RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

24TH JANUARY 2019

**NATIONAL ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2017/2018 AND
THE VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF REGIONAL
ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18**

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

Authors: Ann Batley, Service Director for Children's Services

1.   PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1   The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with (1) an update on the progress of the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional Adoption Collaborative by considering the information provided in the Annual Report for the period 1st April 2017 to the 31st March 2018 (Appendix 1 and Appendix A) and (2) the National Adoption Services Wales Annual Report 2017/2018 (Appendix 2).

2.   RECOMMENDATIONS

       It is recommended that Cabinet:

2.1   Consider the contents of both the Annual Reports.

2.2   Receive a further report at future meetings.

3.   REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1   The reports attached at Appendix 1 (A) and Appendix 2 are the Annual Reports 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, are required to be presented to Cabinet.

4.   BACKGROUND

4.1   The National Adoption Services 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 National Service establishes governance arrangements providing national

direction and coordination. Its broad aim is to improve and make consistent the arrangements for timely placements of children, training and assessment of adopters, adoption supports and collaborative working. The National Adoption Services Wales Annual Report 2017/2018 gives the progress and improvements made in meeting the needs of children, young people and adopters through out Wales.

4.2   Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) is the largest of the five regional collaborative which form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS). It provides a regional adoption service to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. The service is hosted by the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

4.3   This is VVC's third annual report that covers the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018. The collaborative is required to review the service it provides by regulation and as part of the reporting requirements set out in the legal agreement underpinning the operation of the collaborative. The annual report seeks to combine the various reporting requirements in one report. This report was also presented to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on the 7th November 2018.

5.   EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

5.1   These reports are for information and, therefore, no Equality and Diversity screening is required.

6.   CONSULTATION

6.1   Consultation was undertaken by the National Adoption Service Wales and the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) in the preparation of the Annual Reports with children, young people, families, a variety of partner agencies and staff.

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 CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

9.1. The National Adoption Service and Regional VVC Service makes a positive contribution towards the Council's Corporate Plan Vision of *'a County Borough that has high aspirations, is confident and promotes opportunity for all"*; as it will deliver against the specific priorities of *'People - Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone and* *'Place - Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work'*.

9.2 It will also help the Council to meet three of the seven wellbeing goals that The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015' puts in place as follows:

1. A more equal Wales
2. A healthier Wales
3. A Wales of cohesive communities.

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 Both these reports provide Cabinet Members with the National and Regional overview of adoption within Wales and the Region.

10.2 Cabinet Members will note that the regional performance has improved, specifically the increase in the number of children placed for adoption and the reduced time taken to place a child for adoption.

10.3 There are still a number of areas that require improvement and these are being addressed in the VVC Regional Improvement Plan.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee
Community and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

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24TH JANUARY 2019

**NATIONAL ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2017/2018 AND
THE VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF REGIONAL
ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18**

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR LEYSHON

Background papers

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee - 7th November 2018.

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VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE (VVC)

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1 APRIL 2017 TO 31 MARCH 2018

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) is the largest of the five regional collaboratives which form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS). It 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. The service is hosted by the Vale of Glamorgan Council.

1.2 This is VVC's third annual report and covers the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018. The Collaborative is required to review the service it provides by regulation and as part of the reporting requirements set out in the legal agreement underpinning the operation of the Collaborative. This report seeks to combine the various reporting requirements in one report.

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

2. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

2.1 There has been no change to the managerial structure of the service during the period and the service continues to be managed by a Regional Adoption Manager and three service specific managers for Family Finding, Adoption Support, and Recruitment and Assessment. The Family Finding Manager went on maternity leave in January 2018 but the post has been covered by an interim acting up arrangement within the service. The Adoption Support Manager's post has been made a permanent full time position as a result of the Best Value Review.

2.2 There have been some changes to the staff team during the year due to a part time Business Support Officer leaving the service to obtain a full time position, two part time Social Workers retiring, one Social Worker who was employed for 30 hours moving out of the area and two Social Workers going on maternity leave. The loss of these part time posts has enabled some reconfiguration of these posts to full time positions. The service has continued to receive a high number of applicants for the vacancies which have arisen and also has had success in filling temporary positions. Some short term agency cover has also been put in place to cover gaps.

2.3 As outlined in the last report and due to the increased demands being placed upon the Collaborative, the Directors of the partner authorities commissioned a Best Value Review of the service in December 2016. The review was undertaken by an Officer from the Vale of Glamorgan Business Improvement Team and Finance

Officer from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. The analysis for the review was undertaken between January and September 2017. A draft report was presented to members of the Management Board during the autumn of 2017, prior to the report being agreed by the Directors and Joint Committee in December 2017.

2.4 The review was comprehensive and sought engagement from a range of staff both within VVC and also from our local authority partners. Consultation also took place with key stakeholders, members of the Management Board and representatives from the NAS central team. The review considered a range of aspects from the current service delivery model, the level of demand being placed upon the service, staffing arrangements, the governance of the region and funding.

2.5 The principal recommendations of the review were as follows:

 a) Finalise completion of the digital Adoption Panel process to streamline processes and improve efficiency.

 b) Establish an Operational Group of VVC and local authority managers to progress service improvement and development work within the region.

c) Increase regional staff resources within Adoption Support by securing the full time permanent appointment of the Adoption Support Manager and also the additional post covering Letterbox and Access to Birth Records.

d) In order to meet the emerging need to recruit more adopters, the review also recommended the appointment of a Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator on a two year fixed term basis and two Social Workers in Recruitment and Assessment, one to be appointed initially and a further one should adopter applications increase.

e) Formal review of the Legal Agreement to be undertaken to include twice yearly meetings of the Directors and the Management Board, changes to the frequency of Management Board meetings to quarterly and establishment of an Operational Group as part of the overall governance of the region.

d) Update and consider revision of the existing funding formula for the service and keep it under review.

2.6 An Action Plan has been developed and agreed to take forward the actions arising from the review.

2.7 VVC has continued to operate from Ty Pennant, Pontypridd during this time but due to the licence to occupy the premises expiring in September 2018, a trawl of alternative accommodation options was undertaken in the latter part of 2017 which included partner authorities and commercial options. The available commercial options were financially prohibitive and the partner authorities provided a nil return with the exception of the Vale of Glamorgan. It was therefore agreed that the service would relocate to the Dock Office in Barry during August 2018 prior to the cessation of the licence and following completion of some remedial work to the new premises. It was felt that this would also allow for consultation re any HR issues and for any

other matters affecting staff to be considered. The service moved to their new base on 10 September 2018.

2.8 The budget for the Collaborative is managed by the Vale of Glamorgan and is monitored closely by the Management Board and Joint Committee. The end of year position reported a slight overspend in the budget for 2017-18 created by some additional and unexpected costs for cleaning services at Ty Pennant which were received at year end. The Collaborative receives an annual internal audit undertaken by Bridgend and Vale Audit Shared Service. The audit undertaken for 2017-18 found 'substantial assurance' in respect of the management of risks within the service. The Best Value recommendation to review the funding formula has been taken forward by the Finance Technical Group comprised of Finance Officers from the four authorities. It was agreed that funding arrangements would remain unchanged for 2017-18 but further work would be undertaken in 2018-19 to consider options for future funding of the Collaborative.

 2.9. The Management Board has continued to meet bi-monthly during this period. Board meetings have continued to be well represented and supported by Heads of Service from the partner authorities and wider membership. The representative from the Voluntary Adoption Agency, St David's has changed to their Director of Operations and the Chair of the Management Board transferred to the Director of Social Services for RCT in July 2017.

2.10 The Management Board has played a key role in monitoring the progress of the Best Value Review to address improvements in service delivery. It has also continued to regularly monitor the overall performance of the region highlighting areas for improvement and potential solutions. To support the Management Board in monitoring the key elements of the performance framework, it has agreed the key performance data it wishes to receive on a regular basis which is attached at Appendix A.

2.11 The performance of the regional service has continued to be monitored via the NAS Performance Framework. The range of measures has increased each year which has required more comprehensive recording mechanisms to be put in place to capture this data. VVC has fully complied with all reporting requirements.

2.12 The Director of Operations for NAS attended the VVC Management Board in May 2018 to present the NAS End of Year Report for 2017-18 in respect of VVC's performance. Some of the headlines from this report are covered later.

2.13 The Joint Committee met in June and December 2017. The Joint Committee is comprised of elected Members from each of the authorities although the individual Members changed in May 2017 following the local elections. The Joint Committee approved the annual accounts for the Collaborative, the annual budget and plan and the Best Value Review.

3. SERVICE FUNCTIONS

3.1 VVC's Annual Work Plan has focused actions around the ongoing priorities set by NAS to improve adoption support and to place children and recruit adopters more effectively. Progress in meeting these priorities and developments to enhance service delivery are outlined under each of the service areas.

4. FAMILY FINDING

4.1 As previously indicated VVC is the largest of the regional collaboratives with the largest children looked after population. This context was acknowledged in the NAS End of Year Report for 2017-18 which states 'one of the implications of the size of VVC is that it represents a correspondingly large proportion of the overall demand across the spectrum of adoption services that local government and partners are required to provide'. In terms of family finding activity this represents a large area of work for the region and one that has increased since VVC's inception. The NAS report indicates that regionally VVC worked with about 15% of the children looked after within the region during this period.

4.2 The number of children referred for adoption totalled **244** which has fallen slightly on the previous year, although this represents the highest in Wales. **86** children were placed for adoption during the year, a 6% increase on the previous year. A new measure introduced in 2017-18 requires regions to report on the location of placements. During the reporting period, **51** children out of the 86 were placed within the region. **23%** of the placements made were for children in sibling groups which represents an increasing trend.

 4.3 At the end of the year there were **138** children who had a 'should be placed' for adoption decision but had not been placed for adoption which is significant increase on previous returns. **117** of these children were subject of a Placement Order. This figure has been used to project the number of adoptive placements required by the region to meet its' needs. However out of this total, 16 children were on hold pending a change of Care Plan, 34 children had active links, 10 of which were proceeding to matching, and the region was at year end actively recruiting for 67 children.

4.4 The region has recorded **102** Placement Orders being made during the year which also represents a slight decrease although the number of Adoption Orders has increased to **71**.

4.5 The measure in relation to the timeliness of the process from becoming looked after to being placed for adoption indicates that on average children were placed within **13.6 months** which the NAS report indicates is 'close to the benchmark of 13

months or less and one of the better averages amongst the NAS regions'. The NAS report also highlights that the VVC average of **7.7 months** from Placement Order 'is a significant improvement from last year; it is better than the national average although the benchmark is 6 months or less'. Regrettably of all the placements made during the year, **60** children had waited longer than six months to be placed which is higher than the previous year but is indicative of the challenges faced in placing children with complex and additional needs.

4.6 The level of placement breakdown remains relatively low with **3** placement disruptions during the year, one of these was a sibling group where one of the children had complex emotional needs and the other was a little boy with complex needs who had also experienced a previous breakdown.

 4.7 The number of birth parents referred to the service for counselling fell during the year to **297** in line with the national picture and slight reduction in children being referred. Overall take up in this area continues to pose significant challenges for the service as only **112** parents took up the service, although this represents one of the higher proportions across Wales.

4.8 The provision of Life Journey Material for children at their second adoption review remains an area of national and regional focus. Further improvement has been noted during the period with **68%** of children placed having life journey work materials in place by the second review. NAS has provided a Welsh Government grant to regions to improve performance in this area. VVC has purchased various resources of direct work materials which have been distributed to childcare teams in the region to assist and improve practice. AFA Cymru has been commissioned by NAS to develop a toolkit and to work with regions to develop improvement plans. AFA Cymru facilitated a day for VVC staff and local authority practitioners in November 2017 and more development days are planned.

4.9 The region utilises several different methods to assist Family Finding. If there are no internal links within the Collaborative external funding agreement is sought. The Welsh Adoption Register generates suggested links based on children's referrals and adopters approved by regional collaboratives and Welsh Voluntary Adoption Agencies. Last year VVC purchased a licence for Link Maker, a national database of children waiting. This has proved to be the most successful avenue for external links although sometimes this has been supplemented by an external mailshot which is sent securely to adoption agencies within the UK. The use of Link Maker has also reduced the need to advertise nationally in family finding publications for children waiting.

4.10 VVC accessed the Welsh Adoption Register Exchange Day in North Wales September 2017 where 29 children were profiled. Unfortunately there were fewer adopters in attendance and many children did not have any potential links from the event. A lot of interest was generated for one of the children but unfortunately none

of these links were suitable. One link is still being explored however it has taken some time as therapeutic involvement was required for the transition.

4.11 The service has also used Activity Days organised through Coram BAAF to promote children that were harder to place. Three were accessed across the UK, one child attended in May 2017, another attended in June 2017 and a third child attended in September 2017. Unfortunately no appropriate links progressed from these days. The first Welsh Adoption Activity Day took place in March 2018. This was extremely successful and resulted in links progressing to a match for four children, a toddler with additional needs, an older child and a sibling group of two.

4.12 As members of Adoption UK VVC is able to access 'Children Who Wait', a magazine which profiles children seeking adoptive families. A sibling group of two were profiled in September 2017 and two single children were profiled in March – May 2018 for three sequential editions. The sibling group were not linked using this method however we are exploring links for the two single children. As part of the membership VVC is able to access 10 free advertising spaces from April 2018 which will hopefully be utilised productively.

 4.13 An application to join 'New Families Social' Adoption Group from April 2018 has been made which will hopefully offer another avenue of profiling children to approved same sex adopters across the UK.

5. RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF ADOPTERS

5.1 The Performance Management 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 have been mixed, with improvements in some areas and not in other areas.

5.2. The region received **242** enquiries from prospective adopters in total for the year 2017/18 which represents an impressive 61% increase on the previous year and is the highest it has been for three years. This is encouraging and provides a sound basis for planning recruitment activity going forward. It remains however difficult to accurately identify the geographical location for all the enquiries received, although the local authority area is now a standard question on the enquiry form linked to the VVC website. Whilst this question has been added, VVC continues to receive a significant number of electronic enquiries where the local authority area is not completed and this information is not specified on the enquiries that come via the NAS website. Of the 242 enquiries received, VVC was only able to identify the local authority area for 152.

5.3 VVC's response rate to enquiries within five working days has returned to 100% following a slight drop in performance during the previous year. It is anticipated that the employment of a Marketing Officer will address any further deficits in this area and enhance our initial response to ensure that enquiries are followed up promptly.

5.4 The region approved **46** adopter households in the year 2017/18 compared with **47** in the previous year. The region was on target to approve over 50 households but there were **5** assessments that did not progress to Panel. This is a high number but the reasons given assist in understanding the complexities which can occur in assessing adopters. In two of the assessments, the couple's birth children were not supporting adoption, in one of the assessments the couple had come to a realisation that adoption was not right for their family situation and in another a realisation that they had come too late to adoption. In the fifth assessment that did not proceed a complex family issue had emerged which the couple found too intrusive to continue. There were two further assessments that were due to be completed in the final quarter of the year but were put on hold. The first couple suffered the loss of a family member and wished to take some time to grieve. The second couple had a complex family issue which arose during the assessment which needed further investigation.

5.5 In relation to VVC's overall performance in relation to the timeliness of assessments the picture is mixed. The timescales from initially enquiry to approval has increased from **12.2 months** to **13.5 months** but the timescale from application to approval has improved with an average of **7.1 months** overall. These figures clearly highlight that the greatest gap is between initial enquiry and application, arguably something that has been out of the control of the Collaborative as this is very much related to individual choice. The region continues to be able to account for the delays in assessment and has continued to supply an explanatory narrative to NAS to accompany the return in respect of these measures.

5.6 As mentioned in the previous report, VVC revamped the initial information provided to adopters, believing 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. This continues to be the case, and those attending the information evenings have frequently provided very positive feedback to VVC on how much better informed they have felt. It is clear that the trend noted previously with enquirers taking a longer time to come forward for an initial visit has continued. The recruitment of families for siblings and children with additional needs continues to remain a challenge.

5.7 The shortfall in adopter recruitment and the number of children waiting at year end has become an emerging and very pressing need. VVC was required, along with other regions to submit a Recruitment Plan and target for approvals at year end. For the reasons indicated above VVC fell short of this target but the need to increase adopter resource was considered closely by the Best Value Review and the additional resources recommended in recruitment & Assessment was in response to as the emerging need.

5.8 The decision to employ a Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator is seen as crucial in being able to track and harness the enquiries to increase the number of enquiries which can be converted into applications. Due to the number of children waiting and the number of Placement Orders projected to be made in the coming year, NAS project that the number of adoptive placements required will be 145. This is likely to pose significant challenges upon the service. The Marketing and Recruitment Officer has recently been appointed.

5.9 As of 31st March 2018 there were 26 assessments being completed by the region with a further 11 assessments generated from the adopter training in March 2018 which were all allocated within the first quarter of 2018/19.

5.10 Five of the adopter assessments undertaken during the year were from foster carers wishing to adopt the child in placement. Of the five that were completed in 2017/18, four of them had the child placed with them for more than one year at the point of their application.

5.11 During the past year the majority of the assessments completed have been allocated within the Recruitment and Assessment function. Agreement to extend hours for a couple of part time staff in the Family Finding Team was sought to complete assessments that could not be allocated and by utilising staff slippage monies. Assessment plans and mid-point reviews have continued to be used to improve practice and timeliness.

5.12. 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. It is planned that this area of work will be collated by NAS in the coming year. Again this is an area which poses significant challenges for the service. The need to prioritise the recruitment of adopters for children waiting to be adopted has resulted in a waiting list for allocation. On occasion, applicants have submitted their application to adopt directly into Court which resulted in an urgent assessment being required.

5.13. During the year, there has also been a slight increase in inter-country related enquiries, which have posed some issues for the team due to their complexity. Quite a few of the enquiries received are from couples wishing to adopt a child who is known to them, who resides in a different country. This area has also identified a knowledge gap in the service which we hope to address via training.

5.14 Towards the end of the reporting period, NAS was able to secure some additional funding to assist with recruitment. VVC utilised their grant to provide leaflets to assist with marketing the service and along with two other regions to employ a marketing company, COWSHED to develop a regional Marketing Plan. Further funding has been provided by NAS to provide mentoring by the company to the regions. This plan will therefore be further developed by the Marketing Co-ordinator in conjunction with COWSHED.

5.15 VVC has recognised that further training is beneficial for adopters to help prepare them for the matching process following approval as adopters. A couple of staff within Recruitment and Assessment have therefore devised a fourth day course for adopters which now runs every two months. The course provides guidance to help prospective adopters prepare for a visit from a childcare Social Worker to discuss a proposed match providing an overview of the process required to match a child and explain the legal process of adoption. Information about how introductions are planned is also provided. The second part of the course encourages adopters to think about the grief and loss a child will experience following a placement move.

Activities are undertaken to help adopters think about their support network and highlight the importance of seeking help if they experience difficulties post placement. Techniques to promote positive parenting are discussed and materials shared to help adopters think about ways they can introduce themselves to children prior to placement.

5.16 Three training sessions were held between November 2017 and March 2018 and a total of 37 people attended the course during this period. A lot of positive feedback was received from participants including comments such as adopters felt 'better prepared' and found the course 'informative and enjoyable'. A Welcome Booklet for new adopters has also been developed which provides information and guidance pre-matching on a range of issues.
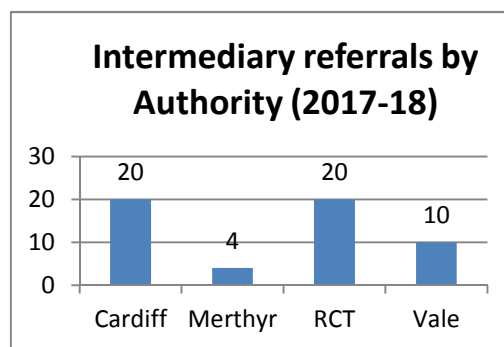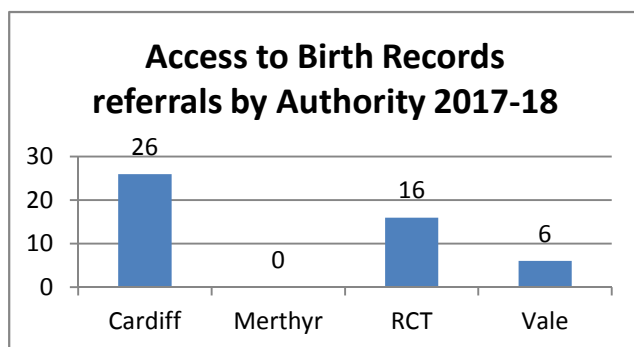
6. ADOPTION SUPPORT

6.1 Demand for adoption support services has remained steady through 2017-18. With **81** requests for adoption support received VVC is showing a consistent referral rate with the previous year's figure (83). This averages around 20 referrals per quarter requiring allocation for assessment. This trend has also continued in Quarter 1 of 2018-19 when 25 referrals were received.

Post-Adoption Support Referrals by Authority 2017-18

	Cardiff	Merthyr	RCT	Vale
	43	4	23	11
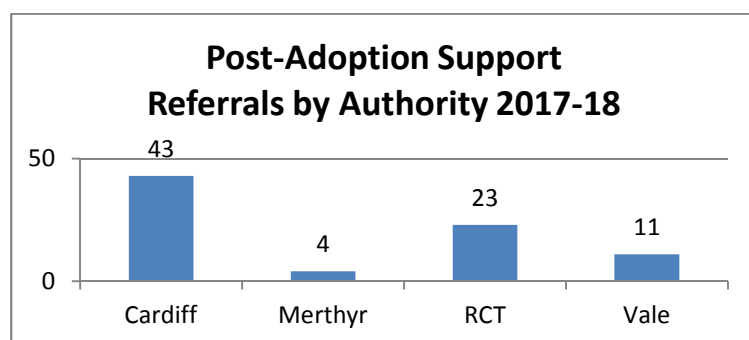
Although referral rates overall remain similar, Cardiff's proportion of referrals rose by 54% from 2016-17 whilst RCT and the Vale of Glamorgan saw a drop of around 35%. Merthyr's referral rate dropped by over 50% however this represents a drop from 9 referrals in 2016-17 to just 4 in 2017-18. Q1 figures for 2018-2019 show referrals for Cardiff, RCT and the Vale of Glamorgan on a par with each other; in fact the Vale of Glamorgan has had 8 referrals in Q1 this year when there were only 11 in the whole of 2017-18.

6.2 In relation to Access to Birth Records cases, VVC has observed a drop of around 28% in referrals with **48** in 2017-18, however in contrast intermediary referrals have increased by 59% to **54** (from 34 last year). Comparing the referral rates when VVC became operational in 2015-16 to the year-end figures for 2017-18, intermediary referrals have increased by 184%. This is largely due to the increase in VVC's capacity to allocate Access to Birth Records cases resulting in an increase in these adopted adults seeking a follow-on intermediary service. VVC remains one of few regions in Wales that has been able to continue to provide this service albeit with a lengthy waiting list.

Access to Birth Records referrals by Authority 2017-18

Authority	Value
Cardiff	26
Merthyr	0
RCT	16
Vale	6

Intermediary referrals by Authority (2017-18)

Authority	Value
Cardiff	20
Merthyr	4
RCT	20
Vale	10

There has been no marked difference in the referral rates by local authority from the previous year in relation to Access to Birth Records. There is a notable increase in intermediary referrals for RCT from 7 to 20 in 2017-18 (185% increase).

6.3 As at 31st March 2018 there were **812** open letterbox cases, an increase of 6% from 767 on 31 March 2017. This reflects the ongoing gradual increase observed in letterbox contact as new referrals exceed the number of existing arrangements closing when a child reaches 18.

6.4 The permanent staffing to enhance the Adoption Support Team 2016 as a result of the pilot exercise in 2016 and the outcome of the Best Value Review has been of significant benefit in reducing pressures within the team and gaps in service delivery. The Letterbox Co-ordinator role in particular has improved the quality of support being provided to adoptive families and birth parents.

6.5 Other monies secured as part of the 2016 pilot were used to access specialist training, the majority of this being used in 2016-17 although additional training has been accessed for some staff in the Adoption Support Team to complete DDP Level 1 training during the year. Staff within the Adoption Support Team are experienced and committed to service improvement. The team has facilitated adoption support groups for adoptive parents with topics including Sensory Processing Difficulties, Social Media and Contact in the last year. In addition, a monthly toddler groups has been maintained which provides opportunities for early intervention as well as bi-annual fun days which have high attendances.

6.6.Family fun days were held in July and November 2017 which were both well attended and numbers of those attending remain consistently high at around 90-100 children. VVC issued a newsletter in the spring of 2018 which was produced by the Adoption Support Manager. The region also contributed to the Adopter Voice project with Adoption UK which included attendance at one of VVC's support groups to consult with adopters. A report of this consultation has been presented to VVC Management Board.

6.7 The Regional Adoption Manager and Adoption Support Manager have continued to be involved in the IPC project commissioned by NAS to develop a National Framework for Adoption Support, the National Adoption Support sub group meetings to take forward the Framework as well as the focused project on Life Journey Work through 2017-18.The Adoption Support Manager has been involved in securing resources to utilise the grant monies referred to earlier in the report to

support improvements in Life Journey work. Further funding is anticipated for 2018-19 and plans for how to make the best use of these resources are being considered.

6.8 The Adoption Support Team has continued to develop an understanding of the demand for targeted and therapeutic services with families needing support across the region 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 continues to pose 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. The Adoption Support Manager is currently developing an adoption support improvement plan which places a greater focus on social work input and intervention with families prior to progression to therapeutic support services with a view to avoiding the need for such interventions.

6.9 The Regional Adoption Manager and Adoption Support Manager have in conjunction with colleagues from Western Bay met with the CAMHS Clinical Lead with a view to developing a consultancy service for Social Workers and a clear referral pathway for adopted children who may require a CAMHS service. A plan to progress these initial discussions is being developed.

7. ADOPTION PANEL

7.1 The Collaborative has continued to operate a joint regional Panel from two sittings, a north sitting covering cases from RCT and Merthyr Tydfil CBC and a south sitting covering cases from Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. Where adopter approvals involve no medical issues, there is provision to transfer the case for consideration to the Panel sitting with availability.

7.2. Panel business has remained at a high level during the year with 42 Panel meetings being held, with three scheduled meetings being cancelled due to delays in cases being ready for presentation.

7.3 As outlined in the previous report and highlighted as an improvement action in the Best Value Review, a significant area of development for the Panel has been to move to digitalising the Panel process and business. This work was completed by the end of March 2018 with the result that Panel business is now conducted via the use of tablets and sending Panel information to Panel members via a secure portal. This has improved security and reduced administrative time and printing costs.

7.4 Maintenance of the central list of Panel members continues to pose challenges in terms of maintaining a sufficient number of independent members and Social Work members. Some new members have been recruited during the year. An induction session for new members was held in June 2017 and a training day for all Panel members was also held in June 2017 facilitated by an independent trainer.

7.5 The other priority set in respect of completing the annual reviews of Panel members remains outstanding but a timetable is being developed to meet this requirement.

8. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

8.1 VVC has received the following complaints during the period:

- Complaint from prospective adopters regarding the process of linking and matching a child and lack of transparency on the part of the local authority Social Worker and staff within the Collaborative in respect of a link they were being considered for.
- Complaint from non-agency adopters regarding the initial advice provided by VVC regarding the process and requirements.
- Complaint from a step parent regarding the step parent adoption process, the delay in the Social Worker concluding the report and not responding to queries raised by the applicant.
- Complaint to the Managing Director from an adopted person regarding the service provided in respect of his access to birth records enquiry.
- Complaint from adoptive parents regarding their attendance at Adoption Panel in 2015 following a review of their approval. Complaint received as part of a stage 2 complaint to Cardiff Council concerning the breakdown in introductions to a child.
- Complaint from adoptive parent in respect of the post adoption support received from the allocated Social Worker.
- Complaint from an adoptive parent regarding the delay in securing a post adoption therapeutic support package.
- Complaint from adopters alleging that they had been discriminated against and treated less favourably by VVC staff in terms of their assessment and the subsequent linking process.

8.2 All the complaints have been resolved at stage 1 of the Vale of Glamorgan Complaint Process.

8.3 Two of the complaints have highlighted issues in respect of the linking process. VVC has, as outlined earlier in the report, introduced a fourth day of training to address some of the issues raised. Two of the complaints have highlighted issues in respect of the non-agency adoption process. VVC's website now contains information in respect of this process. Two have highlighted concerns in respect of adoption support which were addressed.

8.4 Regional staff have also received a number of compliments during the year. A record of these is maintained. The compliments include positive feedback from the fun-days, the toddler group, information evening and support provided for letterbox contact and access to birth records enquiries.

9. CONCLUSION AND 2018-19 PRIORITIES

9.1 During the period for this report, a Best Value Review was undertaken, commissioned by the Directors of the four local authorities. This provided a real opportunity to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the service and to look at potential remedies to address some of the presenting difficulties. The findings of the Review validated the earlier work undertaken by VVC detailing capacity and resourcing issues and options to address the shortfalls in the service.

9.2 In respect of regional performance, the increased the number of children being placed for adoption during the period, the number being adopted and the reduced time taken to place a child for adoption from Placement Order are positive improvements. Some improvement has also been noted in the provision of Life Journey materials for children placed and in respect of the take up of birth parent counselling. These improvements must however be considered against the increase in the number of children waiting for placements and the number waiting over six months to be placed. This set against the decrease in approvals of adopters and delays in timely recruitment of adopters makes recruitment an ongoing and clear priority for the service.

9.3 The service has also been proactive in developing some new initiatives during the year to more effectively support adopters and prepare them for placement. There is also evidence that the increased permanent resource in Adoption Support is having a positive effect in improving performance and reducing pressures on the service. The priorities set for the 2017-18 have been met in part but some are ongoing due to the need to continue to remain focused on our core business.

9.4 The priorities we have set for 2018-19 focus upon completing the actions arising from the Best Value Review which have been endorsed by the Management Board. Particular emphasis for the remainder of the year will focus upon driving up the conversion rate of adopter enquiry to application with the intention of increasing the rate of adopter approvals. Some systems have already been put in place to improve our initial response following the recent appointment of the Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator and so it is hoped that these can be developed further once the additional resources in Recruitment and Assessment are in place.

9.10 The other focus of activity and priority for VVC during this current year has been managing the recent relocation of the service to Barry. In order to achieve as smooth a transition as possible and to minimise service disruption, this has required careful planning and preparation by VVC staff and the development of some new systems of working to meet the needs of the whole region. The permanent location will have benefits longer term but the service is still in a settling in period so it is important that our priorities remain delivering our core business and service improvements.
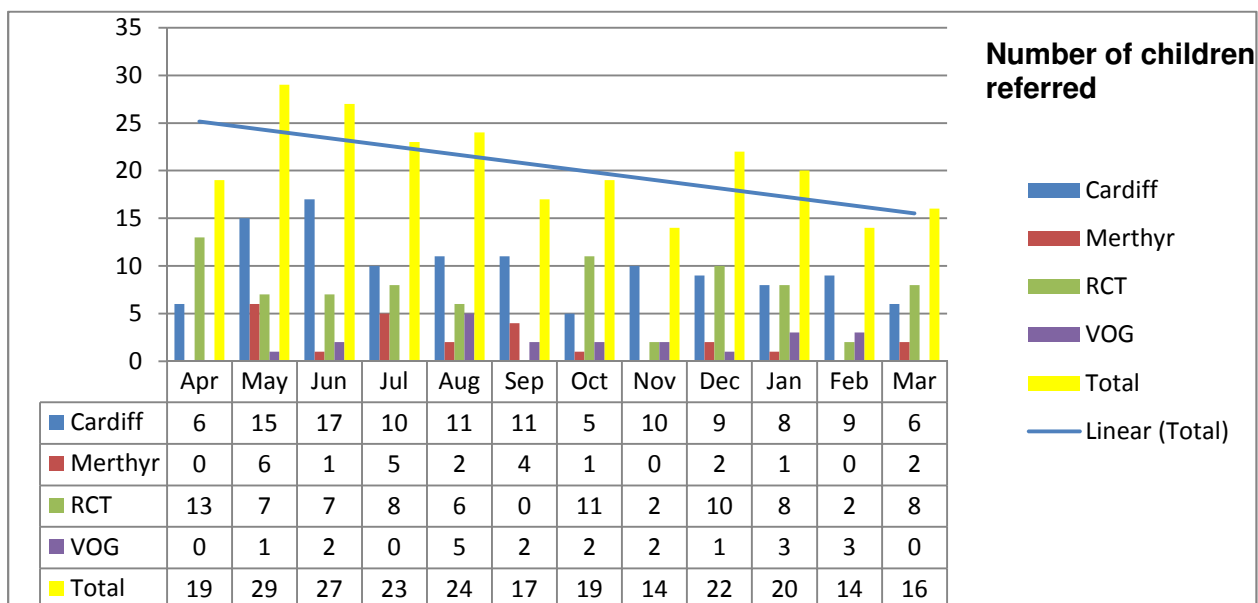
Angela Harris
Regional Adoption Manager
September 2018

APPENDIX A   VVC Annual Report 2017-18

This report provides an overview of VVC performance against key indicators in respect children and adopters as agreed by Management Board. The information is provided by local authority. Comparative data is presented for 2016-17.

CHILDREN

Number of Children Referrals made to VVC since April 2017 – of the 244 referrals received for 2017/18 – 57 have been withdrawn (23%)

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Cardiff	6	15	17	10	11	11	5	10	9	8	9	6
Merthyr	0	6	1	5	2	4	1	0	2	1	0	2
RCT	13	7	7	8	6	0	11	2	10	8	2	8
VOG	0	1	2	0	5	2	2	2	1	3	3	0
Total	19	29	27	23	24	17	19	14	22	20	14	16

2017/18	**Cardiff**	**Merthyr**	**RCT**	**VOG**	**Total**
Total	117	24	82	21	**244**

The number of children referred for adoption has fallen slightly although this total represents the highest in Wales.
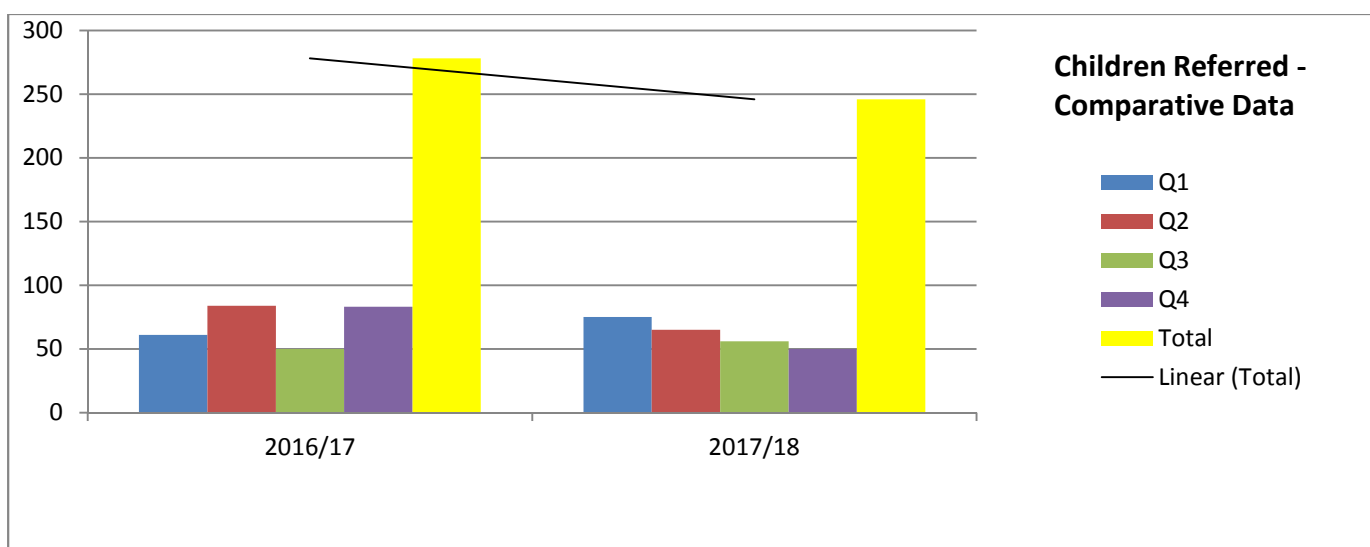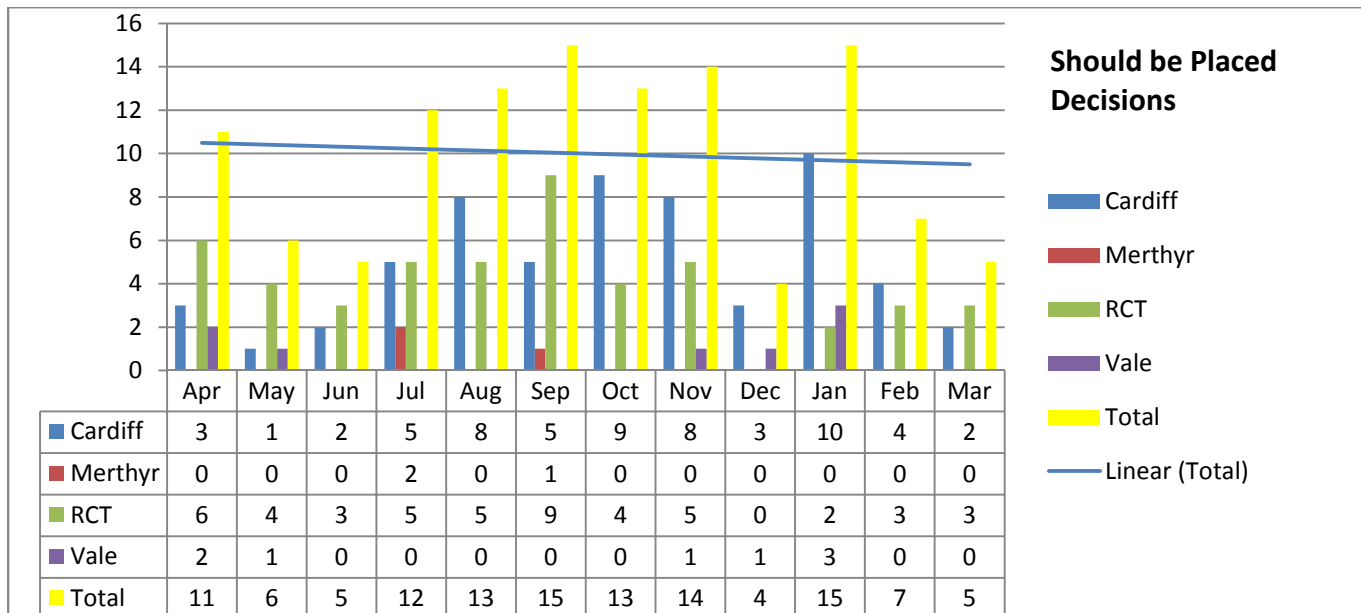

Year	**Q1**	**Q2**	**Q3**	**Q4**	**Total**
2016/17	63	84	50	83	280

VVC Annual Report 2017-18

2017/18	75	64	55	50	244
Total	138	148	105	133	524

Number of Should Be Placed Decisions made since April 2017

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Cardiff	3	1	2	5	8	5	9	8	3	10	4	2
Merthyr	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
RCT	6	4	3	5	5	9	4	5	0	2	3	3
Vale	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	0	0
Total	11	6	5	12	13	15	13	14	4	15	7	5

2017/18	Cardiff	Merthyr	RCT	Vale	Total
Total	60	3	49	8	120

*The number of children with a Should be Placed for adoption decision has slightly increased during the period.*
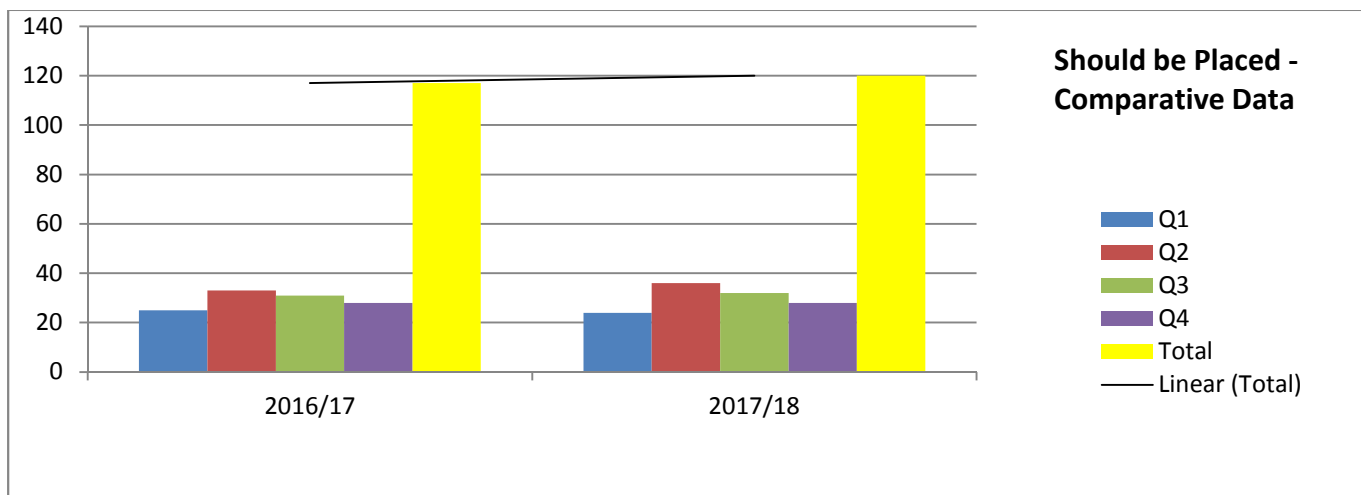
Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2016/17	25	33	31	28	117
2017/18	24	36	32	28	120
Total	49	69	63	56	237

Number of Placement Orders made since April 2017

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Cardiff	2	2	3	3	4	8	3	6	3	7	3	3
Merthyr	0	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
RCT	4	3	5	6	3	8	5	4	2	1	3	1
Vale	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	9	7	9	10	8	17	8	10	6	9	6	4
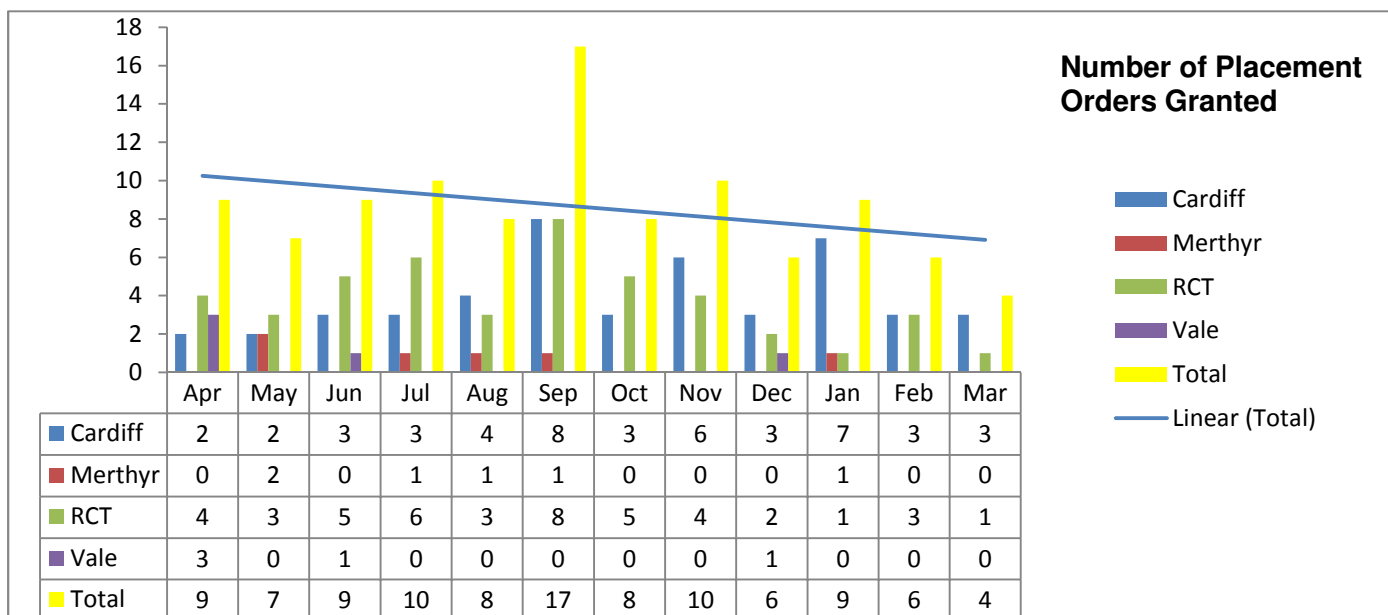
2017/18	Cardiff	Merthyr	RCT	VOG	Total
Total	46	6	45	5	**102**

The region has seen a decrease in the number of children being made subject of a Placement Order during the year but at year end there were 117 children waiting with a Placement Order who were not placed. 16 children were on hold, 24 children were proceeding to matching, 10 had active links being pursued and VVC was actively family finding for 67 children.
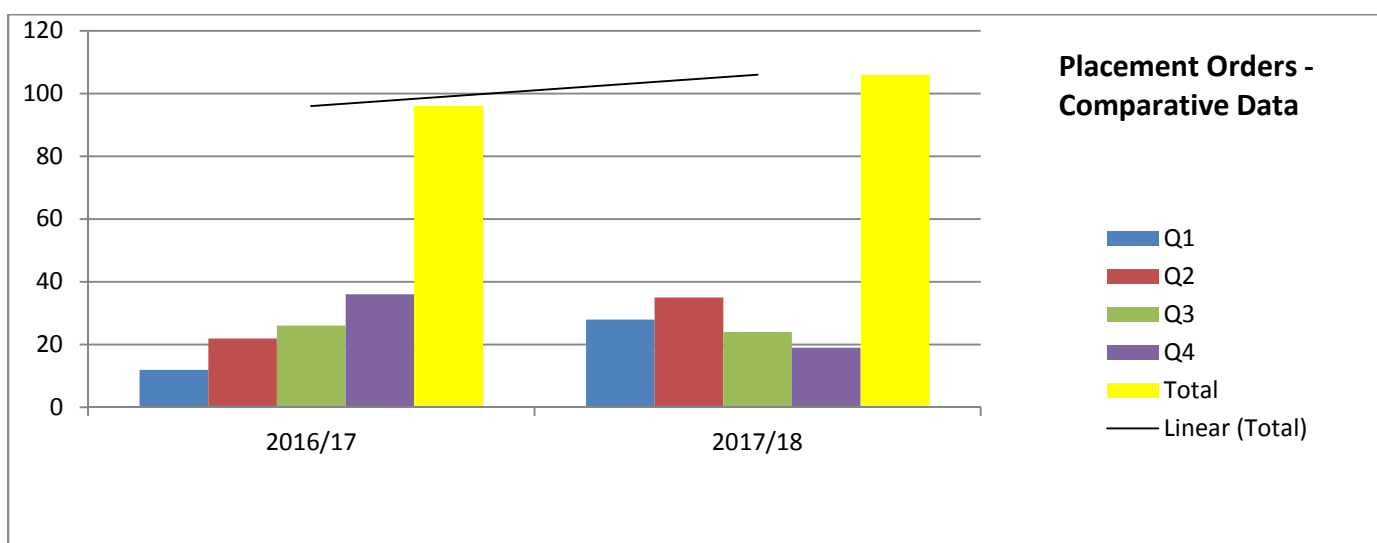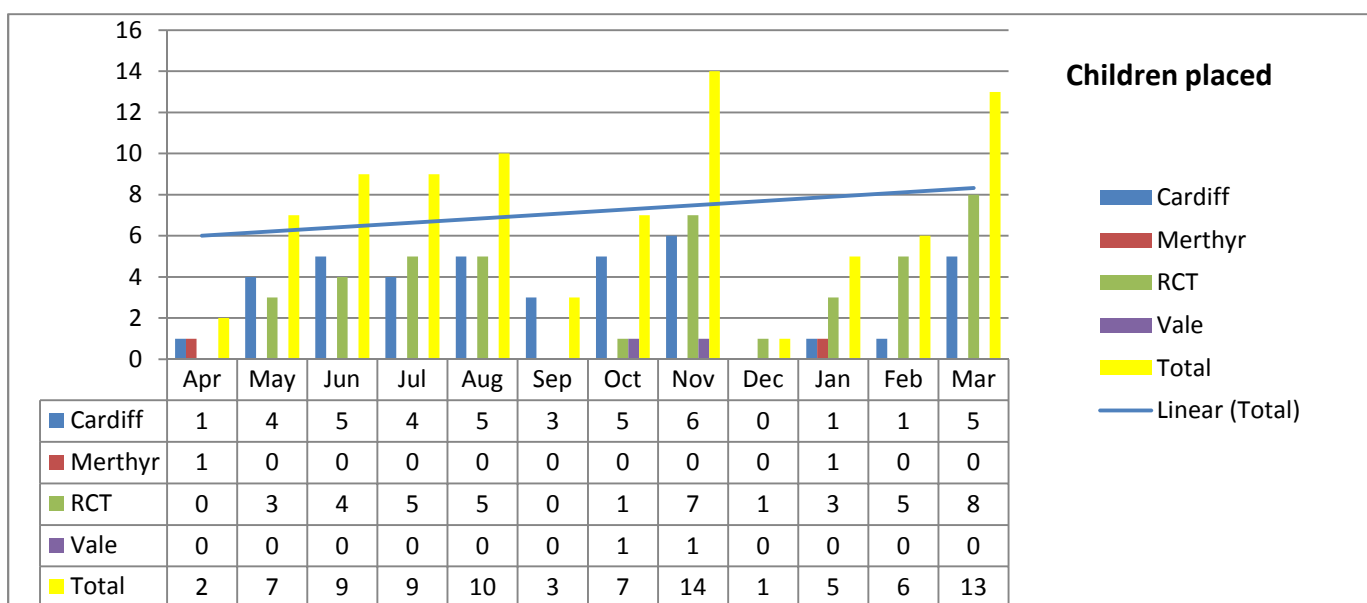

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2016/17	18	33	26	36	113

VVC Annual Report 2017-18

2017/18	25	35	24	18	102
Total	43	68	50	55	216

Number of children Placed for Adoption since April 2017

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Cardiff	1	4	5	4	5	3	5	6	0	1	1	5
Merthyr	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
RCT	0	3	4	5	5	0	1	7	1	3	5	8
Vale	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Total	2	7	9	9	10	3	7	14	1	5	6	13

2017/18	Cardiff	Merthyr	RCT	VOG	Total
Total	40	2	42	2	**86**

The number of children placed for adoption during the year has increased on the previous year. This number is the highest in Wales. Concern however remains in respect of the number of children waiting for placement and the length of time they wait.
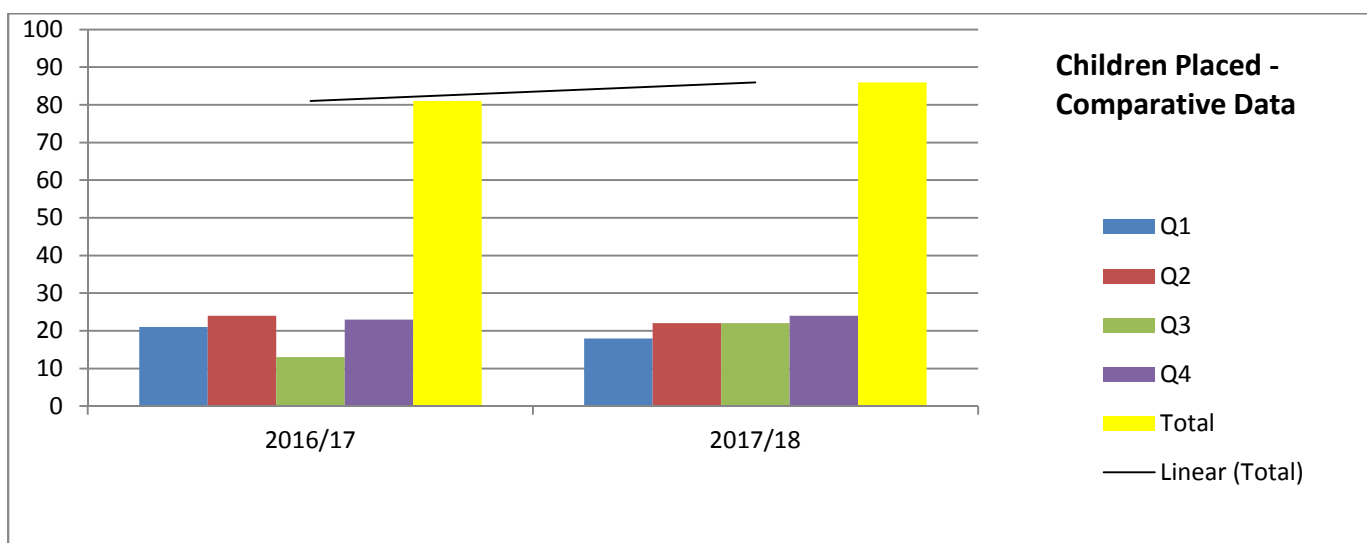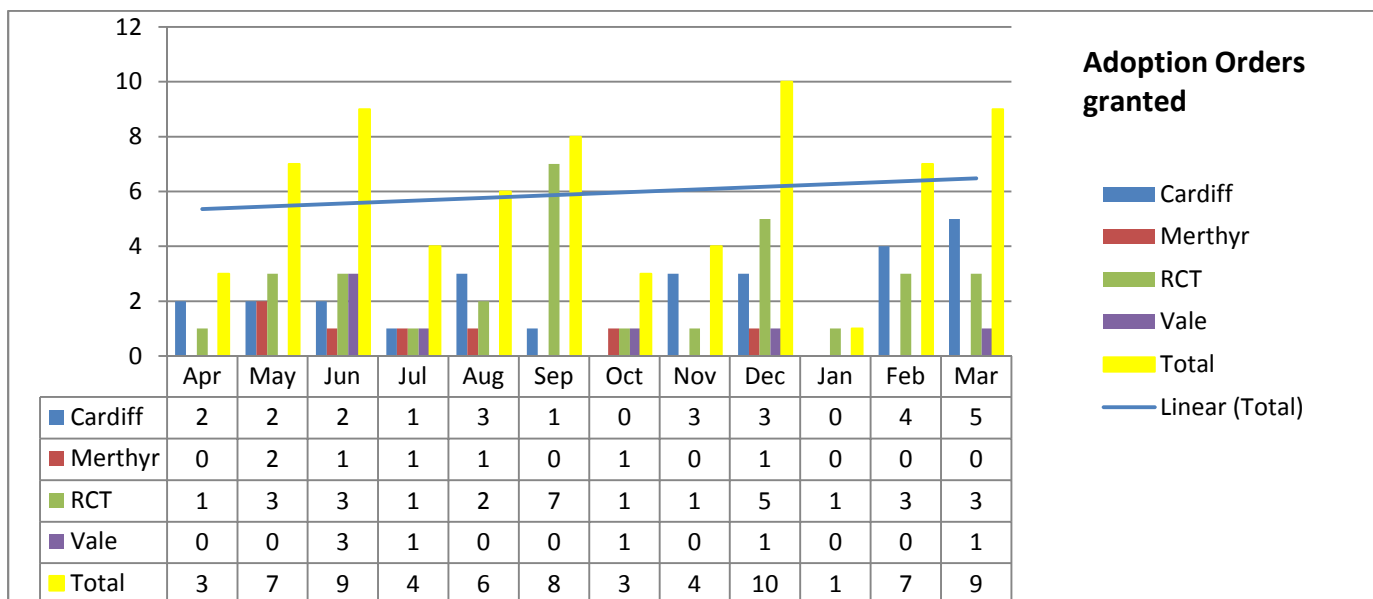
VVC Annual Report 2017-18

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2016/17	21	24	13	23	81
2017/18	18	22	22	24	86
Total	39	46	35	47	167

Number of Adoption Orders Granted since April 2017

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Cardiff	2	2	2	1	3	1	0	3	3	0	4	5
Merthyr	0	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
RCT	1	3	3	1	2	7	1	1	5	1	3	3
Vale	0	0	3	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
Total	3	7	9	4	6	8	3	4	10	1	7	9

2017/18	Cardiff	Merthyr	RCT	VOG	Total
Total	27	6	31	7	71

Adoption Orders have increased from the previous year.
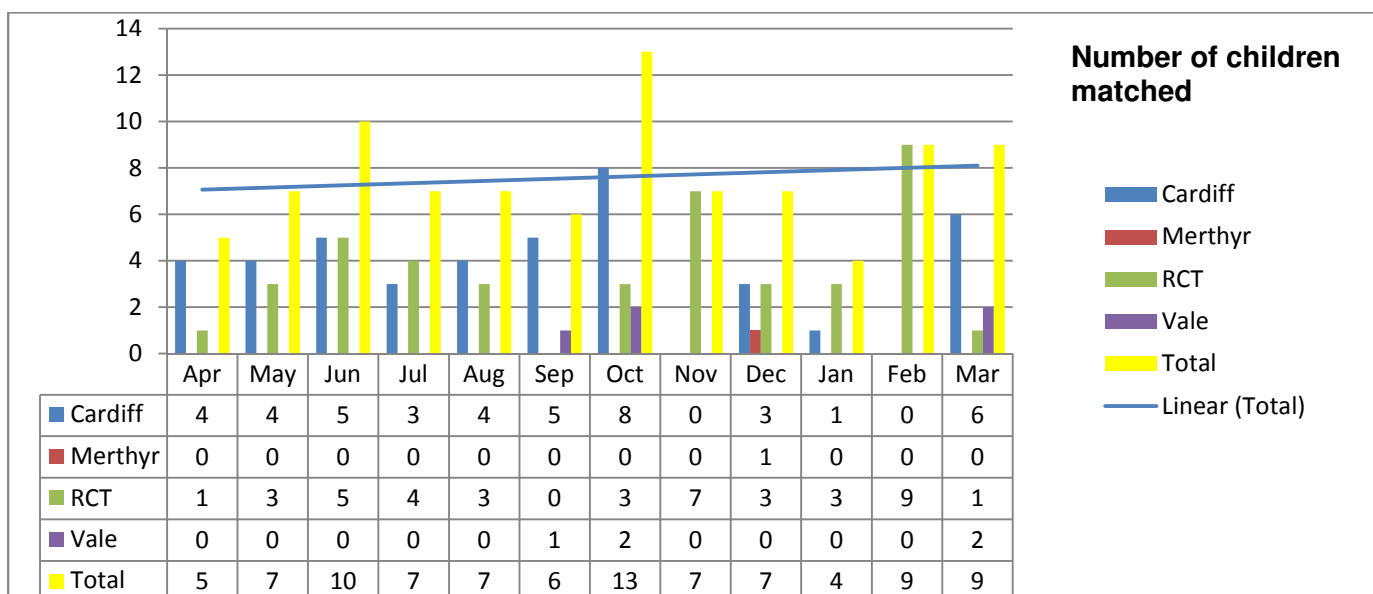
Number of Adoption Orders Granted – Comparative Data
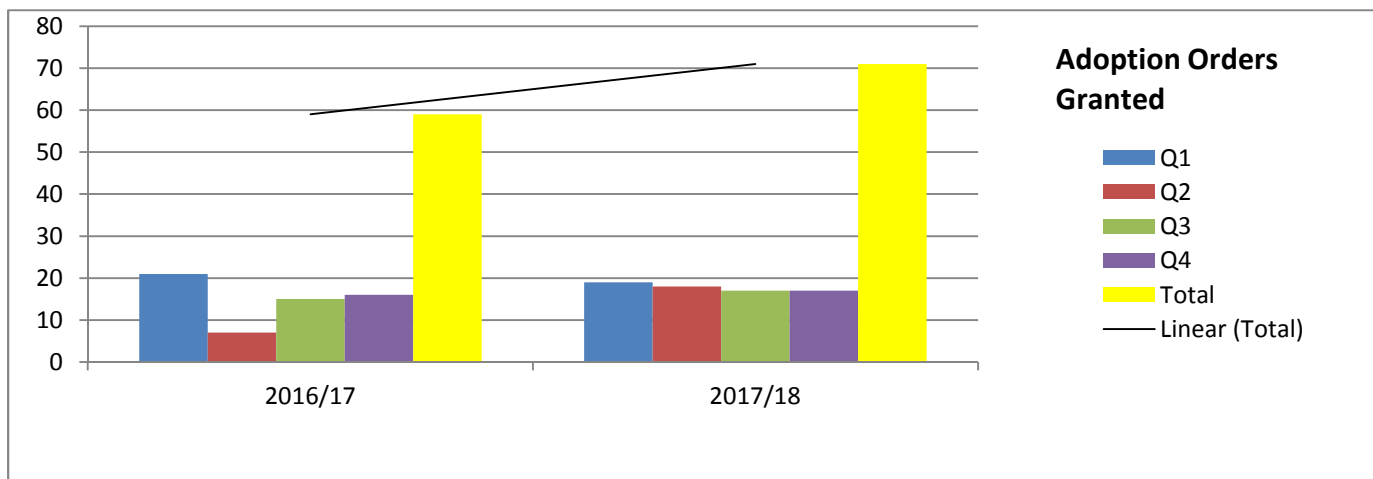
APPENDIX A   **VVC Annual Report 2017-18**

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2016/17	21	12	15	17	65
2017/18	19	18	17	17	71
Total	40	30	32	34	136

Number of children Matched (approved by Agency Decision Maker) but not placed since April 2017

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Cardiff	4	4	5	3	4	5	8	0	3	1	0	6
Merthyr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
RCT	1	3	5	4	3	0	3	7	3	3	9	1
Vale	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	2
Total	5	7	10	7	7	6	13	7	7	4	9	9

2017/18	Cardiff	Merthyr	RCT	VOG	Total
Total	*43*	*1*	*42*	*5*	*91*

This represents the number who were matched at the end of the year whose placement fell in the following quarter.

Number of children Matched (approved by Agency Decision Maker) – Comparative Data
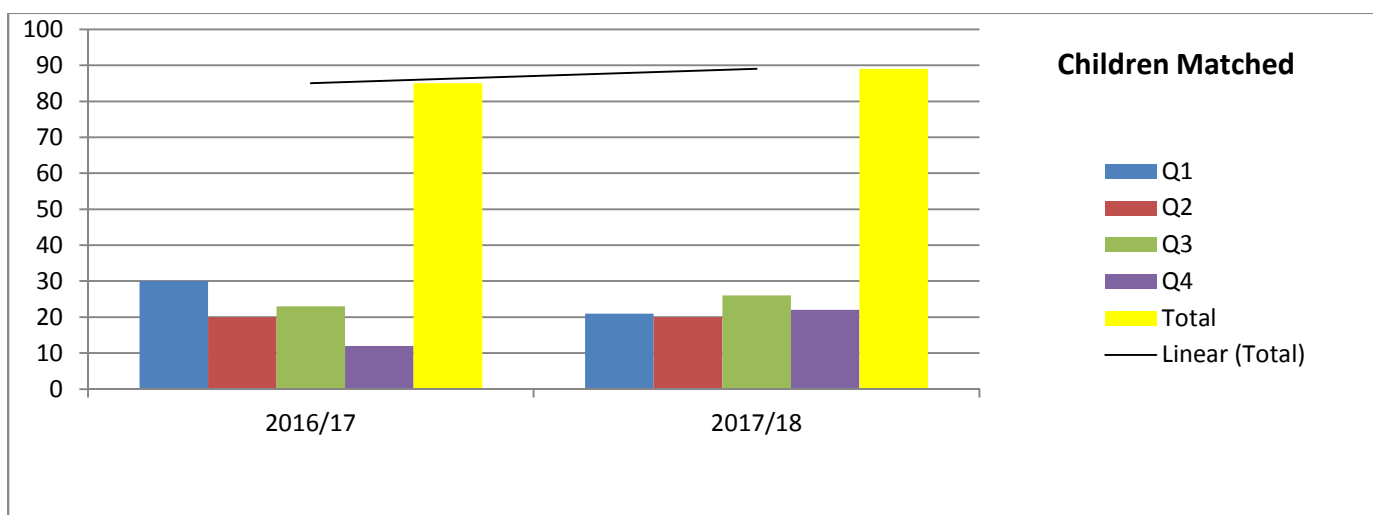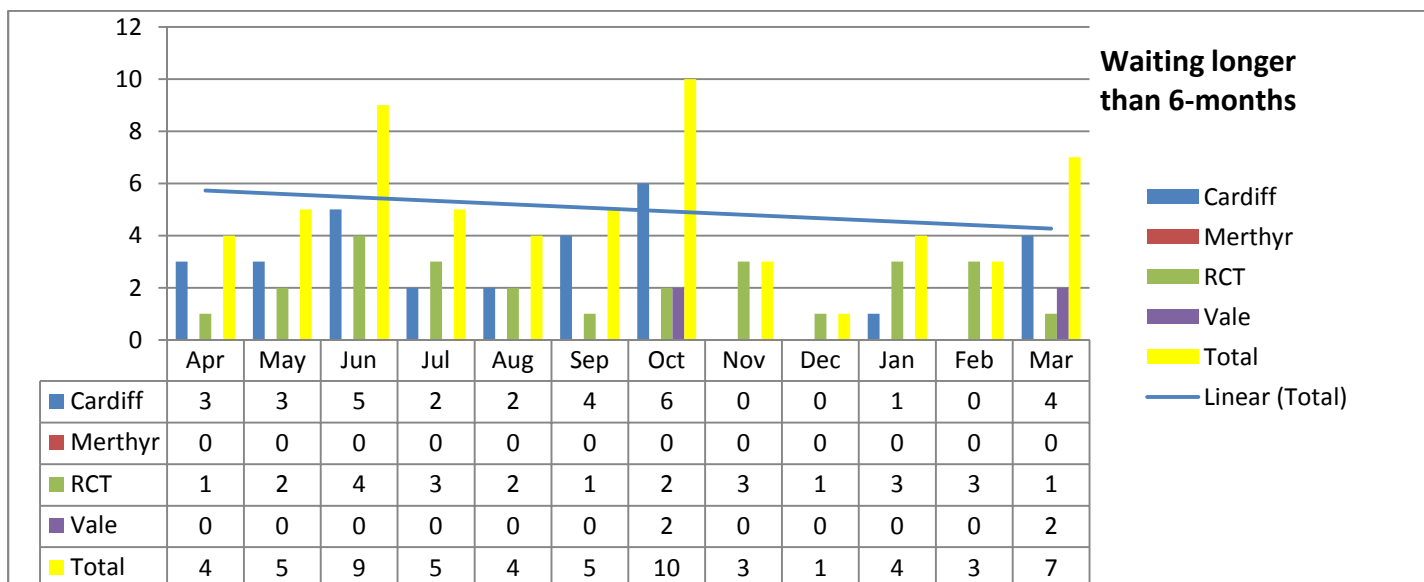
VVC Annual Report 2017-18

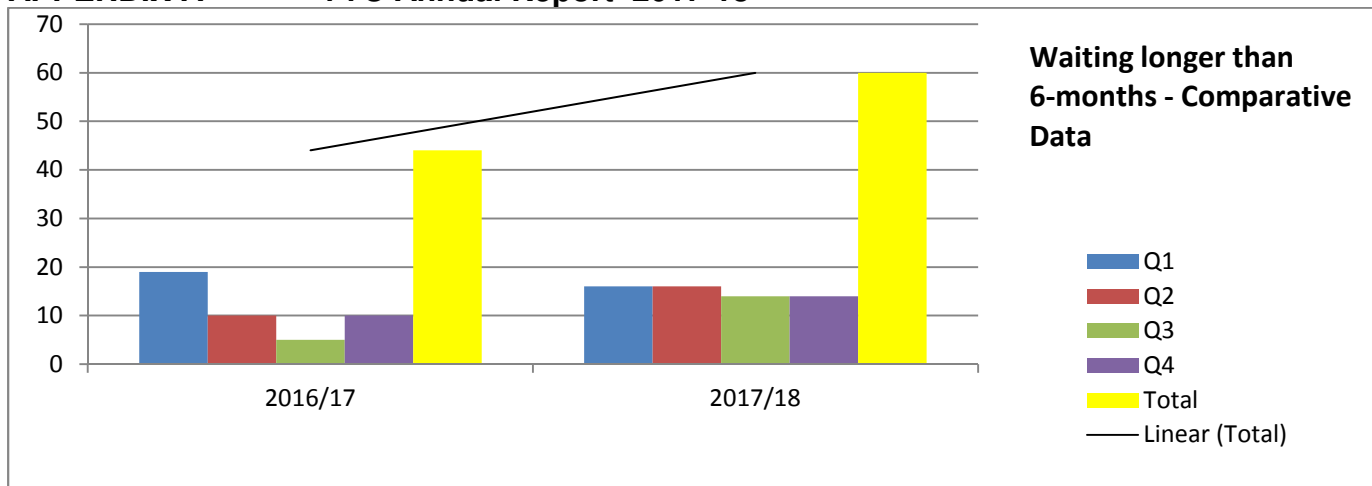| Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2016/17	30	20	23	12	85
2017/18	22	20	27	22	91
Total	51	40	49	34	176

Number of children Matched in since April 2017 who have waited longer than 6 months (or 3 months for a relinquished child under 6 months of age) to progress from date of Should be Placed for Adoption Decision to date of Agency Decision to approve Match

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Cardiff	3	3	5	2	2	4	6	0	0	1	0	4
Merthyr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
RCT	1	2	4	3	2	1	2	3	1	3	3	1
Vale	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Total	4	5	9	5	4	5	10	3	1	4	3	7

2017/18	Cardiff	Merthyr	RCT	VOG	Total
Total	30	0	26	4	**60**

These graphs demonstrate an increase in the numbers waiting longer than six months for placement.

Waiting longer than 6-months - Comparative Data

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2016/17	19	10	5	10	44
2017/18	16	16	14	14	60
Total	35	26	19	24	104

Number of children Placed for Adoption since April 2017 for whom Life Journey Material has been provided to adopters by the time of 2nd Adoption Review

Life Journey Work

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cardiff	7	8	8	3
Merthyr	1	1	0	0
RCT	2	6	7	1
Vale	1	2	0	0
Total	11	17	15	4
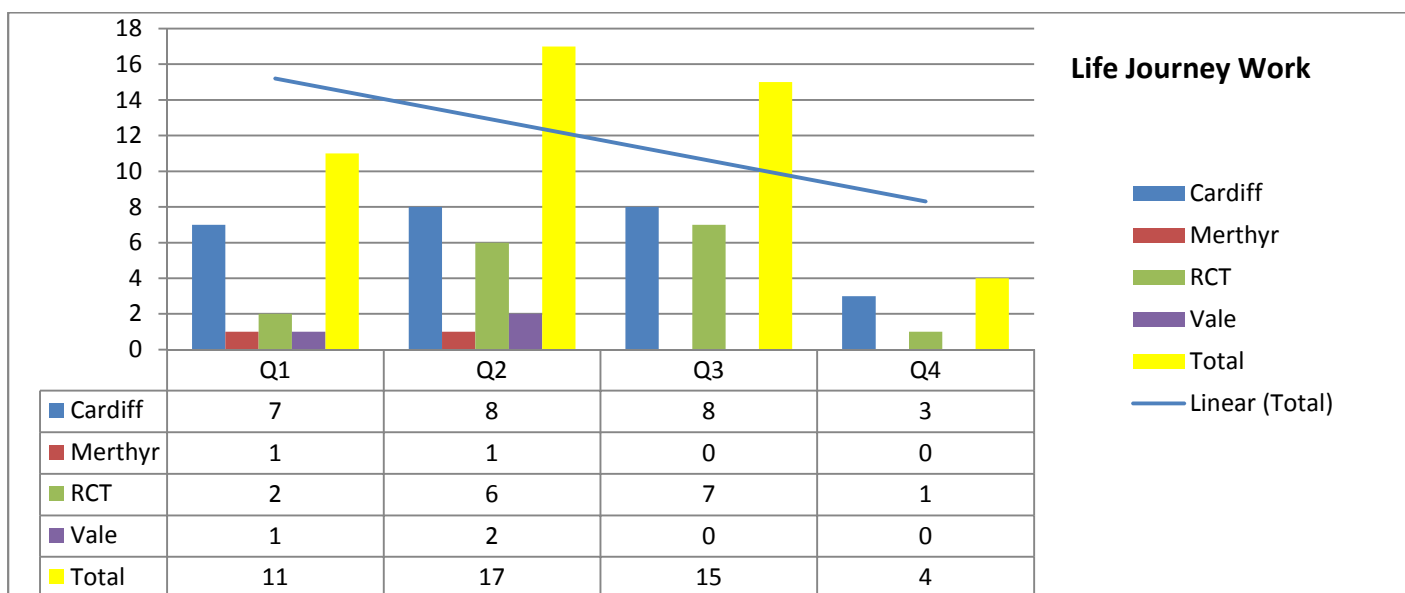
Totals 2017/18	Cardiff	Merthyr	RCT	VOG	Total
2nd Adoption Review	44	2	23	3	72
Life Journey provided	26	2	16	3	47 (NAS have 49 as both the Vale and Merthyr submitted 1 each which was not

					accurate and this was submitted to NAS)

This chart is representative of VVC's figures broken down by local authority.

Not all the data was available for the NAS report but they calculate our overall performance is 68% which is an improvement on previous years.
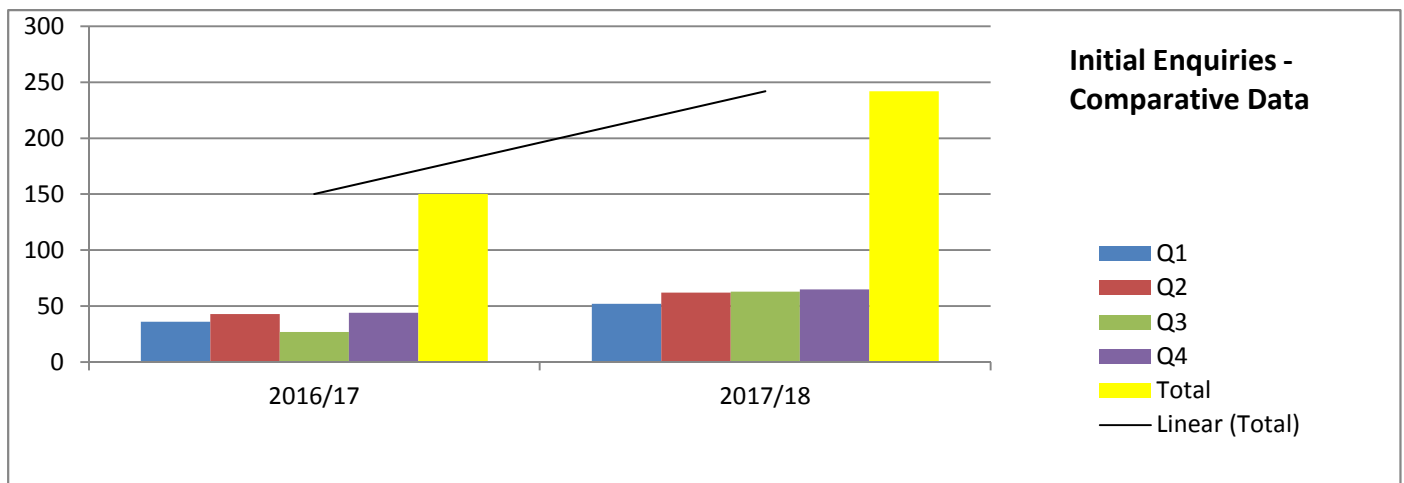
ADOPTERS

Number of Initial Enquiries regarding Adoption received since April 2017 - *Total number of initial enquiries received = 242 of which 90 (37%) we are not able to allocate to a local authority as they were received by email. This is something we are continuing to address.*

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Cardiff	9	3	2	6	3	5	8	5	5	10	1	5
Merthyr	0	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
RCT	1	1	4	4	3	6	6	5	2	8	7	3
Vale	1	4	2	1	2	1	2	3	2	3	4	4
Total	11	10	8	12	8	13	17	14	11	22	13	13
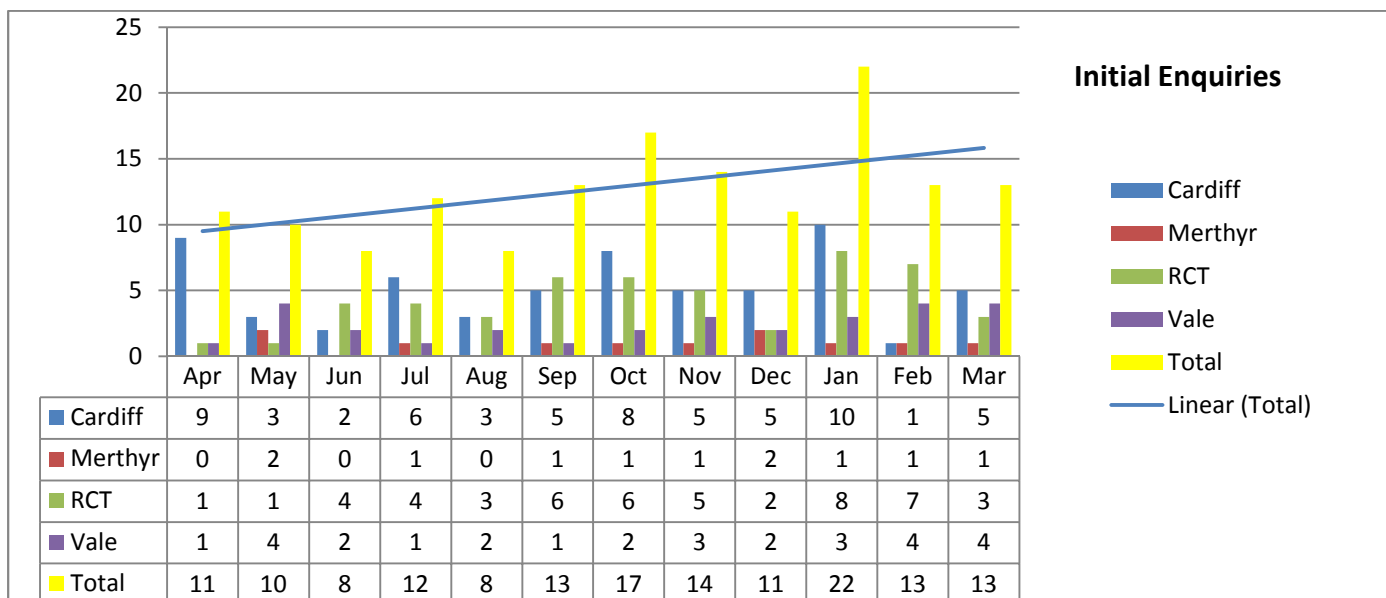
2017/18	Cardiff	Merthyr	RCT	VOG	Total
Total	62	11	50	29	**152 (actual 242)**

These graphs indicate the breakdown by authority. There are a large number where the geographical area is unknown.

Number of Initial Enquiries regarding Adoption received – Comparative Data

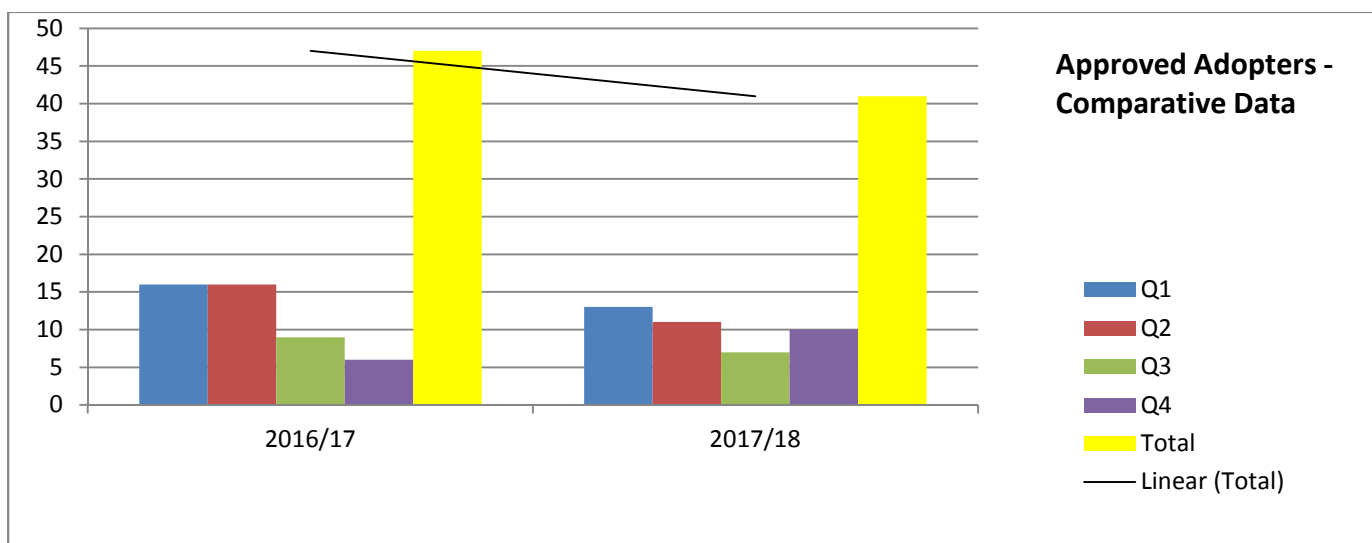| Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2016/17	36	43	27	44	150
2017/18	52	62	63	65	242
Total	88	105	90	109	392

Number of Prospective Adopters receiving Agency Decision to approve as suitable to adopt since April 2017 – *Note; there were 10 approvals in Q4, 2 of which were from outside VVC*

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Cardiff	2	4	3	3	0	1	0	4	0	0	1	2
Merthyr	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
RCT	0	1	2	1	0	2	2	0	1	2	0	1
Vale	0	1	0	1	1	1	2	2	0	0	0	2
Total	2	6	5	6	1	4	5	6	1	2	1	5
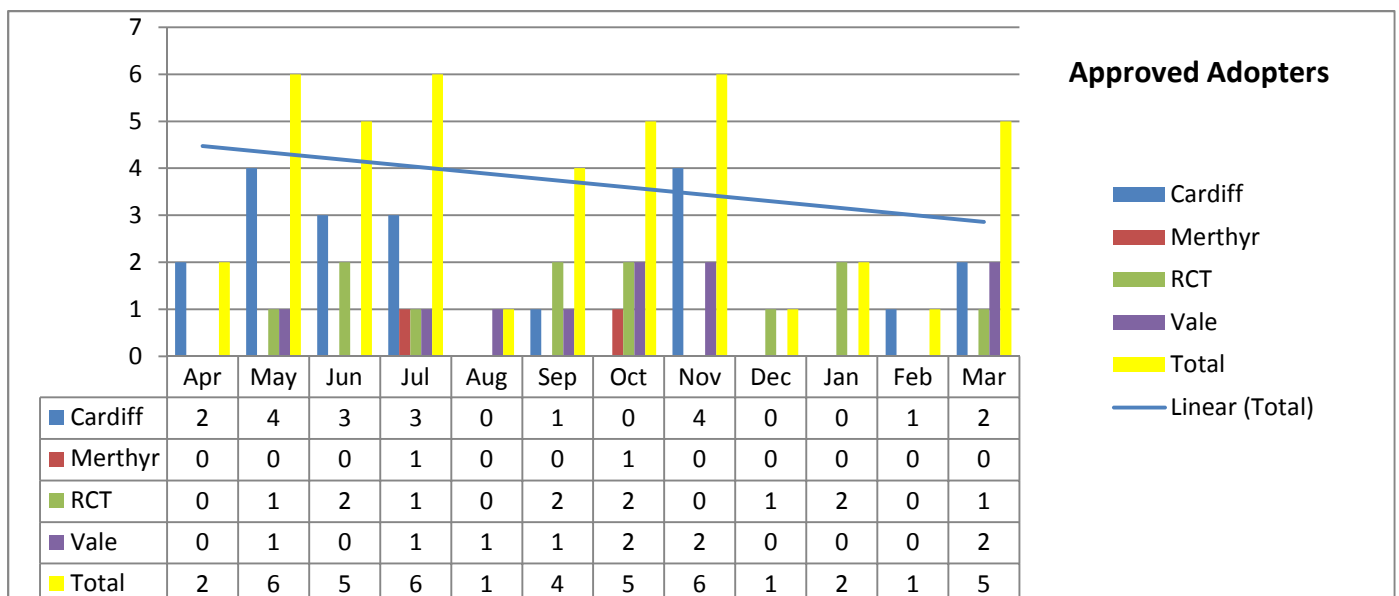
2017/18	Cardiff	Merthyr	RCT	VOG	OTHER	Total
Total	20	2	12	10	2	46

These figures demonstrate a slight decrease on the previous year. Unfortunately five couples withdrew during assessment and one post approval which has had an impact upon the region meeting its' goal.
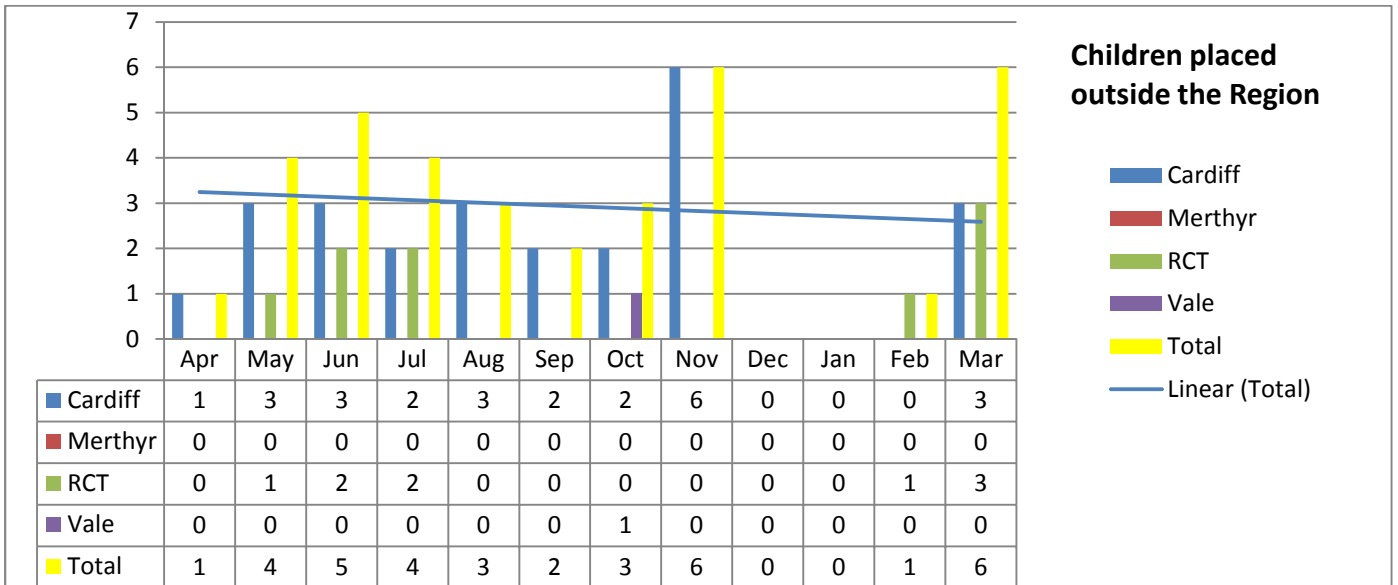

Approved Adopters - Comparative Data

Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
2016/17	16	16	9	6	47
2017/18	13	11	12	10	46
Total	29	27	21	16	93

CHILDREN PLACED WITHIN REGION AND OUTSIDE REGION

Children placed within the Region

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Cardiff	0	1	2	2	2	1	3	0	0	1	1	2
Merthyr	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
RCT	0	2	2	3	5	0	1	7	1	3	4	5
Vale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total	1	3	4	5	7	1	4	8	1	5	5	7
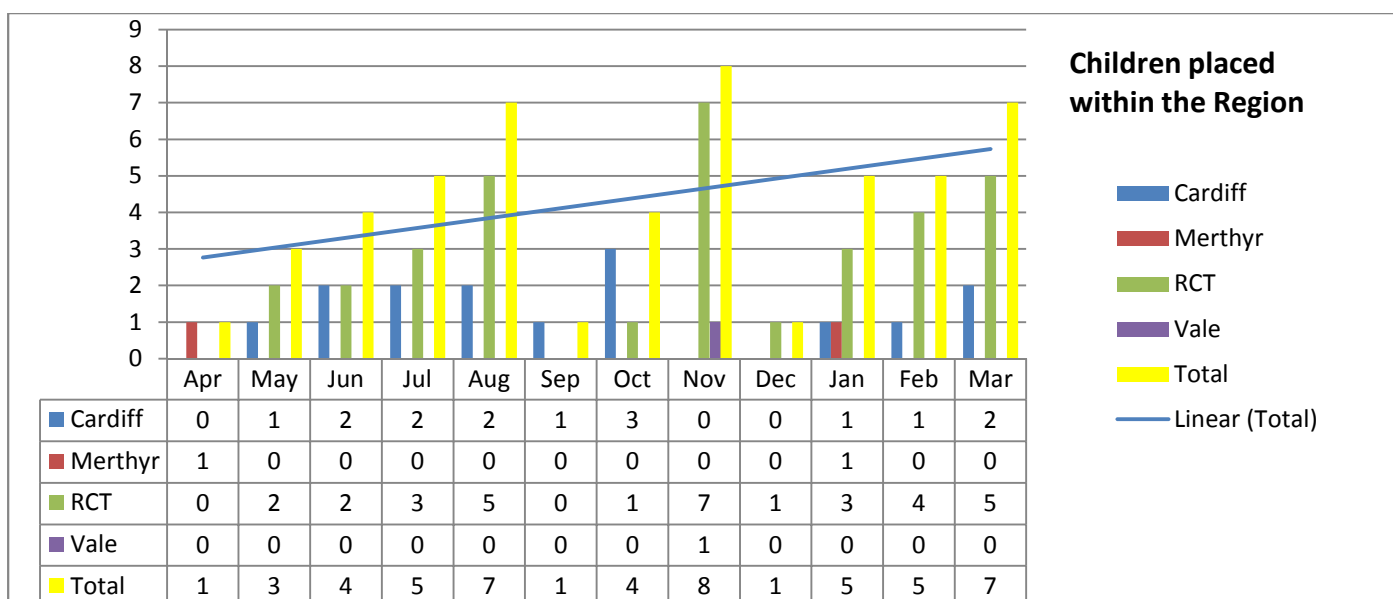
2017/18	Cardiff	Merthyr	RCT	VOG	Total
Total	15	2	33	1	**51**

Children placed outside the Region

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Cardiff	1	3	3	2	3	2	2	6	0	0	0	3
Merthyr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
RCT	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Vale	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1	4	5	4	3	2	3	6	0	0	1	6

2017/18	Cardiff	Merthyr	RCT	VOG	Total
Total	25	0	9	1	**35**

Annual Report
2017-2018

Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Cenedlaethol | National Adoption Service

Achieving More Together /
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

FOREWORD

We are pleased as the chairpersons of the National Adoption Service Advisory Group and Governance Board respectively to have the opportunity to provide this foreword.

Philip T. Hodgson

Phil Hodgson
Chair of the Advisory Group

Geraint Hopkins

Cllr Geraint Hopkins
Chair of Governance Board

The local government elections of 2017 provided NAS with a new chairperson for the Governance Board as well as new councillors to represent each of the five national adoption service regions. This, alongside the consistency in the Independent Chairperson and membership of the Advisory Group, has created an excellent and renewed partnership in the professional and political stewardship of Wales' National Adoption Service.

It is almost four years since the National Adoption Service was launched in November 2014 and since that time we have seen progress and improvement in meeting the needs of children, young people and adopters. This report shows what has been done to extend that during 2017/18 and reflects the hard work and contribution made by adopters, adopted children and young people, as well as professional staff across Wales.

We can see performance improving in many areas as well as important initiatives such as the new Life Journey Work Framework, the NAS Adoption Champions and the Adopting Together scheme which show much promise for the future continuation of this.

We were pleased during this year to be invited to write an article for 'Adoption & Fostering' the quarterly journal now published by the Coram Baaf Adoption and Fostering Academy. We extend our thanks to Dr Alyson Rees of Cardiff University for her support and challenge in co-writing that with Phil. This provided an important 'pause and reflect' opportunity to take stock of where we were. This was complemented in February of this year by an Advisory Group workshop where we began to think about where we want to be and in particular how we move to developing a contemporary and forward thinking adoption services for Wales.

This is not without its challenges, some of which are also outlined in the report, but we realise that in part our role is to challenge ourselves and those that deliver and resource adoption services in Wales, as well as the policy makers of government.

Adoption has lifelong implications for all those it touches; recognising this provides a new 'mindset' for services and different challenges in terms of how we attract prospective adopters, place children and provide adoption support in the future. It also provides challenges to the legal and policy context, resourcing and practice.

However, this is informing the work we have been doing and the plans for the future in terms of the need for dynamic and flexible recruitment and adoption support services. The need to change how we do this in Wales remains significant and will continue to be the focus of attention during the next twelve months.

INTRODUCTION

The National Adoption Service for Wales is a collaboration for the provision of adoption services across Wales.

Since November 2014, it has brought together all local authority adoption services into five regional collaboratives, with co-ordination and leadership provided by a small central team and Director of Operations. Voluntary adoption agencies operating in Wales are important partners in the collaborative, as are other agencies such as health and education.

CENTRAL TEAM

National Adoption Service – Central Team
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Room 409 County Hall, Atlantic Wharf,
Cardiff, CF10 4UW
029 2087 3927
contact@adoptcymru.com
www.adoptcymru.com

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Wrexham, LL11 1AR
01978 295311
adoption@wrexham.gov.uk
www.northwalesadoption.gov.uk

MID & WEST WALES
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Mid & West Wales Adoption
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adoptionenquires@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
www.adoptionmwwales.org.uk

Neuadd Brycheiniog, Cambrian Way,
Brecon, Powys, LD3 7HR
01597 827666
adoptionenquiries@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
www.adoptionmwwales.org.uk

WESTERN BAY
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Western Bay Adoption Service
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Port Talbot CF131PJ
0300 365 2222
enquires@westernbayadoption.org
www.westernbayadoption.org

VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF
Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan

Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Adoption
Level 7, Ty Pennant, Catherine Street,
Pontypridd, CF37 2TB
0800 0234 064
adoption@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk
www.adopt4vvc.org

SOUTH EAST WALES
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South East Wales Adoption Service
North Wing, 2nd Floor Block B,
Mamhilad House, Mamhilad Parke Estate,
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adoption@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk
www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/3122.asp

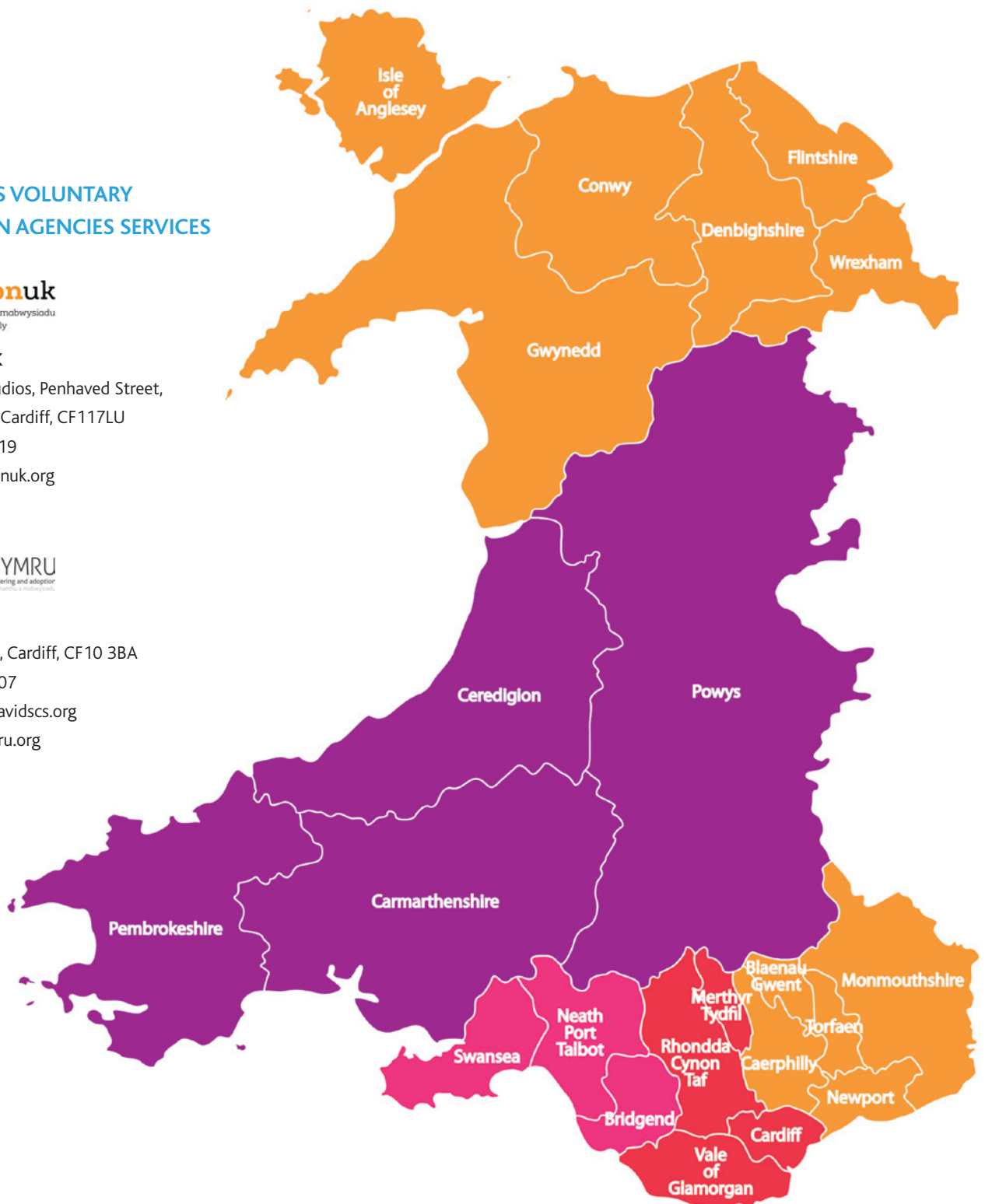**adoption**uk
ar gyfer pob teulu sy'n mabwysiadu
for every adoptive family

Adoption UK

Penhaved Studios, Penhaved Street,
Grangetown, Cardiff, CF117LU

029 2023 0319

www.adoptionuk.org

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

AFA Cymru

28 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BA

029 2066 7007

Info-afa@stdavidscs.org

www.afacymru.org

**after
adoption**

After Adoption

Penhaved Studios, Penhaved Street,
Grangetown, Cardiff, CF117LU

029 2066 6597

information@afteradoption.org.uk

www.afteradoption.org.uk

Credwch
mewn plant
**Believe in
children**

Barnardo's
Cymru

Barnardo's Cymru

Trident Court, East Moors Road,
Cardiff, CF245TD

0800 0546 788

cymruadoptionandfosteringservice@
barnardos.org.uk

www.barnardos.org.uk/adoption

St David's Children Society
Cymdeithas Plant Dewi Sant

St David's Children Society

28 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BA

029 2066 7007

info@stdavidscs.org

www.adoptionwales.org

For looked after children in Wales who cannot remain with their birth family, and for whom an adoptive home is the agreed plan, adoption services play an important role in securing a permanent family.

During the 2017/18 business year:

- more than 300 children were placed in their new adoptive home;
- approximately 300 children had their adoption orders granted[1];
- a further 350 children, with the legal authority to be placed, were waiting to be matched or placed with their new family at the end of the year.

The service worked with about 16% of the children who were looked after in Wales last year, a similar figure to the year before. According to Welsh Government data, on average over the last eight years, 13% of all the children who ceased to be looked after were adopted.

The adoption agencies that make up the National Adoption Service for Wales provide a range of services to support these children and their families, as well as others affected by adoption. In addition to working with the children above, adoption services across Wales also:

- supported more than 500 children with adoption support services;
- facilitated more than 3,370 active letterbox contact arrangements;
- provided a service to more than 320 birth parents;
- received more than 200 requests for access to birth records and more than 150 for help in making contact with birth family;
- received more than 60 requests for support from birth siblings and other relatives.

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[1] This data is collected by the Welsh Government and will be published later in 2018
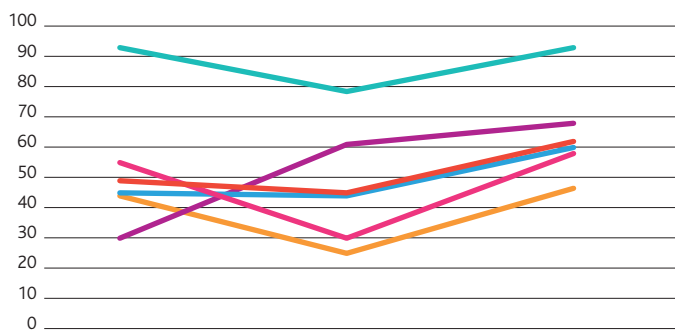
ADOPTION SUPPORT

Since NAS was formed, we have made improvements to the adoption support services we provide, and we are currently implementing our Framework for Adoption Support.

This framework recognises that all adopted children and their parents may want or need support at some stage, and that this needs to be easily accessible and available within 'adoption informed' services. It also recognises that we should better equip adoptive families in the early days, as well as ensuring families get effective information, advice or support whenever they need it. These changes are part of recognising that adoption has 'lifelong implications' for children, their adoptive parents, and others affected by adoption – particularly birth parents and adopted people.

Out of the many positive changes being made, we are particularly pleased with the impact of our life journey work for children and families. 62% of children now have this in place by their second adoption review.

All of the regions have shown further improvement this year, with Mid and West Wales consistently performing well.

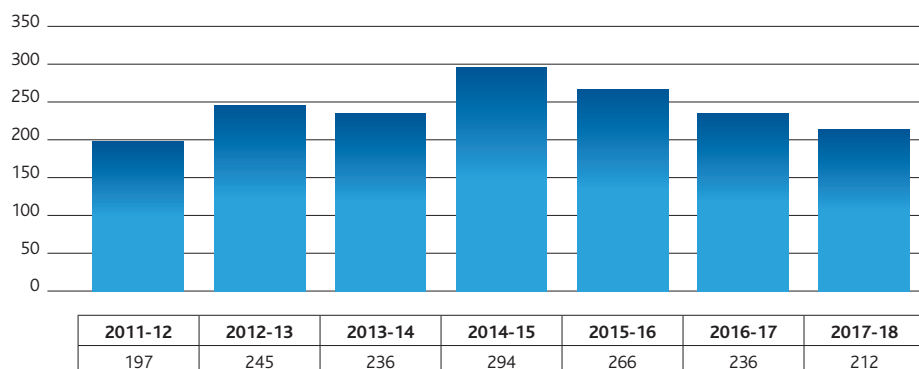

Framework for Adoption Support

Once again this year nearly all the children placed had their need for adoption support services assessed, and 36% had ongoing services at the point of placement, a higher proportion than last year (25%).

There has been an increase in post adoption support being sought and provided. At 167, 32% more new requests for post adoption support were assessed during 2017/18, with a further 81 in progress at the end of the year. The vast majority of these assessments, more than 124 or 74%, resulted in a non-financial support service being provided mainly for therapeutic or practical support.

We have asked the Welsh Government to revise the legal framework for adoption support services. This would make adoption support plans become part of the child's Looked After Children plan, remaining active and reviewed under the new Social Services and Well-being Legislation until support is no longer needed. Families would still be able to come back for further support should they need it later on.

We believe this will help us improve the accessibility of services, alongside making changes that improve how adoptive families are supported from the start. Initiatives such as the new Life Journey Materials Framework, and the flexible post approval training package for adopters, should provide this. We also plan to consider how contact is supported in 2018/19.

Percentage of children at second adoption review with Life Journey materials in place

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Mid & West Wales	92%	79%	92%
North Wales	44%	25%	46%
South East Wales	45%	43%	60%
Vale, Valleys & Cardiff	30%	61%	68%
Western Bay	55%	30%	58%
WALES	49%	45%	62%

2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
197	245	236	294	266	236	212

PLACING CHILDREN

Section 2 of the report outlines the work we are doing to improve recruitment, meaning we can place all children in a timely way. We have been improving marketing and recruitment because we now understand our business needs in much more detail.

In 2017/18, 212 adopters were approved, fewer than in previous years, but 12% more new assessments (277) were commenced. The level of adopters approved has returned to pre-NAS levels; this may be the 'norm' for Wales, but this needs to change because recruitment activity at this level will not meet our needs.

Despite this, there are some positive things to report in terms of placing children:

- the children we place are, on average, being placed more quickly;

- 56% of children placed joined their new family within the Welsh Government guideline of 13 months from the time they became 'looked after' and 49% within the 6 months guideline from the time of the placement order;

- nearly one third of the placements we made were for children in sibling groups – similar to last year;

- the level of matches that do not proceed or breakdown before the adoption order remains very low at 1%;

- enquiries from adopters have increased by 20% this year; and

- the average time for an adopter to be approved has reduced again – on average 6 months from formal application to approval, 9.5 months from the adopters first enquiry.

We recognise that we need increase the level of assessments commenced and completed to reach a new level of adopter sufficiency, meaning we can reduce the number of children waiting and the time they wait. We believe in the short term that Wales needs to almost double the number of adopters it recruits.

UNDERPINNING WORK

There are many other activities that the National Adoption Service is engaged in. In section 3, we report on the work we are doing to engage with adopters, adopted children and young people, and our co-produced development work with them. It also outlines the significant amount of work we are doing in legal and policy arrangements, which ensure that the context for adoption services works well for the people receiving services.

The rest of the report outlines how we did in meeting our priorities for 2017/18.

OUR FOCUS

**The National Adoption Service vision
for 2017/18 was to:**

- Increase the range of adoptive homes available to meet the needs of children for whom adoption is the agreed plan

- Reduce the time all children wait for an adoptive placement, including children with additional needs, and ensure sibling groups are placed together

- Ensure prospective and approved adopters receive good quality, timely assessment and support

- Implement our Framework for Adoption Support to provide everyone affected by adoption with improved access to advice, information and certain services, as well as more targeted and specialist support for those who need ongoing support following assessment

- Achieve improvements in the performance of adoption services across Wales

**Key Improvement Priorities
for 2017/18 were:**

- Continuing to improve adoption support

- Placing children effectively

- Underpinning work – which included informing the legal and policy context, consulting with and using co-production to engage our service users, improving professional understanding and skills in permanence and adoption related work, and ensuring our Governance arrangements work well
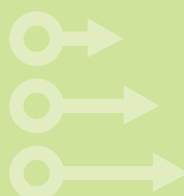
1 PRIORITY

Continuing to improve adoption support

Progressing the Adoption Support Framework and Business Case

The National Adoption Services Framework for Adoption Support outlines our ambitions for the support and services that adopted children, adoptive parents and others affected by adoption can expect over time. It is the adoption support improvement plan for Wales, based on our engagement with the people who use services. Over time, we want these services to be easily accessible and widely available everywhere, meeting needs in a timely way.

Where are we at March 2018?

- The Framework has been developed and agreed by all partners and stakeholders.

- Most regions have developed their local arrangements to provide adoption support, including providing new or additional services and developing their staff to deliver specific therapeutic adoption support interventions.

- An Adoption Support Development Manager post has been created – funded by £50k Welsh Government (WG) investment which is secured to 31st March 2019.

- Engagement with adopters is ongoing via an embryonic 'Adopter Voice' scheme for Wales, and with children and young people via expansion of 'Talk Adoption'.

- Welsh Government/National Assembly agreed implementation of Section 8 and 9 of the English Children and Social Work Act in Wales.

- Adoption UK (AUK) launched '**The First 1000 Days**' project in October 2017. Its aim is to provide a package of support to adoptive families during the first three years, starting when the child is placed. It offers free access to a helpline; local peer support, training workshops and courses; factsheets and resources on a wide range of adoption related issues. In the first 6 months, 53 families have formally registered to the project and a further 25 people have contacted the helpline about it. AUK have provided 10 workshops across Wales dealing with issues with Education, Sleep and Therapeutic services and more are planned to focus on health and development issues, and Life Journey Work.

- Local government is implementing a national policy on financial allowances in adoption; regions are working with their local authorities to implement this from 1st April 2018.

- We are implementing the new framework for **Life Journey Work** in adoption, which has been co-produced with children, young people and adopters. A new 'Toolkit' has been developed, which together with the Framework and Good Practice Guide, are on the www.adoptcymru.com website. This work has been supported by AFA Cymru; all staff have received support and training from AFA Cymru and this is to continue. Recurring investment of £75k has been made available from the Welsh Government to create capacity for improvement and is available to regions to embed the changes going forward.

- We have continued to work with Welsh Government and Adoption UK to make education services more 'adoption aware'. Lots of adopters express concerns about the way their child's needs are understood in school settings; AUK provides awareness raising work for education professionals across Wales. This year, with funding from Welsh Government, 'Master Classes' have been held across Wales. Adoptive parents, teachers and adoption social workers have come together to hear about the latest theories in brain development and the impact of early trauma, as well as sharing strategies on supporting adopted children in school. A comprehensive bank of resources has been gathered and is available for teachers on the Hwb Education Intranet and from Adoption UK. This complements the two guides produced in previous years.

A guide for teachers https://www.adoptionuk.org/nations/cymruwales#GettingItRight

A guide for parents https://www.adoptionuk.org/nations/
cymruwales#GettingItRightParents

- We have produced and made a **Legal Guide for Adopters** available.
  Developed by AFA Cymru for NAS it is available on
  www.adoptcymru.com/publications and on the AFA Cymru website.

- We have continued to work on improving access to CAMHS
  and other health services that support emotional well-being. A
  productive meeting was held between clinical leads for CAMHS
  services in Wales and managers from the National Adoption Service
  for Wales in May 2017. The current CAMHS development plans
  include a commitment to improve the offer to vulnerable children,
  of which looked after children (such as adopted children) are a
  key group. Initial links have been made in four of the five regions,
  although there is still room to improve what is available to families.
  NAS has been invited to join the re-formed Early Intervention
  and Resilience workstream of the 'Together for Children and
  Young People' programme, and in early 2018 gave evidence at
  the National Assembly for Wales CAMHS inquiry building on the
  written evidence that NAS submitted.

The business case estimates the cost of implementing the Adoption
Support Framework to be in the region of £1.4m – not including
individual targeted and specialist services, some of which would be
provided by others e.g. health. On the next page are some other
priorities in the business case that are being considered currently.

What	Update	Future needs
Improved access to consistent, 'adoption informed' specialist advice and information about adoptive parenting and being adopted – preferably provided by Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA) in a 'triage' type service – preventing statutory involvement for many.	• NAS website developed to include Adoption Support pages • Adoption UK (AUK) membership for all new adopters – grant funded by Welsh Government (WG) to 31st March 2019 • AUK and Association for Fostering & Adoption (AFA) advice lines – grant funded by WG to 31st March 2019 • NAS adopter database to be part of new WAR • Business case identifies triage service development costs as £50k minimum	Develop the triage concept and service offer including links with regions and, where appropriate, Local Authority (LA) and Information & Advice (IAA) services Funding to be identified
Update pre-approval training for adopters and develop a post approval/placement program for all adopters.	• Post approval training for adopters developed (grant – one off) • Scoping of pre-approval training content included in above • Some regions have invested in staff and adopter training in specific therapeutic and behaviour management techniques	Funding for ongoing delivery to be identified Project to review and update pre-approval training to be scoped and funding identified Other opportunities to add to the range of options available to be explored
Arrangements for adopters, children and young people to access new post adoption support assessments through the regional services as well as enhancing oversight of existing support plans for adopters/children who live in each regional area,	• Four of five regional adoption services now offer post adoption assessments • The South East Wales regional collaborative has developed a service delivery model for this has been made available to all regions to consider implementing	Fifth region to develop its plan Scope what is needed for regional services to have improved oversight of adoption support plans and develop a plan
Integrating adoption support plans into children's care and support plans (Part 6 plans) and keeping these plans and services live and active for as long as they need to be.	• Requires legislative change – advice including independent legal advice provided to Welsh Government. Formal requests for the changes to be made.	Continue to request and work with WG to achieve this
Help other agencies/services become 'adoption aware'.	NAS education plan mirrors and works with WG plan for the education of looked after children • Health services • Other services	Priorities for 18/19 to be followed up including recent agreement by WG to track educational outcomes of adopted children Consider similar approach for other partner services
Letterbox and Contact.	• Children's commissioner annual report on siblings views on contact/separation • WG response includes working with NAS • Recognition of growing area of work	Share good practice and develop an improvement plan

Placing Children Effectively

The key to being able to place children in a timely way is having sufficient adopters to meet the needs of children with an adoption plan.

We are placing children more quickly and having success in placing siblings groups and more complex children. Despite this however, the number of children waiting has begun to increase again and at 31st March 2018 there were 350 children in Wales subject to a placement order waiting to be matched. Although we know that at least 20% of these children had matches being considered, we also know that we need to recruit more adopters so that we reduce the number of children waiting overall and the time that any child waits.


We have done a lot of work this year on our recruitment strategy, as well as developing better information and data to help us try to predict demand for placements. This is making good progress but we know that services will need to increase recruitment by a good margin to be able to place the children currently waiting, as well as the children likely to have placement orders made in 2018/19 and beyond.

WHAT HAVE WE DONE

- All regions and VAAs now have marketing and recruitment plans in place, and in the second half of this year we started to develop recruitment goals based on the analysis of likely need

- Our Welsh Government development grant was used to support the regions in developing marketing plans, encouraging greater collaboration where there was opportunity for this. It also supported national and regional recruitment campaigns including by the VAA's

- Nationally, our social media presence continues to grow, and we have made improvements to the national website and how we use it following a review

- We ran a successful radio campaign at the end of the year that had a positive impact on enquiries

- We have worked with our 'Adoption Champions' to inform the content of our marketing and a number of champions have provided feature stories for this

- Our VAAs partners have worked together to develop a specialist recruitment project 'Adopting Together' for the children who wait longest

- We will continue to use web analysis and digital marketing to further improve our marketing nationally and regionally
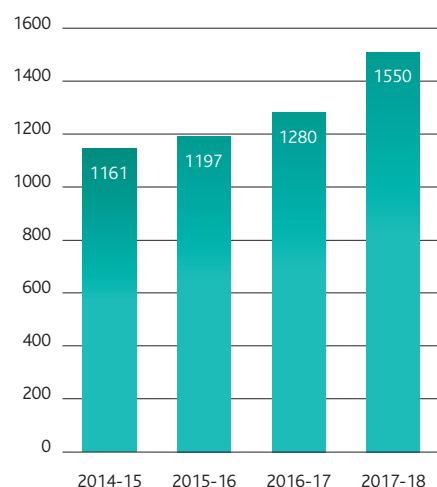
Average in months it has taken from the date of the most recently looked after to date of placement for adoption
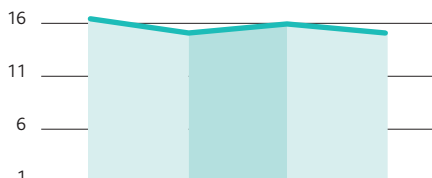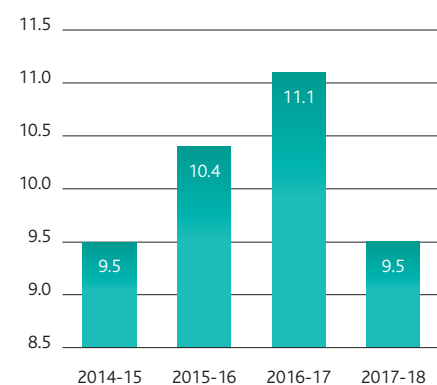
	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
	16.5	15.0	15.8	14.6

Benchmark: 13 months or less

Number of Initial Enquiries

Year	Value
2014-15	1161
2015-16	1197
2016-17	1280
2017-18	1550

Average time (months) for Adopters to progress from initial enquiry to agency decision to approve

Year	Value
2014-15	9.5
2015-16	10.4
2016-17	11.1
2017-18	9.5

Benchmark: 8 months or less

CHALLENGES

There many challenges facing us, not least ensuring marketing skills and resources are available across what is essentially a social work service, and using data to predict demand in an environment where many factors (e.g. numbers of placement orders made) are beyond the control of the service. Adopter sufficiency planning is new for NAS regions and agencies, and we are developing the data set alongside addressing the re-emerging gap.

Marketing is not something that all services have invested in to date and the central team is losing its part time marketing support at end of June.

The work we have done on marketing to date has however resulted in increased enquiries. These are responded to in a timely way, and there have also been improvements in the average timeframe for approval of adopters, as well as more assessments were commenced last year than in the previous.

We therefore have good foundations for the plans to address this nationally and regionally over the coming year, where we are aiming to maintain a good level of enquiries and begin to increase recruitment again.

Our plan is to commission expert marketing support, and monitor the implementation of marketing plans including improved use of analytics, better co-ordinating our digital and social media marketing, as well as working with our Adoption Champions to further develop our #SeeTheWholeChild campaign.

adopting together

Alongside this we will see the roll out of Adopting Together, a collaborative project supported by the National Adoption Service, in partnership with the statutory sector and delivered by the Voluntary Adoption Agencies in Wales. The project has emerged from a common and clearly defined purpose of securing permanence for children who wait longest for a family; it has been developed during 2017/18.

Led by St David's Children Society, Adopting Together brings together theoretical knowledge and best practice models that have been developed across the UK into one distinct model with four interlinking components for Wales:

• effective transitions using structured therapeutic play;

• an early interventions approach that supports the main carer – child relationship;

• Team for Child meetings pre-matching which brings together information from those who know the child best;

• specific recruitment, assessment and training of adopters by St. David's Children Society and Barnardo's, including child specific recruitment in partnership with Local Authority and Regional family finding teams.

Cofrestr Fabwysiadu **Cymru**
Wales Adoption Register

EXCHANGE AND ACTIVITY DAYS

The Wales Adoption Register continues to work creatively in finding adoptive families for children who are waiting. In 2017/18, we have held an Adoption Activity Day (AAD) and Exchange Days in South and North Wales respectively.

Adoption Activity Days are an opportunity for prospective adopters to meet a range of children waiting to be adopted. In that sense, AADs are child and adopter-led, and enable them to be active participants in family-finding. Unlike more traditional family-finding mechanisms, AADs give children and adopters the chance to emotionally connect and respond directly to each other through fun and enjoyable activities in a safe and supportive setting. Most importantly this is an opportunity for children to be seen as children first.

- Our first AAD in March 2017 was an overwhelming success with very positive feedback from the adopters, social workers, children and foster carers who attended. 6 children were matched with families as a result – 1 in 4 children who attended. One little boy who has since been placed said he feels he chose his family on the day, and it is very much part of his life journey story!

- Our second AAD in March 2018 was an even greater success and matched 40% of children who attended – 14 children out of the 35 and we expect at least 4 further matches. The majority of these placements are for children who have been on the Wales Adoption Register for more than 6 months and include 5 sibling groups.

- We held an Exchange Day in September 2017 in North Wales. 10 children were matched through this event including a sibling group of 3.

In feedback to the Register, most adopters express the importance of adopter-led opportunities and how much they learn about the children waiting by attending such events. Many expressed an interest, and have subsequently been matched with children they would not otherwise have considered or been linked with, including older children and large sibling groups.

These events, along with practitioner meetings and VAA meetings to the Register, make up the majority of the matches made by the Register in 2017/18 (28 out of 38). The matches from the AAD in March 2018 will be accounted for in 2018/19 once they have been progressed.

MATCHING AND PLACING CHILDREN

We are doing other work to improve the arrangements for placing children.

- We know that adopters really value the input of Medical Advisors before their child is placed with them. However, Medical Advisors were aware of poor notification pathways when children are placed for adoption with their adoptive families and when adoption orders are granted. They undertook a review to gain a better understanding of improvements that could be made. There were different issues across Wales that are being considered through the regional management boards.

- We have been working with the Welsh Government to upgrade the database that supports the Wales Adoption Register and facilitate an adopter database. This had been delayed but in February a decision was made to proceed. Cardiff Council, as the host authority for the NAS central team, will be procuring the new database. It is anticipated the register will go live during 2018, a project plan is in place and a Steering Group established to inform and implement the changes in practice required.

UNDERPINNING WORK

DEVELOPING OUR PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

The National Adoption Service Performance Management Framework (PMF) is detailed, but it now provides essential context and understanding to the delivery of adoption services across Wales. The work we have done on data to support the recruitment strategy this year exemplifies the value of this and we are beginning to develop additional data and intelligence to meet our needs.

NAS is continuously working to improve systems for data collection and verification on a regional and national basis. To this end we completed a review of the PMF this year, including an examination of any inconsistencies in the quality of data, with an eye to the future. We had hoped that Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) would be sufficiently implemented as a potential replacement and have been working with WCCIS to develop the relevant modules, but realistically this is looking unlikely. Our review identified that reliance on local authorities for accurate and timely data was a factor, as was the quality of regional data systems and infrastructure; ownership of performance culture is still not universally embedded across NAS.

Practice Solutions were commissioned to provide an initial assessment of the National Adoption Services' use, processing, storage and dissemination of information. We want to use the opportunity of renewing our system to improve and consolidate our knowledge management, increasing analytical capability in the short term and inform the longer-term position. We also want to integrate the data capabilities of the new Wales Adoption Register so we reduce duplication and unnecessary burden.

CONTINUING TO USE CO-PRODUCTION TO ENGAGE USERS AND INTEGRATING SERVICE USER VIEWS INTO OUR GOVERNANCE

We have continued to use co-production to engage with adopters, adopted children and young people. Events have been held across Wales by regions and VAA's through support groups and focus groups, as well as for National Adoption Week last October.

During National Adoption Week 2017, a family event was held in Techniquest, which the former Cabinet Secretary the late Carl Sargeant attended.

This was a fun event for the families that came from every part of Wales and also launched the **National Adoption Service Adopter Champion initiative**.

We appealed to current adopters across Wales to become champions of adoption and have received an excellent response.

NAS believes that the story of adoption is best told by the people who have experienced it and whose reality it is. People who may not have thought about adoption, or may be considering it but feeling unsure, should hear these stories to feel that, with support, they could complete their family too.

The Adoption Champions have an important role in promoting a positive and realistic view of adoption by sharing how it positively changes their lives, the difference it made to the lives of children they adopted, and encouraging and empowering others to consider adoption with an open mind.

The initiative was launched during National Adoption Week 2017, and we look forward to developing it further by involving the Champions in future campaigns and linking them with regional services so that they can support local groups and activities.

During 2017/18, we also began to embed more structured and systematic ongoing ways of engaging with adopters, children and young people, as well as continuing to co-produce projects such as the development of the Life Journey Work framework.

'**Adopter Voice**' is an initiative developed by Adoption UK in Wales and supported by NAS. It mirrors a similar English scheme and began in Wales in the second half of 2017/18, continuing this year. Information was gathered across Wales by Adoption UK via attendance at support group meetings and a short online survey. 8 support groups, at least 1 in each region, were visited, where a set of standard questions were used to create a discussion about the strengths and challenges in the adoption system in Wales currently. Generally there was a feeling that the recruitment and assessment stages of the adoption journey are mainly effective, but the post adoption order experience is more variable. Adoption support, including specialist services, was highlighted as the main area of concern, alongside the need for improvements in communication about the support available locally.

'**Talk Adoption**' is a national (UK-wide) support service for adopted children and young people run by After Adoption. It encourages adopted children and young people to build relationships and learn new skills, boosting their confidence.

Talk Adoption Wales provides monthly groups for children and young people aged 7-10 years old and 11-25 years old. The service currently runs 2 groups (1 for each age group) in Cardiff and Swansea, and bi-annual family days for all family members. The groups offer a safe and supportive space to meet, have fun and explore issues which are important to adopted children and young people. The groups are very much led by the children and young people, their ideas, their thoughts, their voice.

Talk Adoption Wales promotes the voice of adopted children and young people by encouraging group members to attend/speak at adoption events, such as those run by National Adoption Service in Wales, Local Authority adoption teams and other adoption agencies.

Indeed, in Wales, young people from Talk Adoption spoke at the launch of the National Adoption Service at the Senedd in November 2014 and at the same time produced a DVD to highlight some of the issues important to them. This provides an important opportunity for adopted people to have their voices heard by the wider community, by professionals involved in adoption, their peers, and others e.g. teachers, politicians and senior officers. It is open to all who wish to take part, but is not part of the monthly sessions.

Maintaining the link with Talk Adoption Wales has been a priority for NAS and a core element of the NAS plan for engaging with those who use adoption services.

The **support groups** to children and young people in Cardiff and Swansea have continued, with both groups being oversubscribed. Exploratory discussions about the expansion of the service in Wales, including a group in North Wales, have been ongoing but hampered by lack of resources. After Adoption has been considering re-shaping its service in Wales to focus on support groups to children and young people.

Talk Adoption have been engaged in the **Life Journey Work** project, sessions to develop a training DVD as well as a sample 'Life Journey' book outlining what they think it needs to contain and how this work should be undertaken.

A **draft newsletter** has been also developed. The groups discussed further possible webpage/App content (for Talk Adoption and The National Adoption Service), which would have the same type of content as the newsletter, but with additional video interviews, audio interviews, links to other websites, and links to relevant social media platforms.
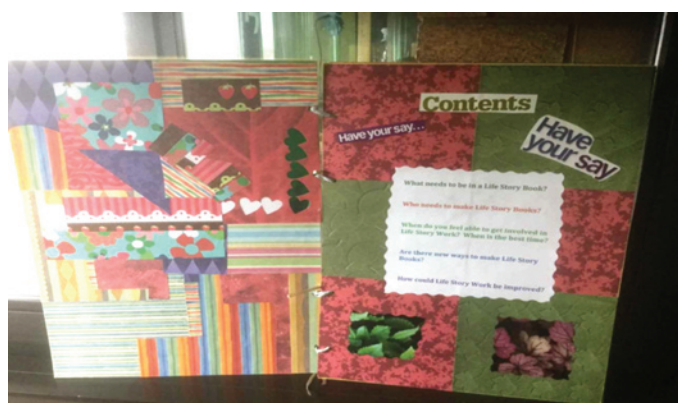
INFORMING THE LEGAL AND POLICY CONTEXT, ADVOCATING CHANGE WHERE NECESSARY

NAS has continued to advocate for improved services on behalf of those using adoption services to the Welsh Government, National Assembly for Wales and others.

NAS is a member of the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group, where the improvements in adoption support are being monitored as part of a wider work stream on Permanency Planning and Building Stable Placements. During this year, NAS has kept the group updated on the development and implementation of the Framework for Adoption Support, and delivered a presentation on the improvement programme 'Life Journey Materials' for children who are or will be adopted.

NAS provided written evidence to the National Assembly for Wales inquiry into the Emotional and Mental Health of Children and Young People, and subsequently the Director gave evidence in person with colleagues from the All Wales Heads of Children's Services group and the Welsh Local Government Association. The subsequent report 'Mind over Matter' has recently been published and makes specific reference to issues and recommendations for the future of services to support the emotional wellbeing of adopted children.

NAS also collaborated with the All Wales Heads of Children's Services group and the Welsh Local Government Association to provide written evidence to the National Assembly for Wales Public Accounts Committee inquiry, which looks at public services for care experienced children and young people. The Independent Chair of the NAS Advisory group also wrote to the committee chair.

NAS meets twice a year with the relevant Welsh Minister for Children to discuss the NAS Annual and Mid Year reports.

NAS has been engaged with the Welsh Government review of the adoption regulations prompted by the implementation of the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care Act 2017. Alongside this, NAS has made a formal request to the Welsh Government to make changes to the regulations for the assessment of adopters, and for the provision of adoption support services. These changes are being requested to facilitate the improvements that NAS wishes to see implemented.

NAS has also engaged with the Welsh Government's development of new arrangements for Additional Learning Needs by attending workshops and meeting with officials.

NAS has worked with the Care Inspectorate Wales in their development of a revised methodology for adoption services in Wales. One of the regions, Western Bay, was inspected as a pilot, alongside an inspection of the national functions between January and March 2017. Early feedback for both is positive and the publication of both reports is awaited. The remainder of the regions will be inspected during 2018/20 with the VAA's towards the end of the programme.

ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF IMPROVED PROFESSIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND SKILLS IN PERMANENCE AND ADOPTION RELATED TASKS ACROSS THE WORKFORCE

A number of our initiatives are impacting on the workforce within regional services and local authorities. Examples of this include our marketing and recruitment work, the new life journey materials for children who are or will be adopted, and training in specific therapeutic techniques, which are available to staff and adopters within regions.

Our Welsh Government grant aid has enabled NAS to contract with AFA Cymru and Adoption UK, allowing us to develop post approval training modules for adopters based on feedback. We aim to make these available during 2018/19 in a variety of ways to suit different learning styles.

Intelligence nationally and regionally, backed up by research, consistently indicates that support in the first year of placement and beyond is particularly needed. Our vision is that adopters will have access to more detailed and specific training/development at any stage after the child is placed or formally adopted. This forms a key part of the Framework for Adoption Support that we have developed, and is in recognition that adoption has lifelong implications for all involved.

ENSURING OUR GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS WORK WELL

NAS has been in existence for three years and a review has been commissioned, using Institute of Public Care, to ensure the governance, management and operational arrangements of NAS are 'fit for purpose', enabling successful delivery of its stated role and purpose. The review commenced in the final quarter of 2017/18 and will be completed during 2018/19.

Reviews of the collaborative arrangements for North Wales and the Vale, Valleys & Cardiff also took place during 2017/18.

YOUR FEEDBACK

Regional adoption services record compliments and complaints received at the service. There may be some under-reporting of both, particularly where these are received and dealt with by individual local authorities.

Across wales during 2017/18, there were 14 complaints and 17 compliments specifically recorded. There are no national themes arising from these complaints or compliments; two regions have noted receipt of more than one complaint about a similar element of service and have taken appropriate action.

FINANCE

The local government elements of the National Adoption Service are funded in the same way as all other local authority services in Wales.

The central team receives an allocation from the rate support grant which was £311,000 for 2017/18 and is used for the small team, governance and development/improvement. The Wales Adoption Register, managed by the central team, is funded by grant aid from the Welsh Government.

The Voluntary Adoption Agencies are independent charities but also receive funding from the Welsh Government Third Sector grant. This funding provides a little over £300,000 additional funding for adoption services.

Welsh Government Adoption Support Development Grant and Additional Resources

Welsh Government provided a development grant of £90,000 and recurring additional annual resources of £125,000 available up to 31st March 2019, against a business case focused on the continuing implementation of the 'Adoption Support Framework' and supporting recruitment.

Adoption Support	Life Journey materials framework	Adopter Training	Recruitment
Recruitment to Adoption Support Development Manager post including capital costs of post creation Continued support to the development of the Adoption Support Framework.	Continued development and implementation of the Life Story Toolkit and Good Practice Guide Allocation to each region for cost of additional capacity for this work to be undertaken with children placed for adoption Development of members section on www.adoptcymru.com Development of additional toolkits for other stakeholders Co-production with adopters and adopted children and young people	Post approval training modules developed Project expanded to include a review of the current pre-approval package	A national radio campaign ran for one month National and regional expert public relations and media services including development of marketing plans and recruitment campaigns Review of www.adoptcymru.com website Family day and promotional activity during National Adoption Week

PRIORITIES FOR 2018/19

PLACING CHILDREN EFFECTIVELY

This will include:

- Keeping recruitment focused on the needs of children likely to be adopted

- Implementing the new Wales Adoption Register and adopter database

CONTINUING TO IMPROVE ADOPTION SUPPORT

This will include:

- Agreeing the next priorities and identifying funding

- Continuing things that are already helping e.g. improving life journey work, improving 'adoption awareness' in schools, trying to change the law for adoption support, improving training and development for adopters, consistent approaches across Wales

FUNDAMENTAL TO ACHIEVING THESE WILL BE THINKING AHEAD

- Continuing co-production and engagement with those who use adoption services

- Thinking ahead about the sort of adoption service we want for the future

- Working to improve the legal, policy & evidence framework that affects adoption

- Encouraging the development of improved professional understanding and skills

The National Adoption Service was created to improve services for all those affected by adoption in Wales.

The National Adoption Service (NAS) for Wales, launched in November 2014, is an innovative collaborative for the provision of adoption services. It brought together Welsh local authority adoption services into a three-tier structure which includes partnerships at all levels with Voluntary Adoption Agencies based in Wales, Health and Education Services, as well as others.

At local authority level, all 22 Welsh councils continue to provide services to all looked after children whilst identifying and working with those children for whom a plan for adoption is appropriate.

Regionally, local authorities work together within five regional collaboratives to provide a range of adoption services. Each regional collaborative has links with the voluntary adoption agencies, health and education. The services provided differ in each collaborative but all provide the adoption agency functions for children, recruit and assess adopters, offer counselling to birth parents and advice to adopted adults. Some currently directly provide adoption support services, whereas in others this remains with their local authorities.

Gwasanaeth Mabwysiadu Cenedlaethol | National Adoption Service