with more information on the needs of children at a far earlier stage in the process in order for them to make a more informed decision around whether adoption is the right choice for them. To this end VVC has revamped the format of their information evenings, which are currently held bi-monthly, to provide a comprehensive

information pack which attendees are invited to digest before progressing to an initial visit from a Social Worker.

- 5.7 As a result of this approach there has been some decline in the numbers of people seeking an initial visit and some potential applicants may delay before making contact about an initial visit. This approach has however yet to show a marked difference in the numbers coming forward for siblings and a number of those approved for more than one child have gone on to be matched with a single child. The recruitment of families for siblings and children with additional needs remains a challenge.
- 5.8 The region has invested in the service of a part time Marketing Officer employed by NAS. A project group has been established with her support and the IT Department to develop VVC's website which is now nearing completion. Three members of staff will receive training in order to be able to update the website. The website will provide a useful mechanism to monitor enquiries from prospective adopters and the different geographical areas, information which can be used to target future marketing.
- 5.9 There had been a noticeable decline in relation to enquiries from Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, both areas which have previously generated a significant number of enquiries with no need for active awareness raising. It therefore felt that should this trend continue then consideration would need to be given to more active awareness raising within these geographical areas in the coming year.
- 5.10 Towards the end of the reporting period, the decline in enquirers seeking an initial visit as evidenced during quarter 3 appears to be showing signs of reversing. Information evenings held in January and February 2017 produced a significant number of initial visits compared to the previous quarter and this has resulted in an increase in the number of adopters attending the most recent Preparing to Adopt training course held at the end of the year.
- 5.11 As of 31st March 2017 there were 29 assessments being completed by the region, with 11 first time assessments and one second time assessment awaiting allocation.
- 5.12 Over the past year there has been a conscious effort, wherever possible, to allocate assessments to those workers specialising in recruitment and assessment. There are significant benefits to this approach in building expertise and skill but improvements to performance have not been seen due to those staff also undertaking generic work. Assessment plans and mid-point reviews are now more routinely established to improve practice and timeliness
- 5.13 VVC continues to receive high numbers of non-agency adoption referrals, the majority of which are from step parents wishing to adopt their step child.

This is not an area currently collated by NAS. As a result of having to prioritise the recruitment of adopters for children waiting to be adopted, this area of work now has a growing waiting list.

6. ADOPTION SUPPORT

- 6.1 Improving adoption support services within the region has also remained consistently challenging. The Adoption Support Manager has undertaken regular reviews of the service to assess ongoing service needs, shortfalls and resource implications. The workload in this area is high and data collected since the establishment of the Collaborative indicates that it has increased significantly in key areas.
- 6.2 In April 2016, NAS introduced a range of measures in respect of Adoption Support which are collated and reported upon each quarter. During the past year 83 requests for adoption support services have been received representing a 54% increase on the previous year and this support had been provided in 61 cases. In terms of Access to Birth Records requests, 66 referrals were received during the year which represents a slight decrease from 70 having been received in 2015-2016. 34 requests for intermediary services were received during the period which is an increase of 79% from the previous year when only 19 were received. Open letterbox cases have also increased from 636 at the end of 2015-16 to 767 on 31 March 2017.
- 6.3 The workload within the team has posed difficulties in terms of prompt allocation and there is a backlog of unallocated work in all these areas. As outlined previously temporary measures utilising underspend monies from 2015-16 have been put in place to address some of the service deficits. The Manager's role has been increased to full time and two part-time Social Workers have been employed to manage the letterbox system and to clear some of the waiting list for ABR, as a pilot exercise to enhance the staffing resource within the Adoption Support Team. An additional Social Work post has also been agreed and an appointment has been made. In addition, the Directors have agreed to the extension of the pilot into 2017-18 pending the outcome of the Best Value Review of the service.
- 6.4 Another aspect of the plan put in place to improve adoption support has focused upon training and support of adopters and training staff. Membership of Adoption UK was secured for the region and a Non Violent Resistance training programme for adoptive families was facilitated by Adoption UK. This course was run for 20 families with the support of two VVC staff and concluded in November 2016.
- 6.5 One of the adopters who attended the training has set up a quarterly peer support group supported by Adoption UK for a year.

- 6.6 The service has also invested some resources in upskilling staff within the team to more adequately support adoptive families. Training in therapeutic interventions and approaches has been provided for staff to improve practice.
- 6.7 Staff within the Adoption Support Team are experienced and committed to service improvement. Quarterly support groups have been established to address key issues for adoptive families, in addition to the maintenance of monthly toddler groups which provides opportunities for early intervention as well as bi-annual fun days which have high attendances.
- 6.8 A family fun day was held in November 2016 which was well attended. It has been noted that attendances at the bi-annual fun days are increasing to around 100 children with the result that alternative venues will have to be explored for future days. There have been two workshops run for adoptive parents in respect of life story work. Other topics covered in support groups have dealt with managing contact issues and managing behaviour.
- 6.9 Within the team, there is a commitment to improve the provision of services to all families requiring support through the means outlined above and there is a commitment to develop services further. There is a need to develop consultation and information mechanisms with adoptive families but this has been delayed due to capacity within the team. There has been a delay in being able to produce the newsletter for families but it is anticipated that the development of the website will provide a much needed source of information for families and adopted adults.
- 6.10 During the past year, which was VVC's first full year of operation, the service has been able to develop a clearer picture of the demand for targeted and therapeutic services with families needing support and the cost of these to the local authorities. At present the adoption support budget is not held centrally in the region and is retained by the individual local authorities. This has posed some challenge in terms of equity of service and timeliness of decision making, but generally local authority partners concur with the assessment undertaken by VVC and packages of support are being put in place as needed.
- 6.11 In the autumn of 2016, NAS produced a national framework to improve adoption support services and commissioned the Institute of Public Care (IPC) to produce a business case and action plan to develop the framework across Wales. As part of this work a national Project Board was set up to oversee the plan which the Regional Manager and Adoption Support Manager have been actively involved in. Members of the Management Board and regional stakeholder representatives have also met with IPC to contribute to the national discussions regarding improving adoption support across Wales.

7. ADOPTION PANEL

- 7.1 The Collaborative operates a joint regional Panel from two sittings, a north sitting covering RCT and Merthyr and south sitting covering Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.
- 7.2 The workload of the Panel remains high and Panel meetings are now scheduled four times a month. During 2016-17, the north sitting met twenty times, three Panels were cancelled due to no cases being presented. The south sitting met twenty three times, one Panel was re-arranged due to quoracy issues and three were cancelled because no cases were booked in.
- 7.3 VVC's Panel recommended 51 approvals to adopt, 1 review of approval, 75 matches of children with prospective adopters and 3 recommendations for children to be adopted in the cases of 3 relinquished children.
- 7.4 A significant area of development for the Panel is to move to a digital system. Tablets have been issued to Panel members and a licence with Egress obtained to enable secure transfer of Panel information. Panel members have received training on the new system and some trialling has taken place with a view to full implementation.
- 7.5 Maintenance of the central list of Panel members serving two sittings has caused some difficulties to the Collaborative in terms of available independent members and available Social Workers to become Panel members. Some recruitment of new members has taken place and induction and training is scheduled for the first quarter of next year.
- 7.6 Capacity issues within the management team have inhibited progress in conducting annual reviews of Panel members which will need to be prioritised in the coming year.

8. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

- 8.1 During 2016- 17, the region received two complaints.
- 8.2 The first complaint was from prospective adopters who had come forward for a specific child. The Family Finding Social Worker and Childcare Social Worker had visited the couple and decided not to proceed further with the enquiry for a number of reasons. The couple complained about the decision, the content of the initial visit and the approach of the Family Finding Social Worker. The complaint was investigated by the Recruitment and Assessment Manager and resolved at Stage 1.
- 8.3 The second complaint was from another couple following VVC's decision not to proceed to the application stage due to the male applicant's psychiatric condition. This was dealt with under Stage 1 by the Regional Adoption

Manager. Following this the male applicant made representation to NAS and a meeting has now taken place with the couple, NAS Policy Officer and the Regional Adoption Manager to explain the reasons for VVC's decision.

- 8.4 Both these complaints have similarities and concern complaints from couples who have complained about the decision not to proceed with an adoption application or link. The Complaints Procedure is the only mechanism available for making representations against a decision not to take up an application to adopt and does not afford potential applicants the right to make representations to an independent review mechanism which highlights a gap in existing regulations.
- 8.5 There have been eleven compliments and records of thanks received during the year. Two of these have been from birth relatives; one from a grandmother in relation to the management of direct contact with adopters and one from a birth mother in respect of their letterbox contact. One of the compliments was from a voluntary agency expressing their satisfaction in working with VVC regarding the placement of a child with additional needs. The other compliments have been from adoptive parents and prospective adopters expressing their gratitude for the support and service they have received from regional staff.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The first full year of operation of the Collaborative has provided an opportunity for further consolidation of the service and to build upon the performance of the region in the initial year. The region has maintained and improved performance in key areas such as the matching and placement of children for adoption and the provision of Life Journey Material. It is however apparent that the increased workload in terms of referrals of children for adoption, children waiting for placements and for adoption support services has impacted upon performance in other areas, particularly the timely recruitment and assessment of adopters. This coupled with the downturn in the number of enquiries received from prospective adopters makes effective recruitment of adopters a key priority going forward.
- 9.2 Capacity and resourcing issues within the service have featured significantly during the period but it is hoped that the forthcoming review of the service will assess whether the current structure and staffing is fit to meet the current demands placed upon the service to ensure that performance is improved during the coming year.

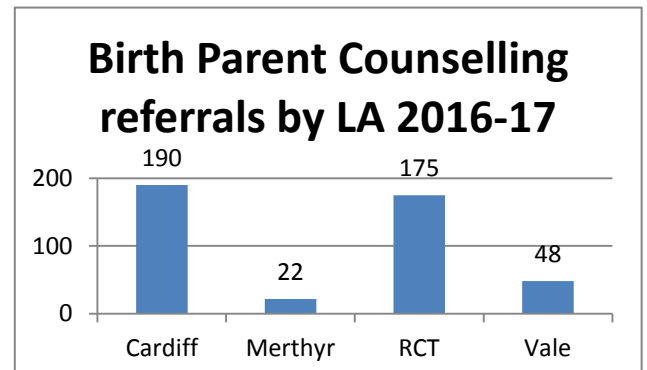
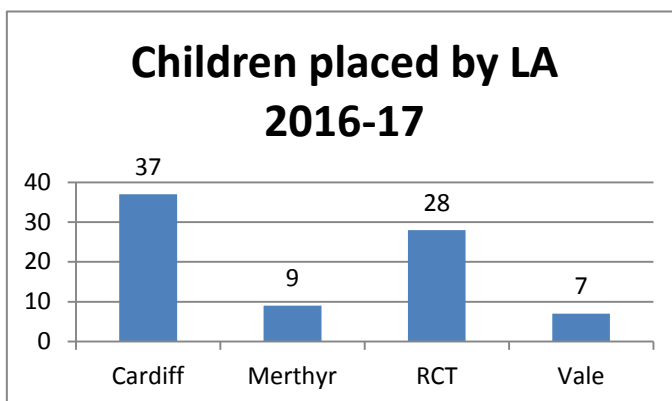
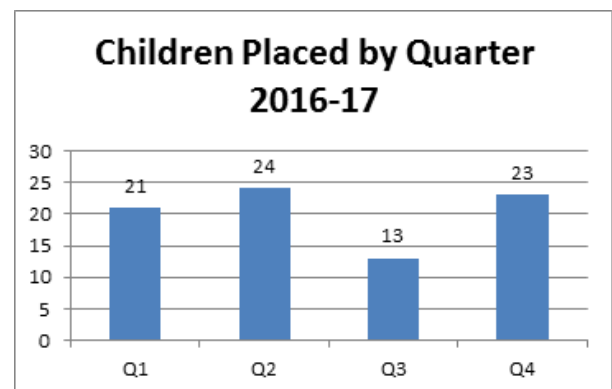
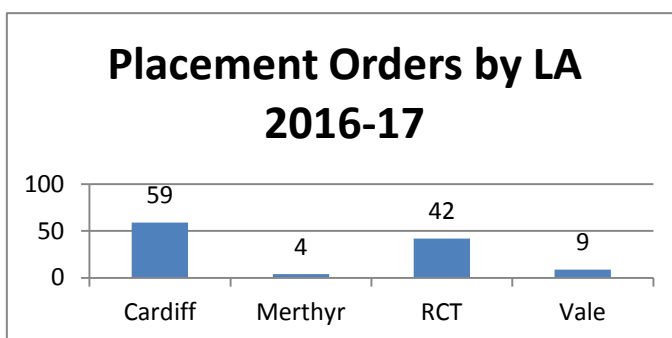
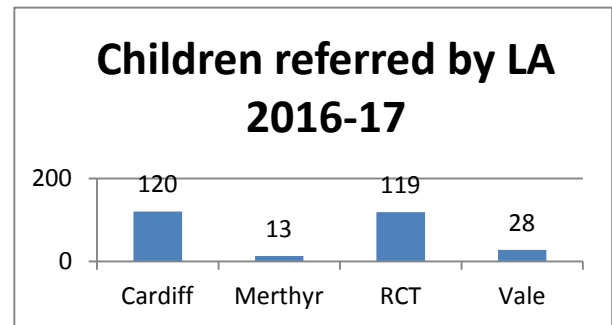
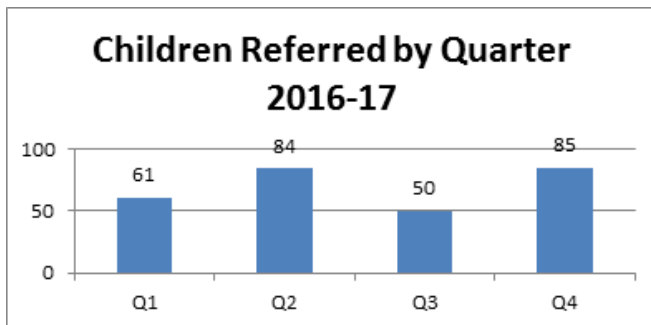
10. FUTURE PRIORITIES

- 10.1 Capacity issues and workload pressures within the regional management team has impacted upon key service developments and has resulted in the need to carry forward some of the priorities identified in year one.
- 10.2 Our priorities for 2017-18 will focus upon focus upon key activities required to improve performance in respect of our core service areas.
- 10.3 There is an urgent need to develop a recruitment and marketing strategy for adopters and to increase our available adopter resource to better meet the needs of children being referred and ensure more timely placements.
- 10.4 Other priorities to support our infrastructure and create efficiencies will be to induct and train new Panel members, complete annual reviews of existing members and secure full implementation of the digital Panel.
- 10.5 Finally, the region will need to be able to absorb the findings arising from the development of the national framework for adoption support and continue to look to ways to better support adoptive families and engage them in the development of services.

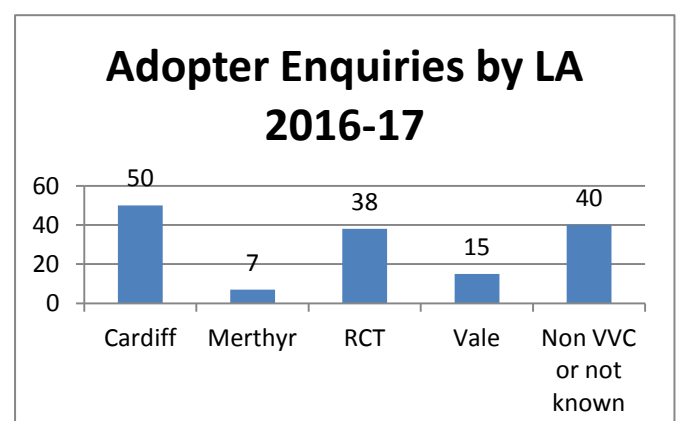
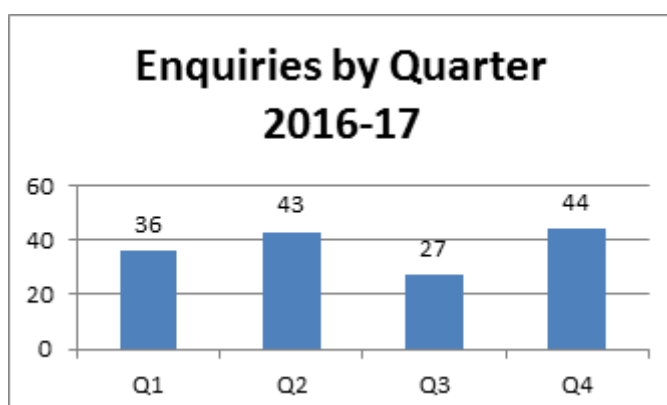
Angela Harris
Regional Adoption Manager
September 2017

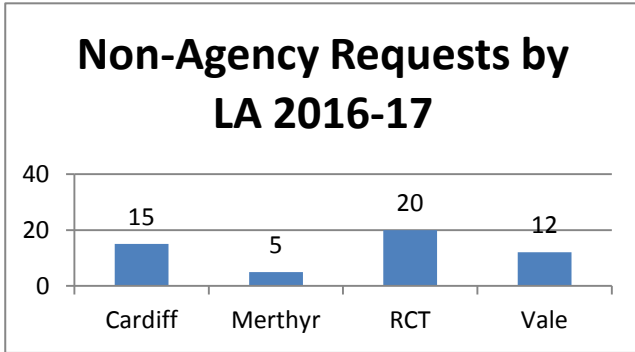
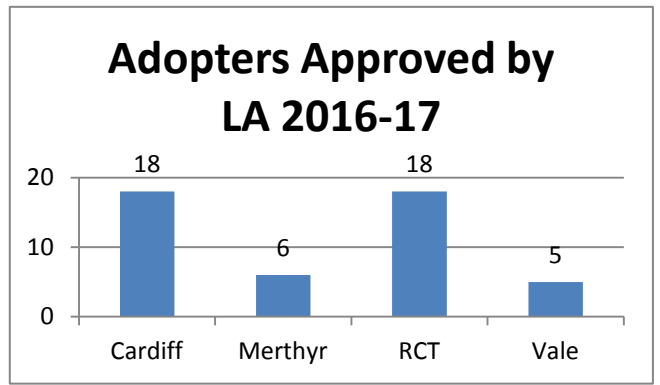
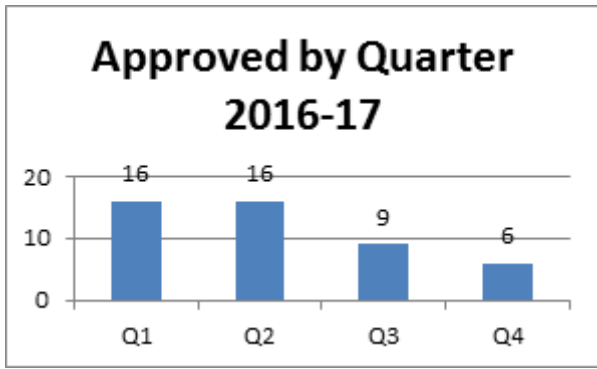
Appendix 1 VVC Annual Report 2016-17

Family Finding:



Recruitment and Assessment:





Post-Adoption Support:

