



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

25th FEBRUARY 2021

REGIONAL ADOPTION COLLABORATION ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

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

AUTHOR: Annabel Lloyd, Director of Children's Services

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to share with the Cabinet the Regional Adoption Collaboration's Annual Report 2019-20.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The reports have been considered at the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on 13.01.21, and at Corporate Parenting Board on 25.01.21.

- 3.2 This report is for information.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The 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 Taf County Borough Council. The service is hosted by the Vale of Glamorgan Council.



- 4.2 This is VVC's fifth annual report and covers the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020. 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 Report seeks to combine the various reporting requirements in one report.
- 4.4 The report is attached at Appendix 1 with data Appendices 2-5, which also includes the following:
- Appendix 1 - Annual report
 - Appendix 2 - Family Finding Data
 - Appendix 3 - Recruitment and Assessment Data
 - Appendix 4 - Adoption Support Data
 - Appendix 5 - Adoption Panel Data
- 4.5 At Scrutiny Committee on 13.01.21, Angela Harris, Regional Adoption Manager, Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Collaboration, was in attendance to deliver the report, and respond to Members' questions. Scrutiny Committee Members were able to pursue lines of enquiry in relation to:
- The decline in RCT demand for adoption during the reporting year
 - Recruitment of adopters
 - Children who are subject to a referral to the Regional Adoption Collaboration, who do not go on to have a plan for adoption (withdrawn cases)
 - The operational arrangements, and impact for the regional adoption collaboration and its services during the Pandemic
 - Arrangements for post adoption support

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

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

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 This is an information report.

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 legal basis underpinning the National Adoption Service is the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) which gave Welsh Ministers the power to direct how



local authorities in Wales deliver their adoption functions. This was enforced through a set of regulations, The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 [generally referred to as the 'Directions Powers'], which require local authorities to collaborate on a set foot print to create Regional Adoption Collaborative. The primary purpose of these Directions is to ensure that effective joint arrangements are in place between local authorities in Wales for the delivery of adoption services.

9. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

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

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 During the year there was a reduction in demand for adoption across Wales, and within VVC by 34%. During the first 3 quarters of 20/21 there has been a subsequent increase in demand.

10.2 There has been a clear improvement noted in the provision of Life Journey Work, from 44% last year to 60 % during this year, with further to go on that if we are to achieve the target of 84%.

10.3 Although there has been changes and significant work carried out leading to 35% increase in supply of adopters this year, supply remains insufficient, and this will remain a focus for the year ahead, alongside continuing to work to reduce the number of months children wait between placement order and being placed with adopters.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Background Papers

- Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee - 13.01.21
- Corporate Parenting Board - 25.01.21
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015

Officer to contact: Annabel Lloyd, Director of Children's Services



VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE (VVC)

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1st APRIL 2019 TO 31 MARCH 2020

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) as part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS), 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.

1.2. This is VVC's fifth annual report and covers the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. This report seeks to combine the reporting requirements set out in regulation and the governance arrangements for the region in one report.

1.3. The report has the following Appendices:

Appendix 1 sets out key performance data in respect of children by quarter and local authority.

Appendix 2 provides information in respect of adopter enquiries and recruitment of adopters.

Appendix 3 provides information in respect of Adoption Support.

Appendix 4 provides information in respect of Adoption Panel activity.

2. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

2.1 The organisational and managerial structure of the service has remained the same during this period with service delivery structured around three functional teams. A managerial vacancy within the service was filled in September 2019 by the appointment of a new Adoption Support Manager. The existing postholder transferred to manage the Family Finding Team.



- 2.2** In April 2019, as part of the Welsh Government award of £2.3M to improve adoption services in Wales, the region received a substantial investment of new monies which has enabled a number of new posts to be recruited across the service. The grant was allocated to national and regional services to support key priorities for improvement which were utilised by VVC Management Board in determining the distribution of the grant. As a result of these monies, VVC has been able to recruit two full time Social Workers to specialise in Transitions and Life Journey Work and a part time Social Worker to support birth parents. These posts were recruited from experienced staff within the service. VVC was however able to successfully recruit to the vacancies created by these appointments enabling the service to be fully staffed by the end of the reporting period.
- 2.3** The service has also recruited two new unqualified posts, a Children and Young People Co-ordinator to support adopted children and young people and a TESSA (Therapeutic Education Support Service in Adoption) Co-ordinator to support adoptive families. Both posts are linked to the national programmes being delivered by Adoption UK; the Connected service which supports young adoptees and the TESSA programme which supports adoptive families.
- 2.4** In addition to the posts located within the Collaborative, 10.5 practitioner posts have been created from the grant to support the provision of life journey work for children with a plan of adoption. These posts are distributed across the four partner authorities and link to the Life Journey Co-ordinator within VVC. All these posts had been successfully recruited to at year end with the exception of one authority. Contingency arrangements were however put in place within that authority to cover the work, pending the appointments being made.
- 2.5** As part of the deployment of the grant an Implementation Plan was developed by Welsh Government requiring reports to be submitted monitoring spend against the grant and the areas of improvement in service delivery as a result of the investment. The Regional Adoption Manager co-ordinated the response on behalf of the region and submitted monitoring reports to Welsh Government in October, December 2019 and at year end to secure continuation of the funding. The National



Adoption Service (NAS) will, on behalf of regions, prepare the bid for the grant in 2020-1 and take over the monitoring function in conjunction with Welsh Government requiring regions to report upon progress to NAS. All posts created as part of the grant within the region are permanent positions.

- 2.6** Temporary arrangements have been put in place to cover a vacancy within our Business Support Team created during the first quarter of the year. This will enable a review of the structure of team roles to be undertaken to ensure that the service can continue to adapt to business need. VVC's office within the Dock Offices underwent refurbishment in the Autumn of 2019 to create some individual and meeting room space.
- 2.7** Following the revisions to the Legal Agreement agreed in April 2019, VVC's Management Board has continued to meet on a quarterly basis. The composition of the Board has remained the same although a new Medical Adviser was appointed following the retirement of the other representative. The Board has continued to be chaired by the Director of Social Services for Cardiff Council. The Vale of Glamorgan Director will take up this post in October 2020. This is in advance of the planned rotational change due to the departure of the current Director in Cardiff. In order to improve business continuity, the four partner authorities have agreed to change the rotation of the chair from an annual basis to a three-yearly cycle with the transfer taking effect at the end of the first quarter of the fourth year.
- 2.8** The overall remit and accountability of the Management Board is prescribed within regulation and the Legal Agreement underpinning the Collaborative. VVC's Management Board continues to play a key role in monitoring the performance and business plan of the regional service highlighting areas for improvement.
- 2.9** The second tier of governance within the Collaborative is via the Operational Group which comprises of senior managers from each of the four local authorities and regional managers from VVC. This group meets on a quarterly basis with meetings being scheduled a couple of weeks following Management Board to enable any



matters remitted by Management Board to be considered. The Operational Group provides a further mechanism for monitoring the performance of the region and is a vehicle for raising standards and improving practice consistency across the region. The Operational Group in conjunction with Independent Reviewing Officers across the region have developed a revised format and process for conducting reviews of adoption placements which is being piloted across the region.

- 2.10** The overall governance of the region remains via a Joint Committee which meets twice a year. Meetings were held in July and December 2019 as per requirements to approve the annual accounts, the annual budget and annual plan for the Collaborative. This structure is unique in Wales for adoption services but has been supported by NAS as the preferred model for regional governance.
- 2.11** 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 an underspend in the budget for 2019 -20 partly created by grant slippage monies and staff vacancies. A proposal to retain the underspend within VVC has been agreed by Management Board and Joint Committee. These monies will be used to upgrade IT equipment for staff to enable more agile working across the region, improve support systems for adoptive families by facilitating specialist training and provide additional staff resource to undertake additional work as may be required due to COVID-19 .
- 2.12** VVC's financial and governance arrangements are subject to an annual audit by Bridgend and Vale Internal Audit Shared Service. This audit was conducted remotely at the end of the reporting period and concluded that the "effectiveness of the internal control environment within the service was sound and Substantial Assurance could be placed upon the management of risks".
- 2.14** VVC is required to report to the National Adoption Service on a range of performance measures which are collected on a quarterly and annual basis under the NAS Performance Framework. VVC has complied with all reporting



requirements during the period and has continued to develop more comprehensive mechanisms to capture the measures, which have increased each year. Data Cymru have been commissioned by NAS to develop the Framework and each region is required to upload data onto this new system each quarter enabling performance data against specific measures for each regional service to be visible across Wales.

- 2.15** The National Adoption Service provide the region with mid-year and end of year reports. The draft report for 2019-20 was delayed due to COVID restrictions and the meeting with the Director of Operations and VVC to discuss the report and our mid-year position had to be rescheduled to early November 2020.

3. SERVICE FUNCTIONS

- 3.1.** Performance against each of the service functions is outlined under the following sections of the report alongside areas of development.

4. FAMILY FINDING

- 4.1** Family Finding and its' associated activities remains a key area of activity for the region and the ability to place children effectively and promptly underpins all other activities. As the largest regional Collaborative, the level of demand placed upon this area and our ability to meet the needs identified remains challenging.
- 4.2** The number of children referred for adoption totalled **143** which marks a 34% decrease on the previous year. There has been a continued downward trend in referrals which has also been observed across Wales. The reasons for this are likely to be varied and will reflect the work being undertaken by local authorities with the Welsh Government to reduce numbers of children looked after in Wales.
- 4.3** A similar pattern of withdrawn referrals was seen with **41%** withdrawn within the period (compared with 43% in 2018-19). There remains a commitment to develop alternative permanency plans for children and positively **88%** of those children who



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were withdrawn from adoption had the option of either a positive parenting or positive connected person's assessment. Just 12% of those referrals (7 children) had a change of care plan to long-term fostering based on an assessment of their individual needs or sibling attachment relationship. Withdrawn referrals in many instances do not equate to a decrease in workload for the service as a lot of work has been undertaken to progress the adoption plan prior to it being discontinued.

- 4.4** The number of 'Should be Adopted' decisions made in respect of children reduced in 2019-20 by **34%** from the previous year. This is to be expected as the number of SBA decisions made will reflect the referrals made during that year and the previous year, as the number of referrals declines so will the number of SBA decisions. All but 1 region within Wales also experienced a downturn in SBA decisions during 2019-20.
- 4.5** The region has recorded **71** Placement Orders being made within the year, a 30% reduction from the previous year and again can be viewed in the context of a reduction in referrals over the past couple of years.
- 4.6** VVC placed **101** children for adoption during the year, a 1% increase on the previous year. This is particularly pleasing when considering the reduction in the number of Placement Orders over recent years. Continuing to place a high number of children reflects our continued commitment to securing permanence for children through adoption where this is the best outcome for the child. This includes successfully identifying adopters for children who have been waiting for a considerable length of time. The number of children waiting less than 6 months between Placement Order and matching for adoption is **24%** in VVC compared with **36%** across Wales as a whole and we have seen the average waiting time in VVC increase by 1 month since the previous year to **11.9 months**. It is important to note that this *mean* average time includes some high outliers of children waiting a significantly higher period of time than others with some 8 children waiting between 6-15 months longer than any other child, somewhat skewing the picture. A *median* average instead shows closer to **9.8 months** waiting time.



- 4.7** It has been very positive to see the increase in the number of children being able to be placed within the region (**72%** up from 65% last year) and this is a clear benefit from the increased recruitment of adopters within VVC. There is also a slight increase in placements made elsewhere in Wales (**10%** up from 9%) and a reduction in the placements made outside of Wales (**18%** down from 26%).
- 4.8** At the end of the year there were **73** children on Placement Orders awaiting an adoptive placement which is a reduction of **22%** from the previous year. A further 13 children had a very strong link proceeding but not yet matched as at the end of March 2020 and another child was awaiting a Placement Order revocation and so the number actually waiting was **59**. Of these as may be expected a significant proportion (40%) have additional factors i.e. aged 4 plus, BME, complex needs or a part of a sibling group which makes being able to secure appropriate matches more challenging.
- 4.9** There were **82** Adoption Orders granted during the year which is on a par with the previous year (83).
- 4.10** The level of placement breakdown continues to be low with two placement disruptions during the year, one of a 5-year-old girl who was placed for 9 months and the adopters felt that they could not continue with the placement. The second breakdown was a sibling group of two girls (aged 4 and 6) where again adopters advised that they could not continue with the placement.
- 4.11** The number of birth parents referred to the service for counselling fell during the year to **139**. **63%** of parents took up the service from VVC during this year which is significantly higher than the Welsh average of **25%**. This reflects the work of the Family Finding Team in offering this service to parents of children referred to us.
- 4.12** Performance in relation to the provision of Life Journey Material for children being placed for adoption has improved considerably over this past year although remains short of the 100% target as is the case across Wales. **84%** of VVC children (up from



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44% in 2018-19) had life journey materials available at matching panel. This is the second highest in Wales and higher than the average of 59% across Wales. **60%** of VVC children (up from 46% in 2018-19) had finalised life journey materials available at the 2nd adoption review. This is the highest in Wales and higher than the average of 57% across Wales. There remain issues with ensuring that these figures are being accurately captured within the local authorities and we are seeking opportunities to work with them to ensure a robust system for data capture is in place. The increase in performance can clearly be linked to the additional Welsh Government funding which has enabled us to recruit a full time Life Journey Work Co-Ordinator from 1st October 2019 and the provision of life journey work practitioner posts within the local authorities which has been rolled out over 2019-20 and into 2020-21. As of September 2020, all practitioner posts have now been filled.

- 4.13** The Life Journey Work Co-ordinator offers regular support, advice and guidance to the life journey work practitioners and in addition has offered workshops/briefings to local authority teams and was integral in the recruitment panels for the practitioner posts. Further work is being undertaken to develop training opportunities within this role as well.
- 4.14** As previously outlined the additional investment from Welsh Government has enabled the creation of a Transitions Worker post within the Family Finding Team as of 1st October 2019. **31** children were referred to this service within the first 6 months of operation. For **22** of these children, direct work was provided to support their transition to an adoptive family, with an 'Understanding the Child' day being provided for several of these children to enable the adoptive parents to be provided with a detailed history of the child's early experiences. For **6** children these were younger children where work was being completed with the older children within the adoptive family to support the transition running smoothly and for a further **3** children work was being offered directly to the foster carer on a 1:1 basis to support them in their understanding of the child's needs. In addition, training has been developed for foster carers as well as ad hoc advice and support to other practitioners. This role has been of incredible value to the region in terms of the service we are able to offer to children



and to improve the overall transitions experience. There are many opportunities to further develop this role over the coming year.

- 4.15** VVC has continued to embrace the use of all available family finding methods over this year. The team liaises closely with the Adoption Register Wales (ARW)/LinkMaker team to ensure information is updated and monitored in a timely manner. We have also made use of the national Exchange Day event in October 2019 and the Welsh Adoption Activity Day in March 2020, each of which produced matches for children.
- 4.16** St David's Adoption Agency and Barnardo Cymru developed a new family finding service in 2018, Adopting Together. Adopting Together focuses upon the recruitment of adopters for children with additional needs who have been waiting for adoptive placements over six months. The scheme targets recruitment for specific children and provides ongoing specialist support to those children for a year following placement. The Vale of Glamorgan, as host authority has entered into a service level agreement with Adopting Together on behalf of our regional partners. As at March 2020, VVC has referred **27** children to the scheme since its' inception; **6** children were placed initially with a further **1** being placed last year. The Regional Adoption Manager and Family Finding Manager presented an overview of VVC's experience of working with the service at a national conference on Adopting Together held in March 2020. The Regional Adoption Manager is also a member of the Steering Group which oversees the development of the service.

5. RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT

- 5.1.** VVC's Marketing and Recruitment Strategy has been further developed during the year and much progress has been seen in furthering its goal of raising the profile of the Collaborative with the wider public and in doing so increasing the number of enquiries received. The Recruitment and Marketing Officer's role has continued to prove crucial in creating the content and activity associated with the Strategy



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ensuring that this is co-ordinated with NAS' Marketing Strategy to increase the number of adoptive families. The Marketing Officer has closely liaised with 'Cowshed', the marketing company commissioned by NAS to undertake national campaigns and represents the region on a national workgroup to promote activity. Links have also been established with local Comms Departments across the region to ensure that adoption features as part of their local advertising features. The Marketing Officer's role was made permanent in December 2019.

- 5.2.** Whilst also benefitting from the NAS' co-ordinated marketing campaign, VVC has also focused efforts in connecting with members of the public in our local areas. This has involved having both a physical and online presence. During 2019/20 VVC attended a variety of community events including Cardiff Pride, Barry Pride, Vale of Glamorgan Agricultural Show, the Big Wedding Show , Vegan Winterfest, St Donat's Craft Fair as well as attending a variety of faith settings in order to discuss adoption. We have enjoyed positive engagement at these events which have all contributed to raising the profile of the service.
- 5.3.** VVC has also developed its' online marketing and it now has a well-established presence on two social media platforms – Facebook and Instagram. These profiles are coordinated and managed by the Marketing Officer and these tools are useful in order to target a wider yet purposeful audience. These platforms are also used to promote the post adoption support services. Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising has been used to promote adoption and raise the awareness of our information events. Whilst the cost implications for PPC are relatively small, the audience we are able to reach, and the data captured to inform future advertising is significant. The social media presence is beginning to show dividends in terms of actual enquiries as we specifically capture where an enquirer heard about us. A pleasing and growing number of people are referencing the fact that they saw our profile or advert online, and this led them to read more about our service and adoption more widely.
- 5.4.** The recruitment activity has had a specific goal to increase the number of enquiries the agency receives. 2019/20 saw a significant and sustained increase in the number



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of enquiries – **340** in total compared to **259** received during 2018/19. This is a pleasing outcome and our ability to provide a professional and structured approach to receiving, recording and tracking enquiries has led to this important increase in performance. The national marketing work in conjunction with regional input is also having a positive impact in providing a consistent and coherent message to the wider public.

- 5.5.** 2019/20 saw the Collaborative hosting six Information Evenings for prospective applicants. These events have always been well attended and feedback has continued to be positive.
- 5.6.** VVC's three day 'Preparation to Adopt' training course continues to be provided by an Independent Social Worker. Questionnaires have been developed by the Vale of Glamorgan's Participation Officer and are distributed at the end of training to gather views of the process from enquiry through to training. These questionnaires are collated and the feedback in respect of the training from participants is unanimous in its praise and appreciation for what they learn. In 2019/20 **six** courses were held. **51** households attended the course. Out of those **51** households **four** did not go onto submit applications to progress onwards to an assessment. These potential applicants have been followed up. Three households' feedback that they wished to take more time to consider their future plans and one household has not responded to follow up enquiries.
- 5.7.** During 2019/20 a total of **75** adopter approvals were presented to VVC's Adoption Panel and positive recommendations were made. **69** of these approvals were ratified within the reporting year. The approvals are broken down as follows: **RCT – 18, Cardiff – 29, Vale of Glamorgan – 14, Merthyr Tydfil – 1 and Other (Newport, Caerphilly and Kent) – 7**. This represented a pleasing increase of **35%** when compared to 2018/19's approval performance. In comparison to other Welsh regions who reported experiencing increases ranging from **8%** to **44%**, meaning VVC was one of the higher performing services.



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- 5.8.** A total of **5** assessments were commenced and concluded with the applicants withdrawing / being counselled out. The level of work involved even where assessments don't conclude is considerable. This is not reflected in the performance figures but evidences the robustness of the decision-making process which supports this work.
- 5.9.** Out of the **69** ratified approvals achieved in 2019/20, **5** were foster carers assessed to adopt a specific child, **8** were second time adopters and **56** were first time adopters.
- 5.10.** **3** approved adopters have since withdrawn following approval for family reasons.
- 5.11.** The majority of the applicants approved during 2019/20 have gone onto be matched with children from within VVC. One has had a child placed from outside of our region from SEWAS. A further two are in the matching process of adopting non VVC children (a second child from SEWAS and a child from Scotland).

6. ADOPTION SUPPORT

- 6.1.** Referrals into the service for adoption support services had remained at a consistent rate for the past couple of years. However, the increased funding and support injected into adoption support services at a national and local level has in turn created an increase of adopters coming forward earlier for services following the making of Adoption Order.
- 6.2.** VVC does not manage a budget for the provision of adoption support services although undertakes assessments of support needs which may recommend an adoption support package to the respective authority where the adoptive family resides. The budgets to support such provision is held in the respective local authority. The total expenditure on adoption support services for the reporting year was **£207,470.6**. This is showing a rise in spending, however when this is consistent with the increase in the number of referrals into the service. The average spend per child is reduced and is only **£992.68** although this varies across LA the costs for



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services are higher in Cardiff and the Vale compared to providers in RCT and Merthyr. On average **40%** of children referred from the region go on to receive funding requests, meaning **60%** are managed with in-house support such as direct work, training, and TESSA support. The emphasis of the service has been to continue to develop the skills of practitioners within the Adoption Support Team to be able to manage families by way of inhouse support without the need to rely on external input. The provision of external funding is monitored via the Operational Group and individual decision making arrangements have been agreed between the respective Operational Manager and the Adoption Support Manager. Discussion has taken place to further progress joint working across the region with the development of a preferred provider list.

- 6.3.** The largest funding costs are for attachment-based therapeutic work, complex emotional and behavioural therapeutic work and therapeutic life story work. These are the most frequently commissioned service and are in line with the types of need children present with. We anticipate that although the need for therapeutic life story work remains high at present, over the coming years with the investment in life journey work across the region this demand will reduce as the quality of the support being provided at an earlier stage improves. The spend on Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) training has reduced as VVC are now able to offer this training in-house and an NVR was provided during the year. A Nurturing and Attachment course was also facilitated in-house reducing the reliance on an external service provider and significant costs.
- 6.4.** **54** referrals for Access to Birth Records for adopted adults were received during the reporting period showing a small increase. **36** referrals for Intermediary Services have been received which are comparable to the previous year. There are two part time Social Workers aligned to this work which is by its very nature time consuming and requires dedication in being able to search and access information from historical records and a range of sources.



- 6.5.** Waiting lists for these services and allocation times have been managed so that applicants do not wait longer than two months for a service. The provision of an intermediary service is a power not a duty and therefore the service is not provided in all areas. It remains a significant strength of our service that intermediary requests are being supported and allows a natural follow on once the letterbox exchange ceases at the age of 18 and reaches out to support young adopted adults with understanding their identity post 18.
- 6.6.** The Birth Parent Advisor is a new role within the Adoption Support Team with the postholder taking up the position from November 2019. A referral process and information leaflet for Social Work colleagues across the region and an information leaflet for birth parents has been developed and disseminated. Nine referrals for individual birth parent support have been received and supported. The post is of benefit to parents post Adoption Order supporting them with a range of issues, contact matters and writing letterbox reports. It is hoped that some support to birth parents can be offered on a group basis going forward and that the role will continue to be promoted across the region.
- 6.7.** The TESSA Co-ordinator was also appointed in November 2019 shortly after the national launch of the service by Adoption UK. The aim of the service is to provide support services prior to adoptive families reaching crisis point. The Co-ordinator undertakes assessments of need and processes referrals of families who may be eligible. **17** referrals had been made to TESSA at year end by VVC.
- 6.8.** The Children and Young People Co-ordinator also took up post at the same time and since this time has been directly involved in running Connected groups on a Saturday once a month with staff from the Connected service. The service caters for children and young people 7 upwards and so the Saturday groups are into three groups according to age. During 2019-20 the service catered for 42 children from VVC. The aim of the service is to reach more young people who might benefit from such support and so the Co-ordinator's role is key to promoting the service across the region. In addition the postholder has provided direct support sessions to 11 children from the



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region and has also supported a number of direct contact sessions for adopted children. Both Co-ordinators have taken over the running of the monthly toddler group for adoptive families which consistently supports eight families at a time.

- 6.9.** Evaluation forms have been developed within the team during the year to evaluate the service pre and post provision of therapeutic support and in terms of the new areas of service provision. The team also ask participants to evaluate the training which has been provided. The main objective is to ascertain the benefits of the service provided and to needs within families which may not have been addressed. It is however hoped going forward that the findings can be collated in a more systematic way to enable the feedback to be used constructively to improve service delivery.

7. ADOPTION PANEL

- 7.1.** The Collaborative has continued to operate a joint regional Panel from two sittings held on a fortnightly Monday and Wednesday basis. Work has continued in merging the central list to service both sittings and to spread Panel activity to enable the Panel to operate on a more equitable, unified basis.
- 7.2.** Panel business has remained at a high level during the year with 43 Panel meetings being held and 149 cases being heard. Two scheduled meetings were cancelled due to quoracy. Appendix 4 to the report provides a breakdown of the work of Panel.
- 7.3.** Maintenance of the central list of Panel members continues to pose challenges in terms of maintaining a sufficient number of Social Work members and a range of independent members. Ten new Panel members have been successfully recruited during the period and one Panel member resigned due to personal reasons.
- 7.4.** A programme of reviews of Panel members was developed at the beginning of 2020 and six reviews were conducted by the end of the reporting period.



- 7.5.** Panel training was provided for Panel members in March 2020 focusing upon the role and function of Panel and the requirements of the new regulations governing the approval of adopters due to be implemented in April 2020.

8. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

- 8.1** VVC has received three complaints during the period. Each complaint has been investigated by the Regional Adoption Manager and two were resolved at Stage 1 of the Vale of Glamorgan Social Services Complaint process. The third complaint has been referred to Stage 2 of the process and a stage 2 investigation has been commissioned.

Regional staff have continued to receive positive feedback on the range of services they provide from a range of sources; service users, local authority colleagues, other agencies and the adoption Panel. Staff are encouraged to collate this information, share it for recording as part of the Collaborative's record, as contribution to their own personal development plans, and to promote the service more generally.

9.9. CONCLUSION AND 2020-21 PRIORITIES

- 9.1** The priorities for VVC, alongside other regional Collaboratives stem year on year from our core business. The need to continue to recruit more adoptive parents to meet the needs of children requiring placements will remain constant features of the service we provide. Considerable improvement in both these areas was achieved during the reporting period which hopefully can be built upon year on year.
- 9.2** Significant progress has also been made in raising the profile of the region as a result of a consistent marketing strategy and this has produced results in attracting more enquiries from prospective adopters. The ongoing challenge for the service is being able to convert more of those enquiries into applications to ensure that we continue to build on our existing pool of adopters and to improve placement choice.



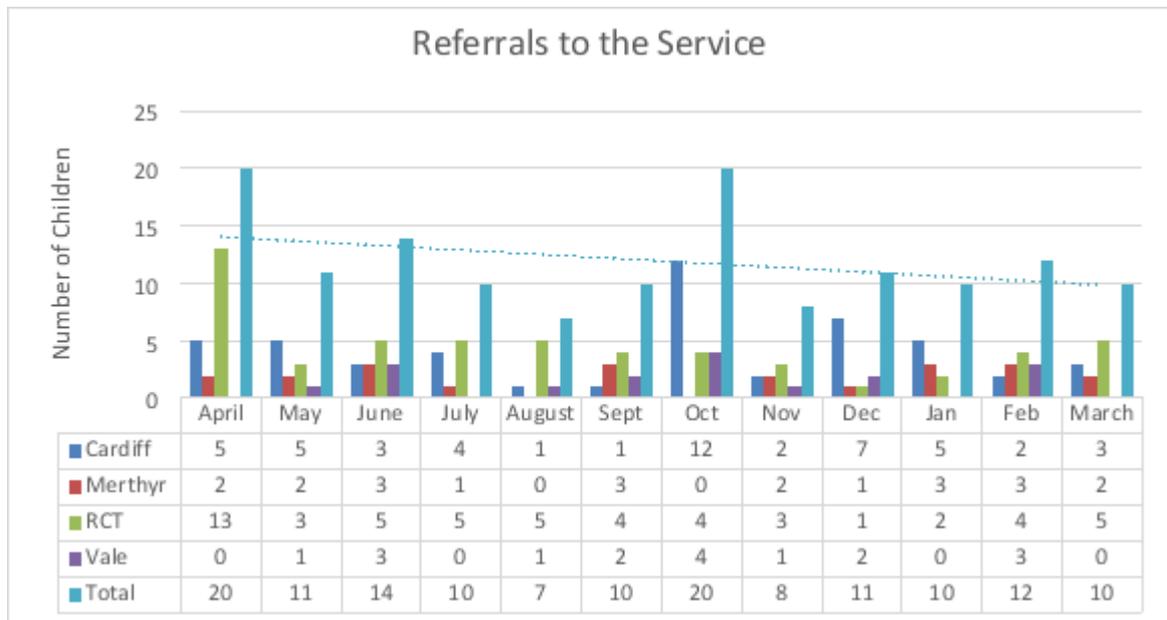
- 9.3** The other area where positive improvements have been seen is in the area of adoption support. The investment received from Welsh Government has been a significant, positive development for the service as a whole. VVC has during this time successfully recruited to all the specialist roles and there is already evidence of the benefits these posts have had on the service. These posts will continue to be evaluated in terms of service improvement and therefore will need to be further embedded across the region to ensure that performance targets are met. This is particularly important in respect of the provision of life journey work for the region due to the large amount of the investment secured for this work.
- 9.4** Just prior to the end of the reporting period the impact of the pandemic and national lockdown was beginning to take effect with staff working from home and key services temporarily halted. The service however adapted quickly to the challenges presented and has been able to deliver its core business partly on a virtual basis or via risk assessed face to face contact. This has enabled key functions to continue to be delivered although it is too early to assess the impact upon overall performance during this year. Going forward the service will need to continue to evaluate the effect upon services and develop plans to mitigate the overall impact upon service delivery.

Angela Harris
Regional Adoption Manager
October 2020

Appendix 2 – Family Finding

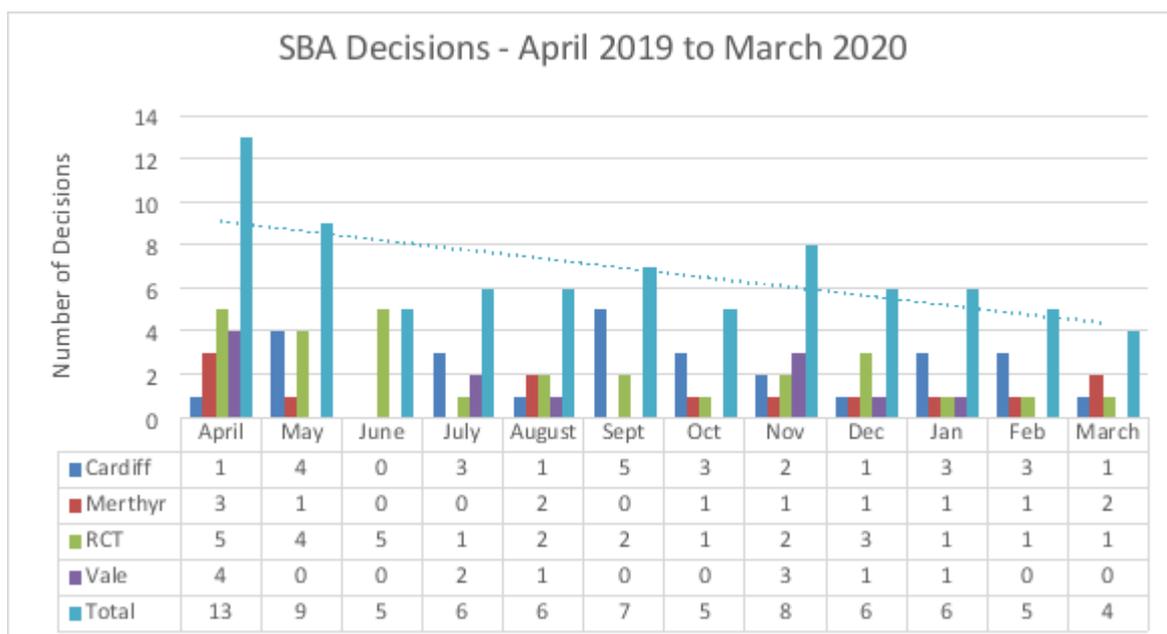
Children Referrals

143 children were referred to VVC during the reporting period. On average 12 referrals were received each month with 38% and 35% of referrals received from RCT and Cardiff respectively. 15% of referrals were received from Merthyr and 12% from the Vale.



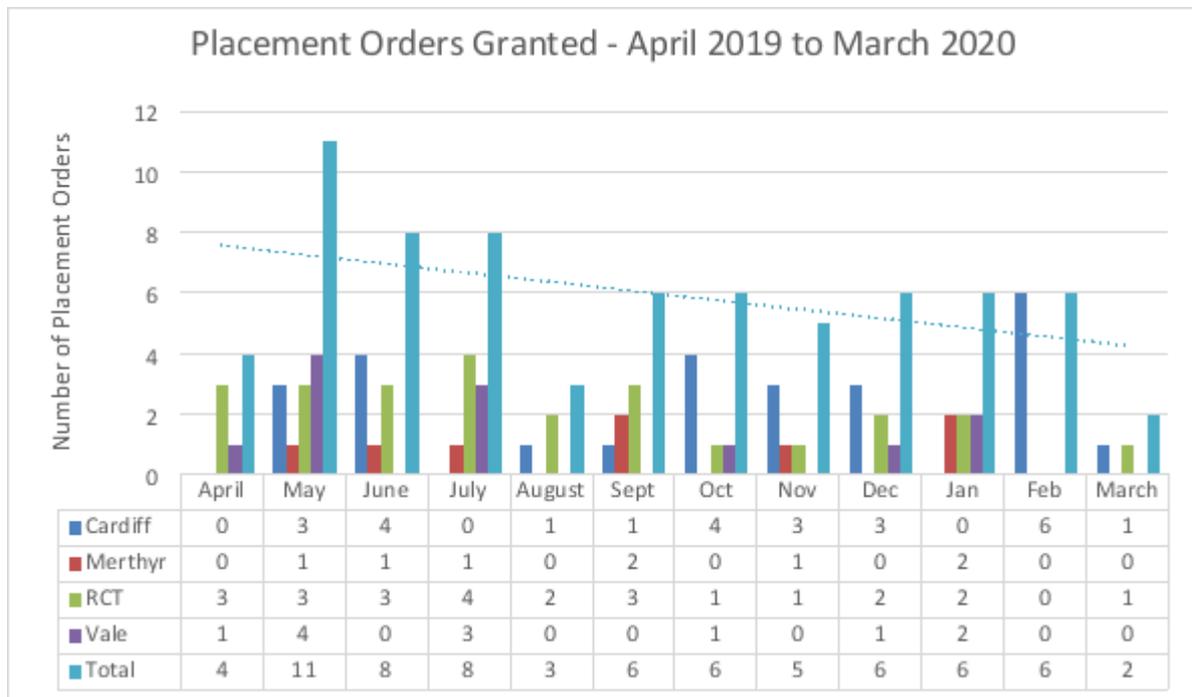
‘Should be placed for Adoption’ decisions

80 SBA decisions were made during the reporting period.



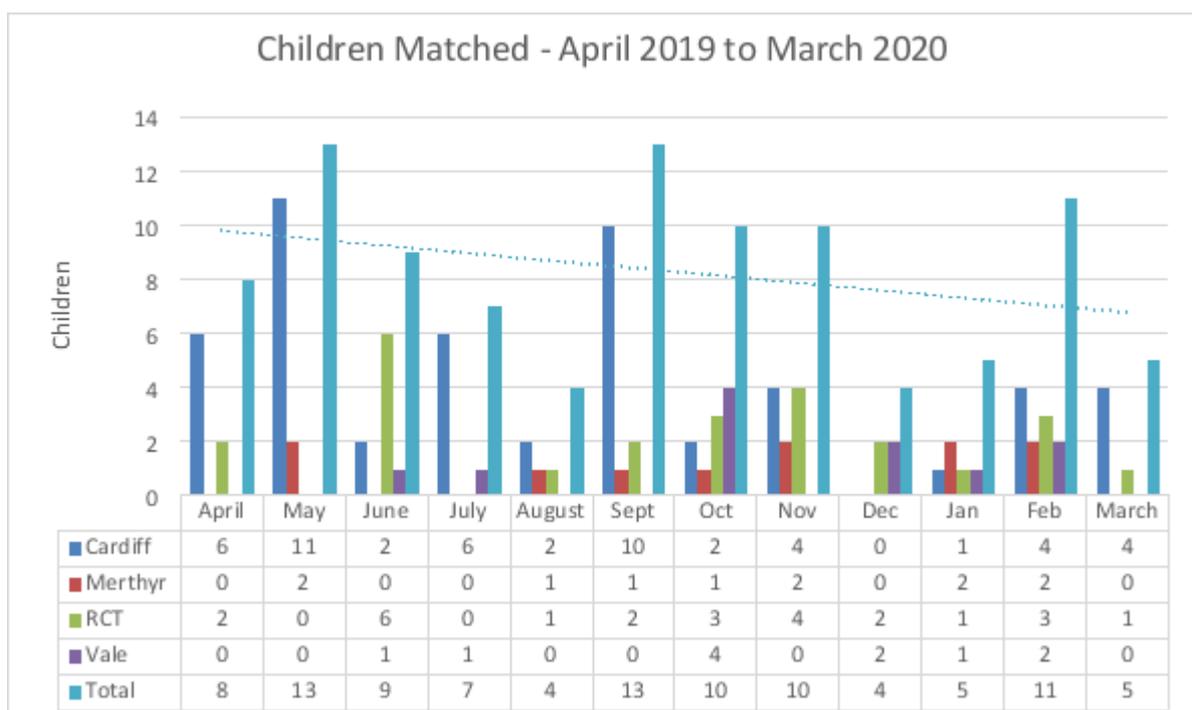
Placement Orders granted

71 Placement Orders were granted during the reporting period with an average of 6 Placement Orders granted each month.



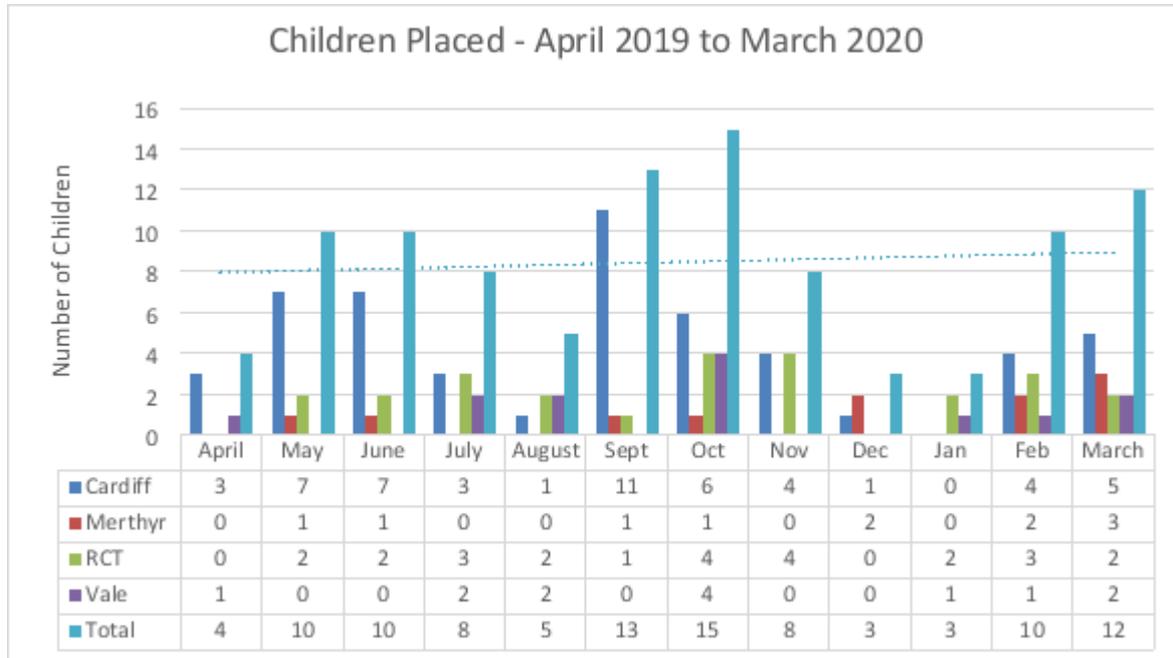
Children matched

98 children were matched with adopters during the period.



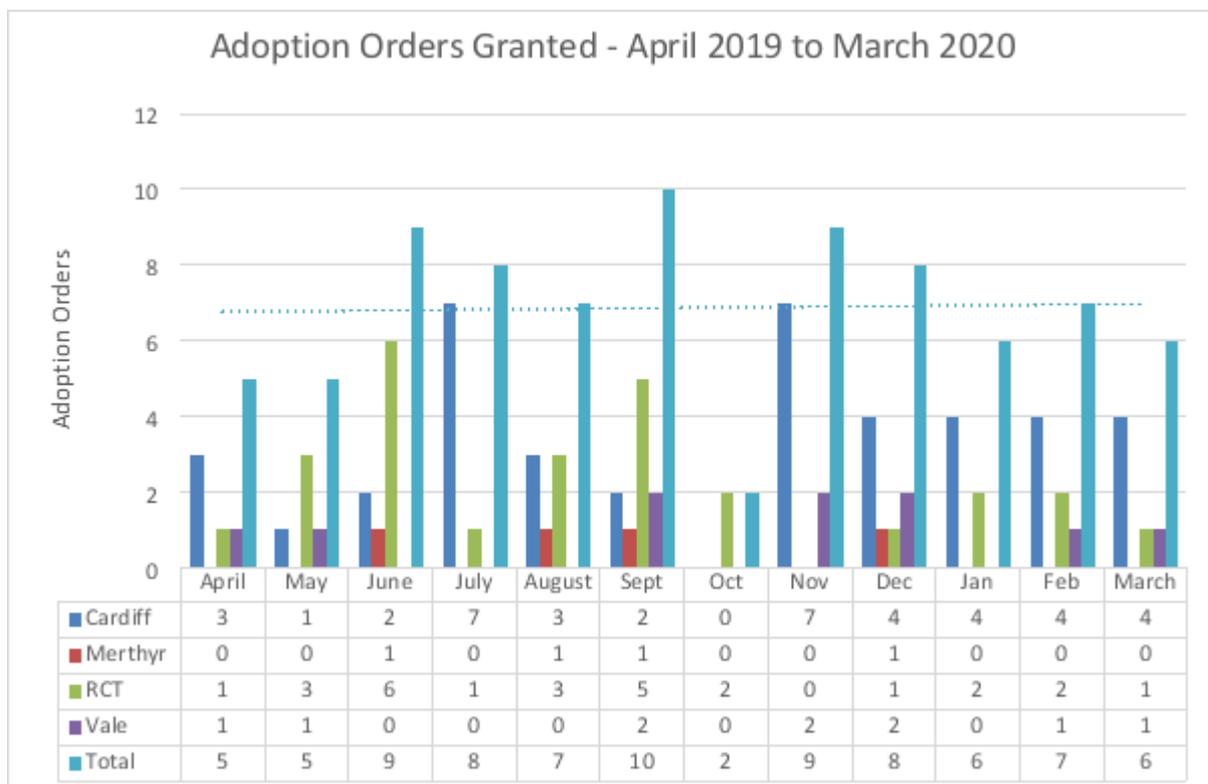
Children placed for Adoption

101 children were placed in adoption during the reporting period.



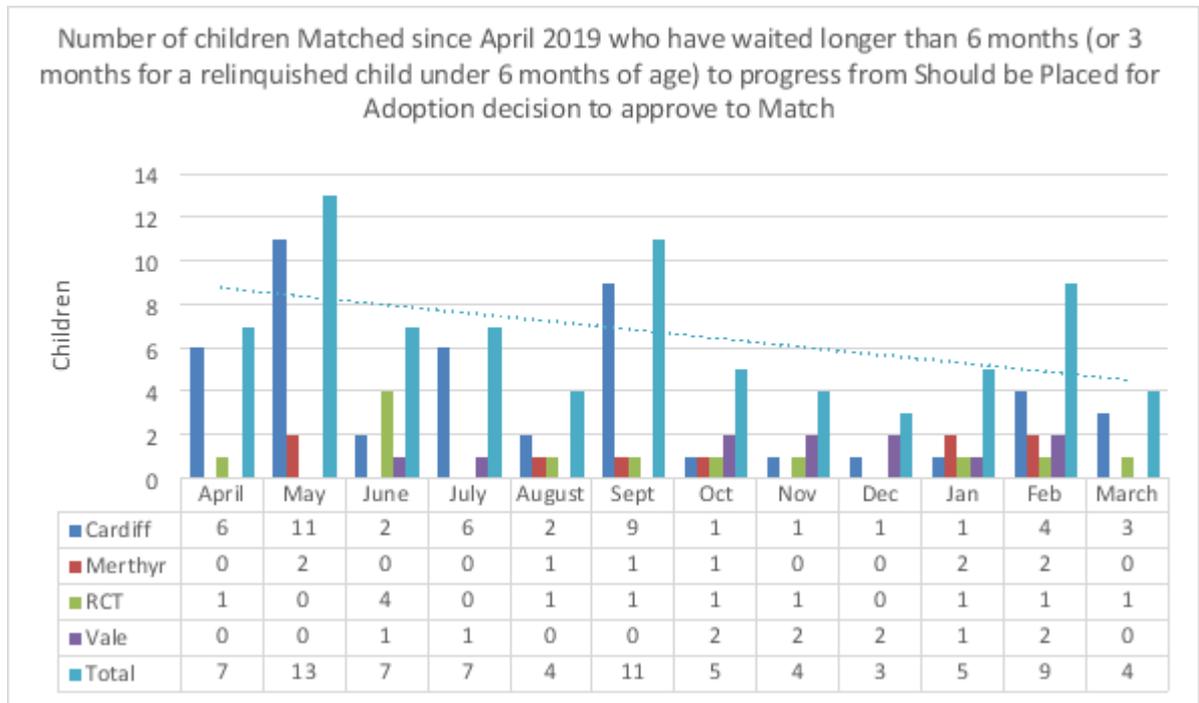
Adoption Orders

82 Adoption Orders were granted during the reporting period.

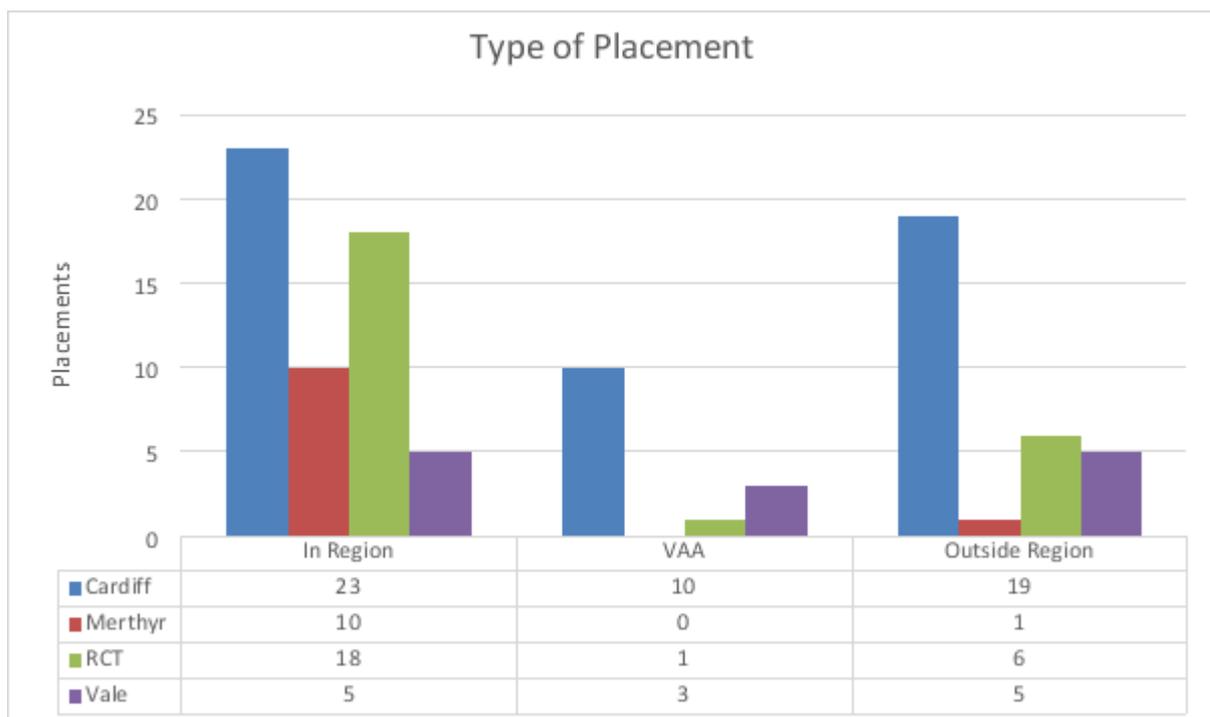


Number of children Matched since April 2019 who have waited longer than 6 months (or 3 months for a relinquished child under 6 months of age) to progress from Should be Placed for Adoption decision to approve to Match

79 of the 98 children matched had waited longer than 6 months to progress from a 'Should be placed for Adoption' decision to 'Approve to Match'.



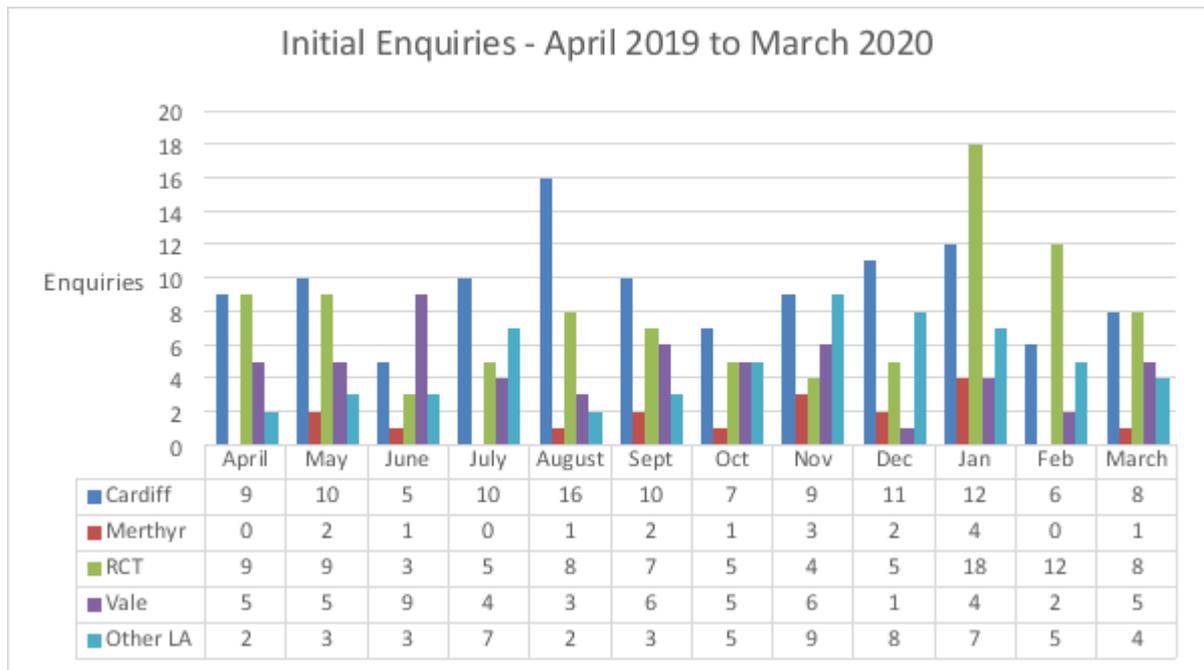
Type of Placement



Appendix 3 – Recruitment and Assessment

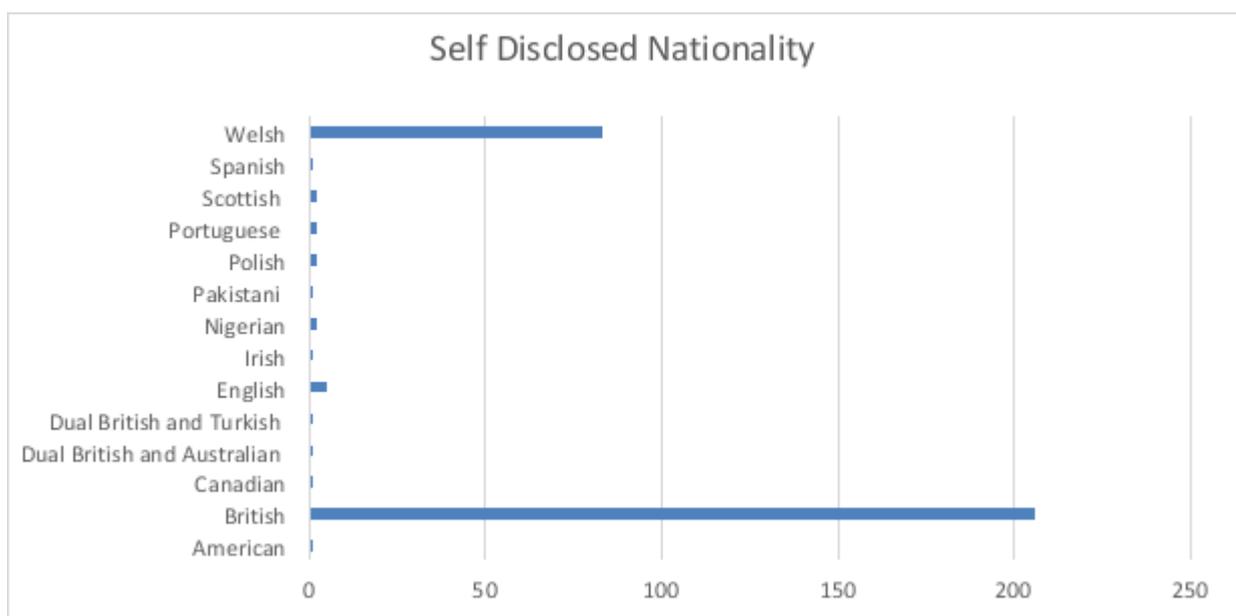
Initial Enquiries

278 enquiries were received from people living within our region. In addition, 58 enquiries were received from people living outside our area. There was a total of 336 enquiries.

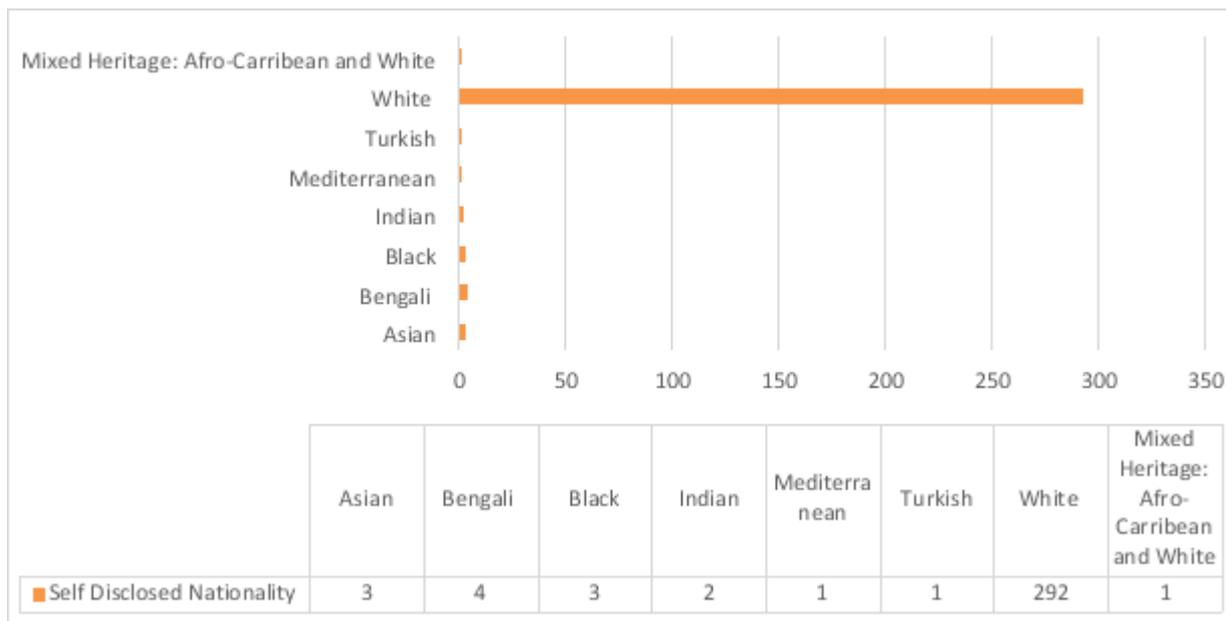


Demographics of Initial Enquiries

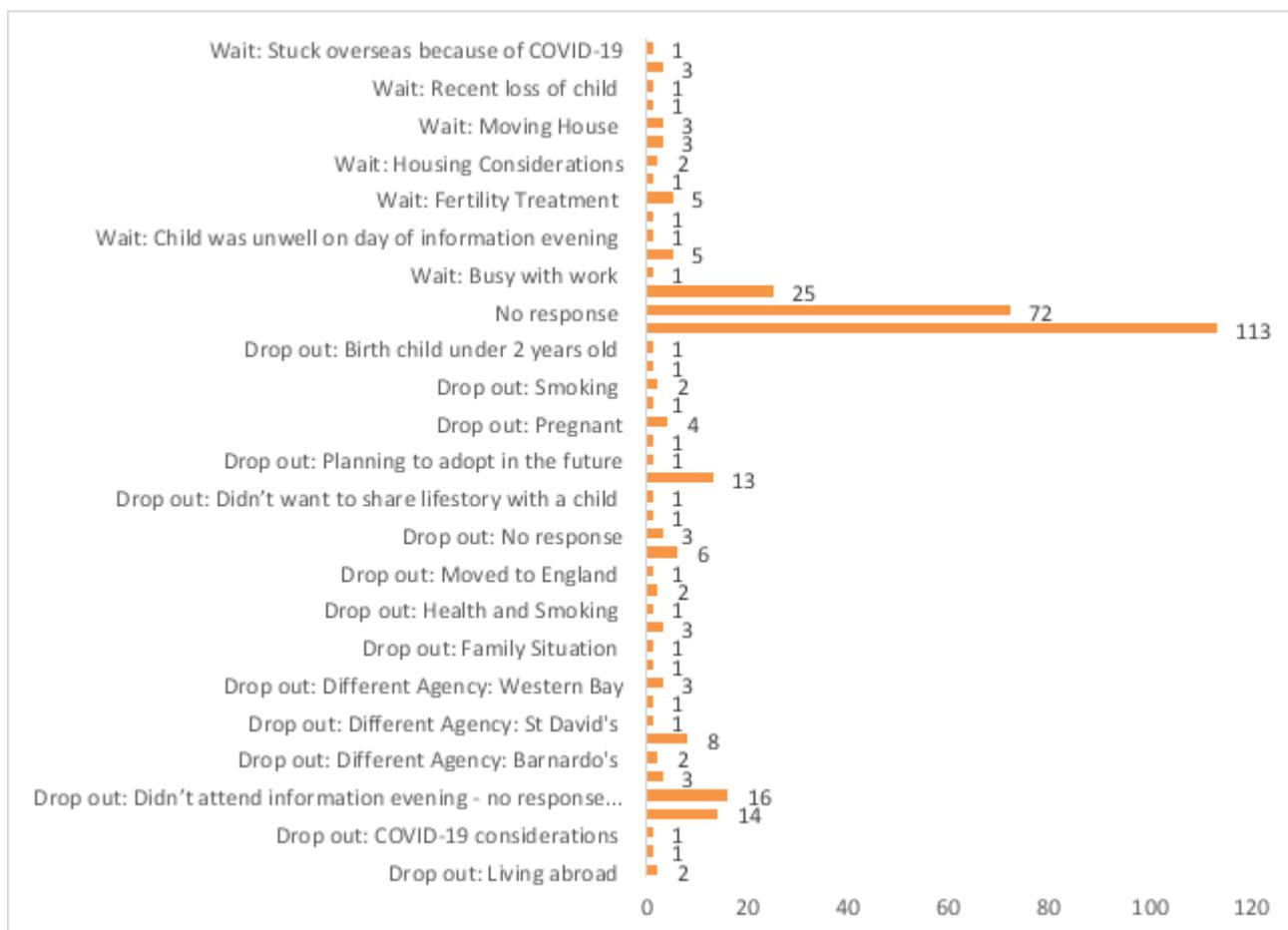
Self-disclosed Nationality



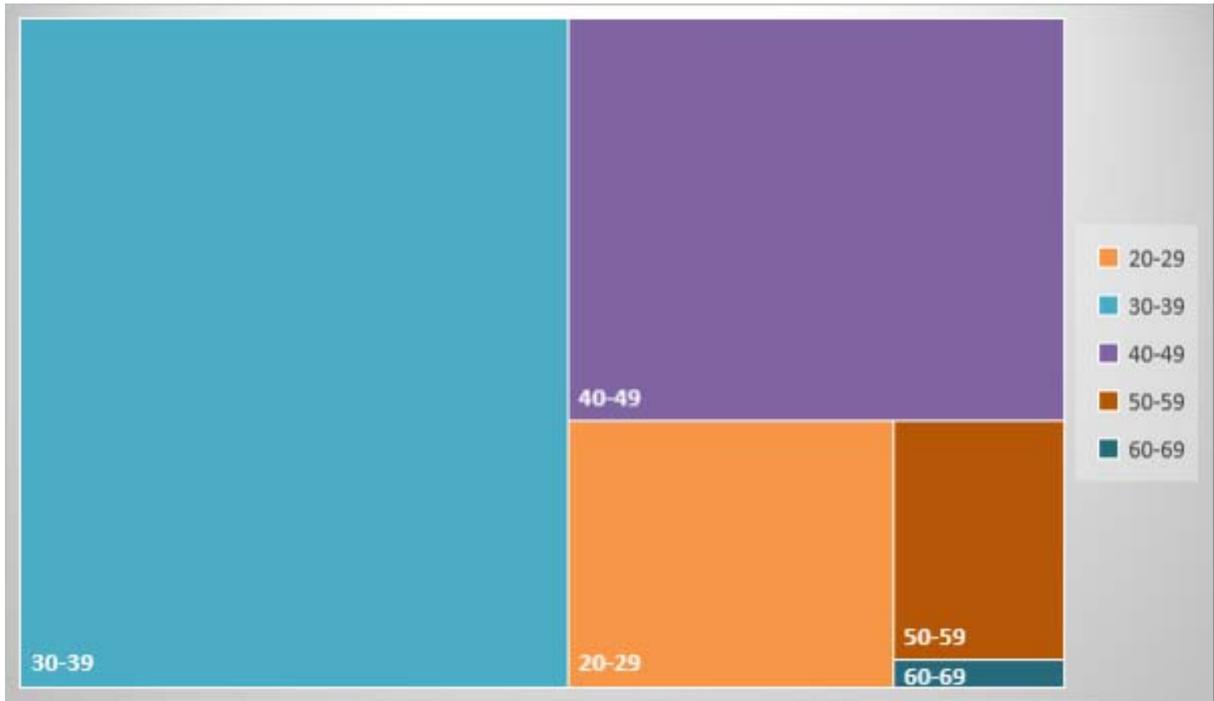
Self-disclosed ethnicity



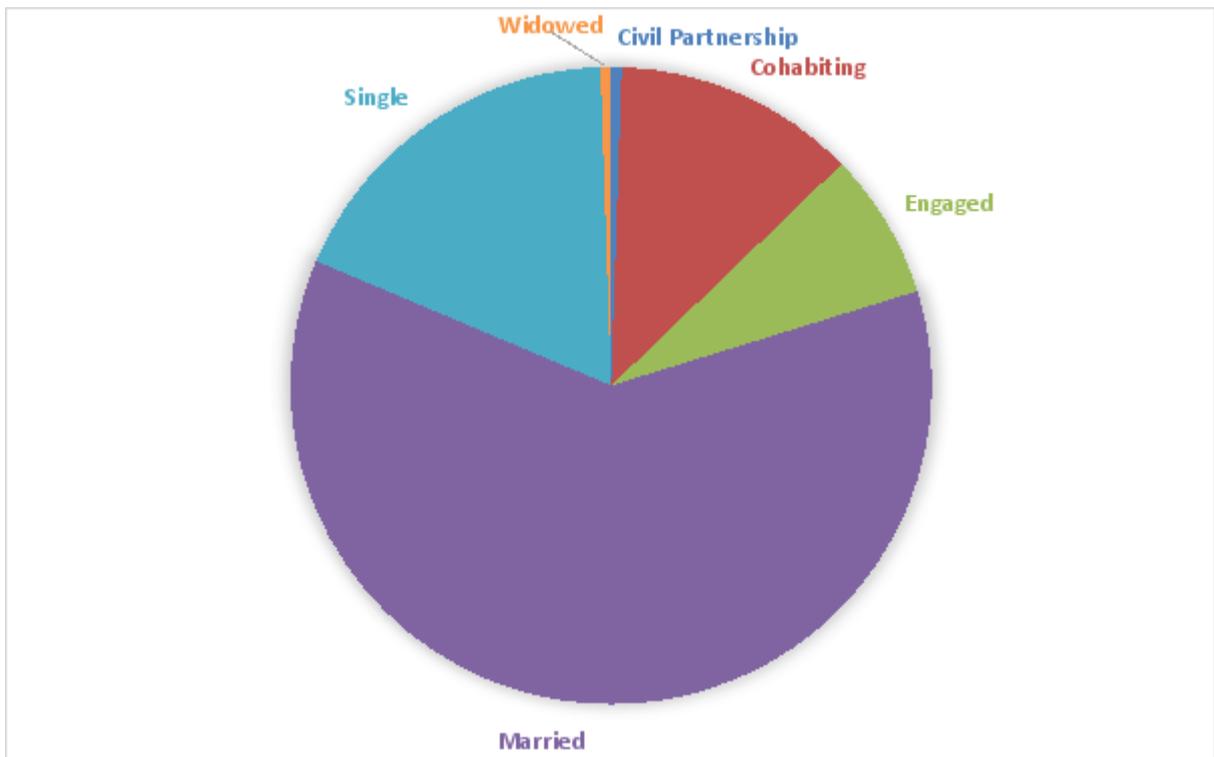
Self-disclosed Follow up - reasons for delay or withdrawal from adoption process before Information Evening



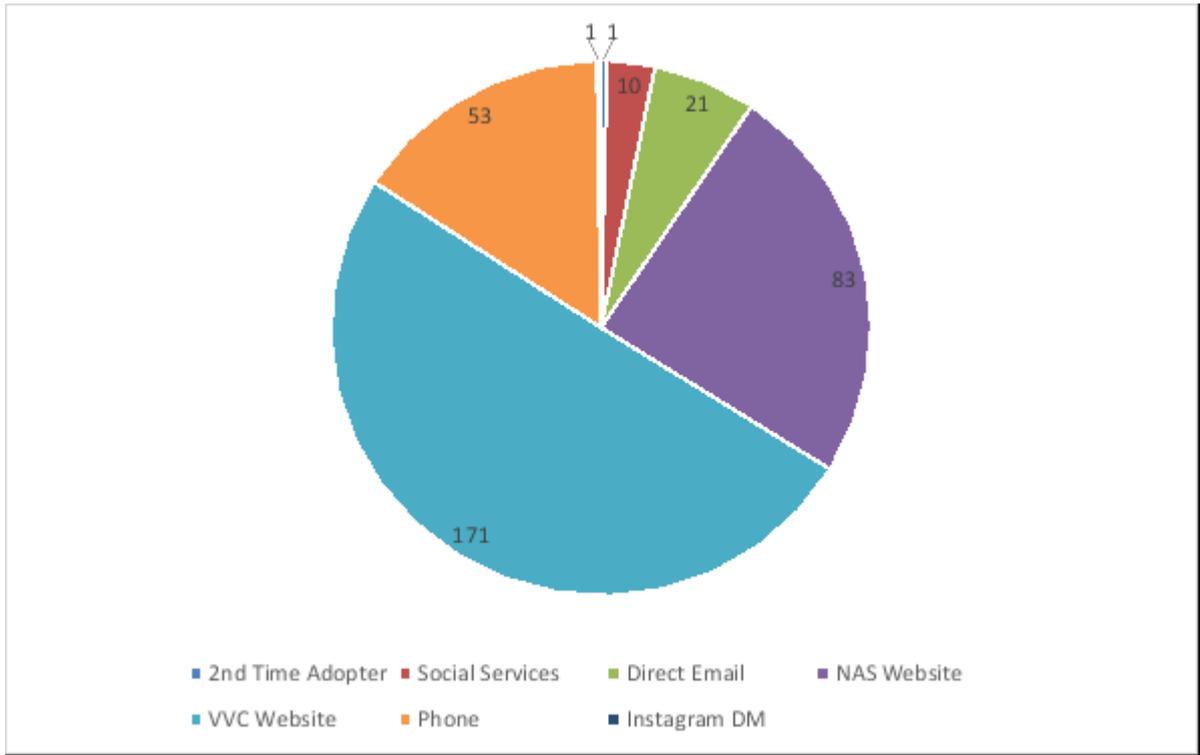
Age



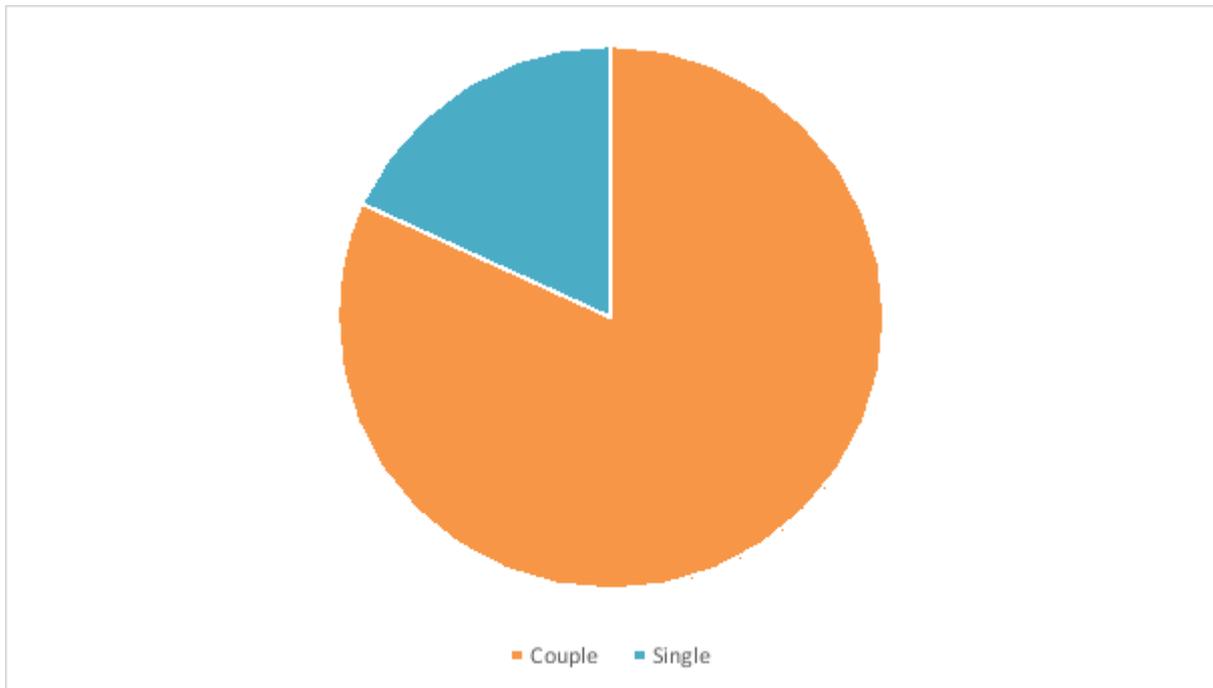
Relationship Status



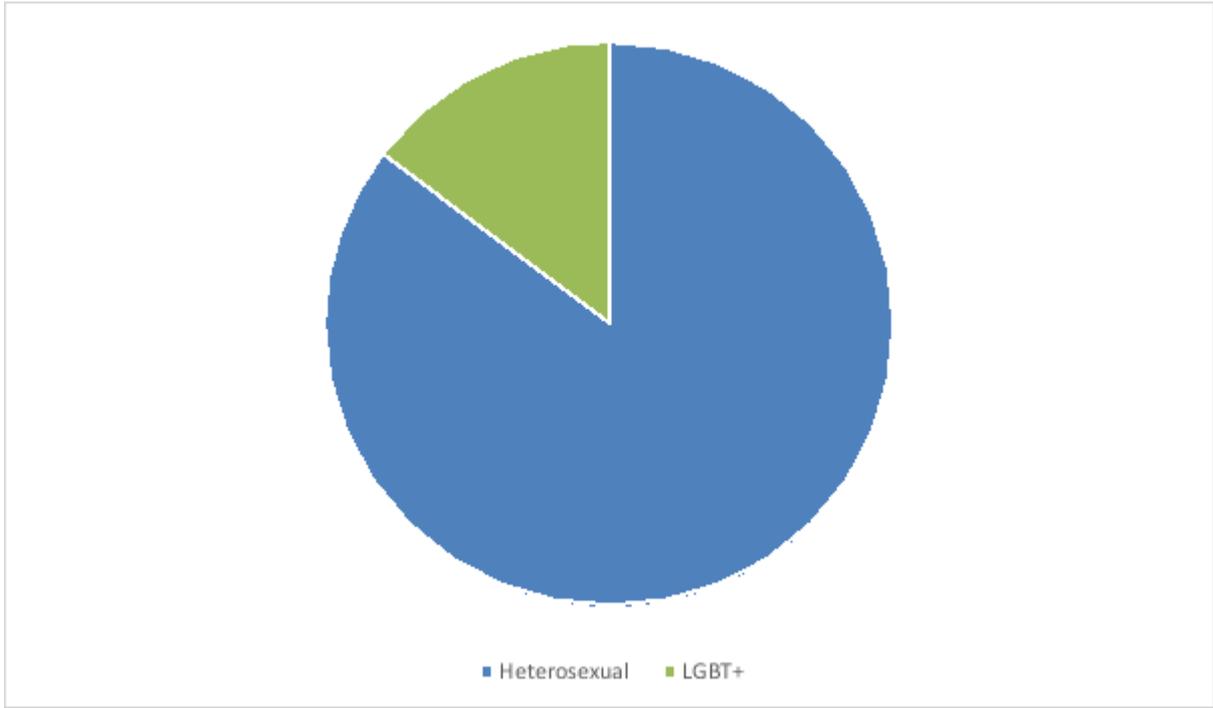
How they contacted us



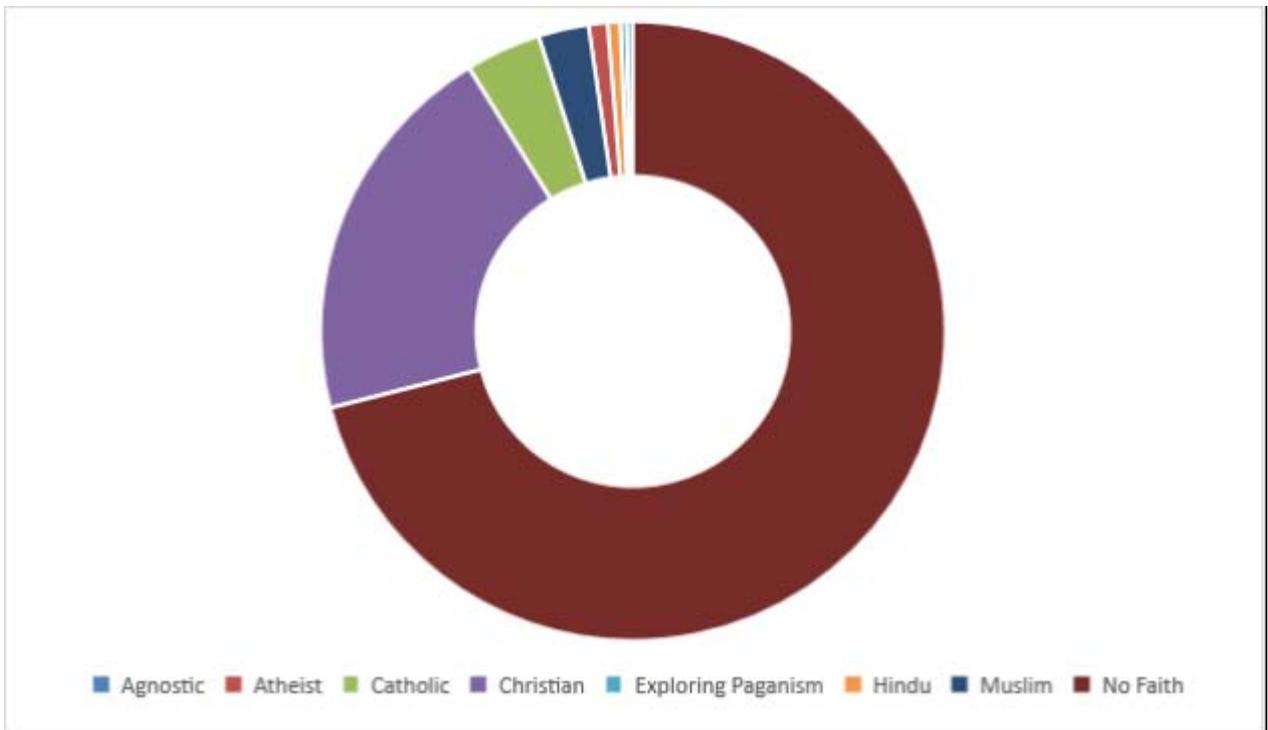
Couples and Singles



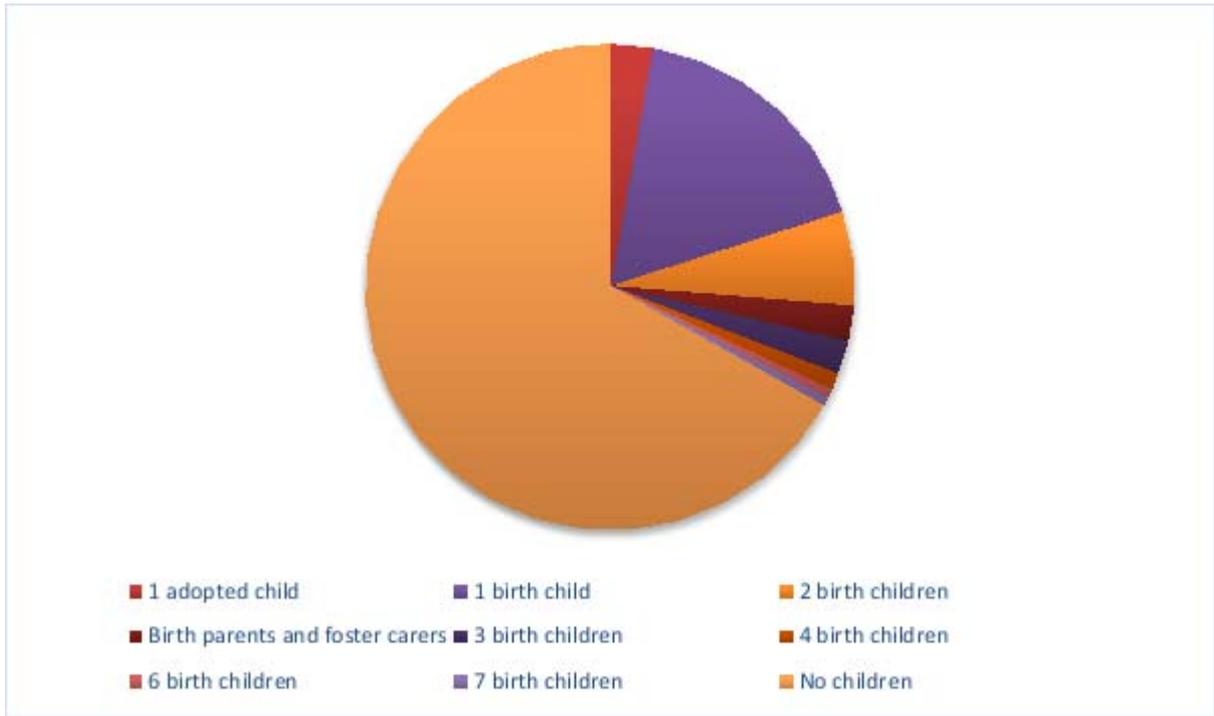
Couples: self-reported LGBT+ and Heterosexual



Self-reported Faith

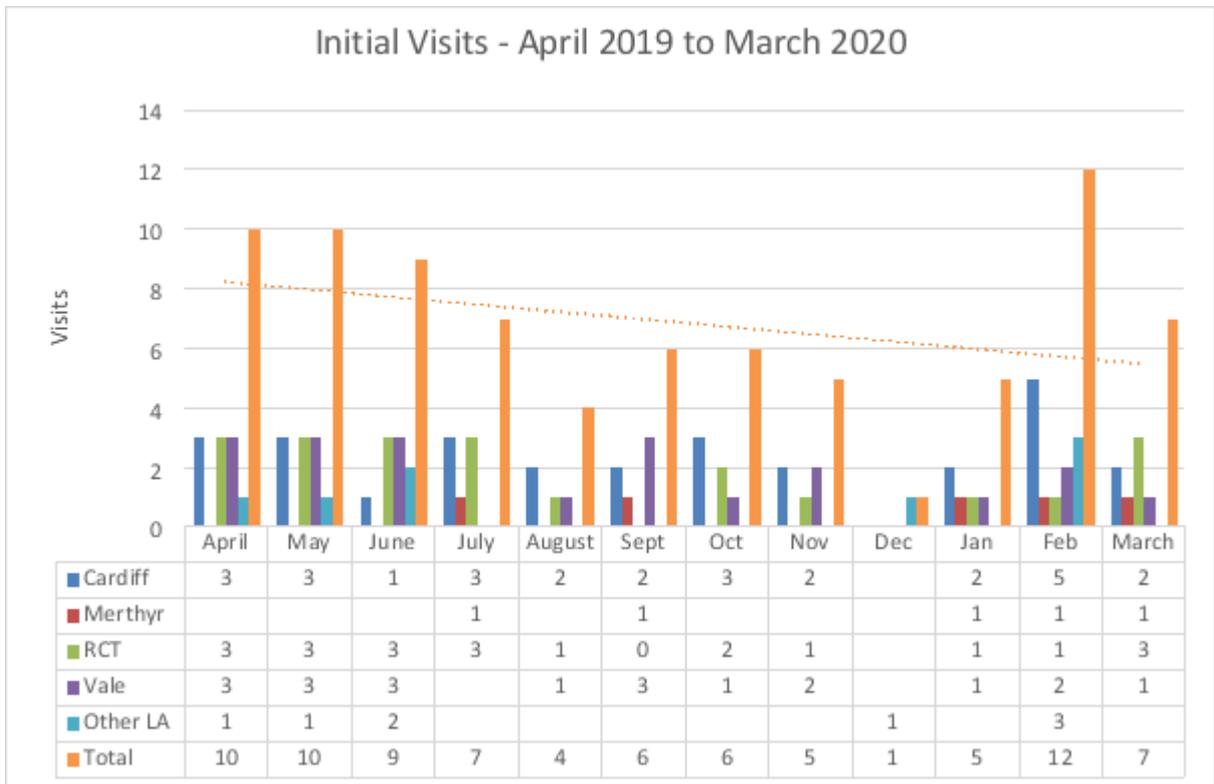


Adopting with children already in the household



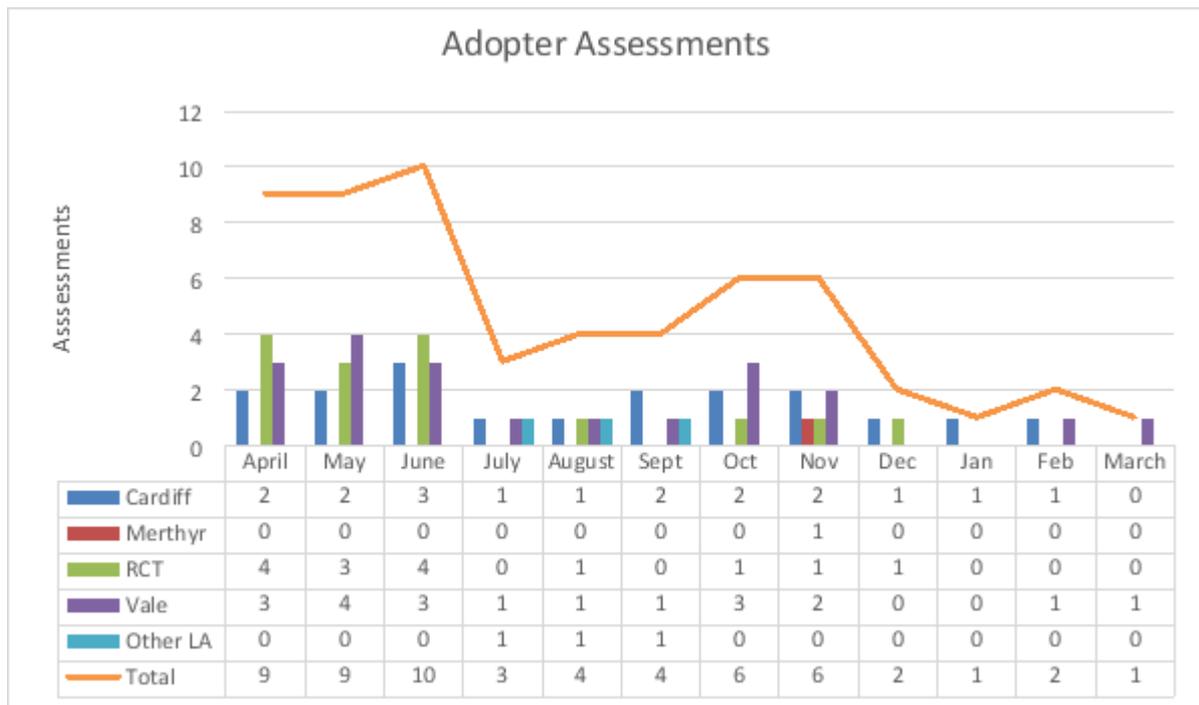
Initial Visits

82 initial enquiries took place during the reporting period.



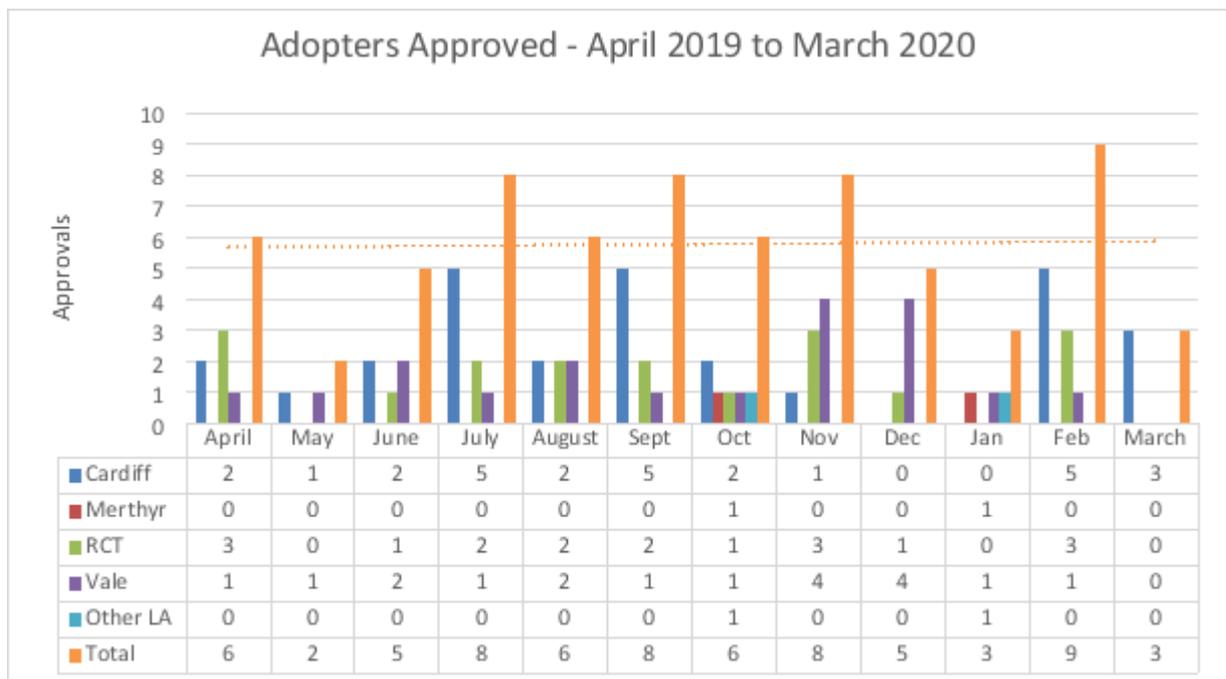
Adopter Assessments

57 adopter assessments were carried out during the reporting period



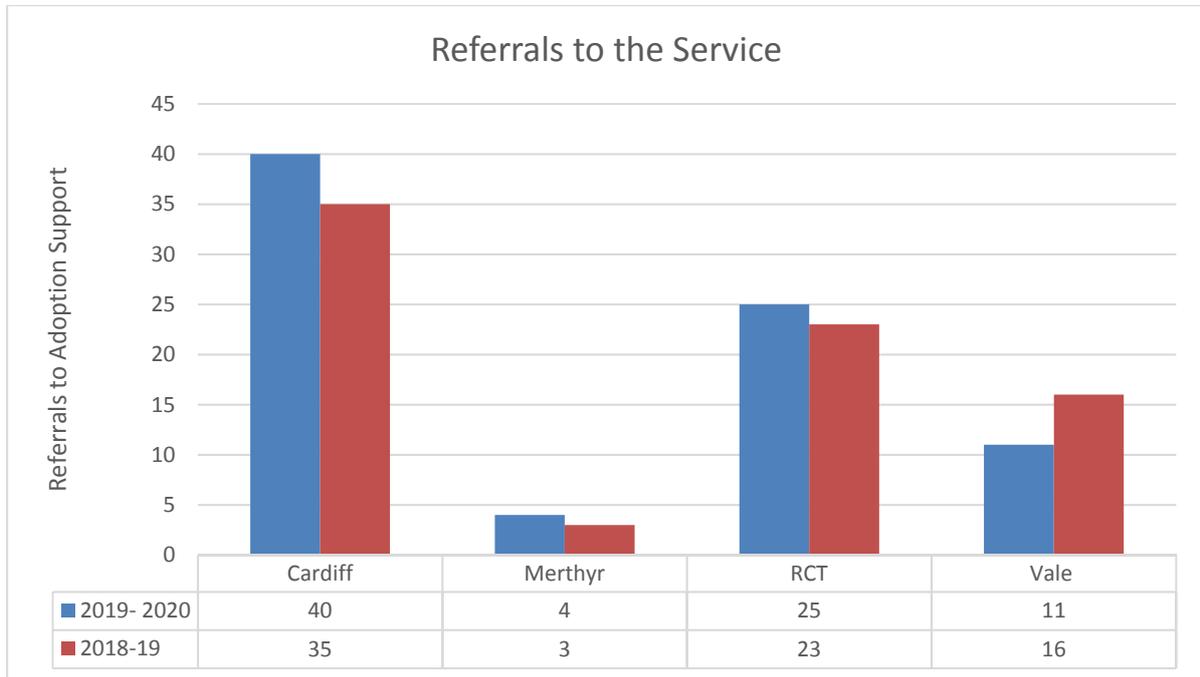
Adopter Approvals

75 adopter approvals were presented to the adoption panel, of these 69 adopter approvals were ratified during the reporting period.

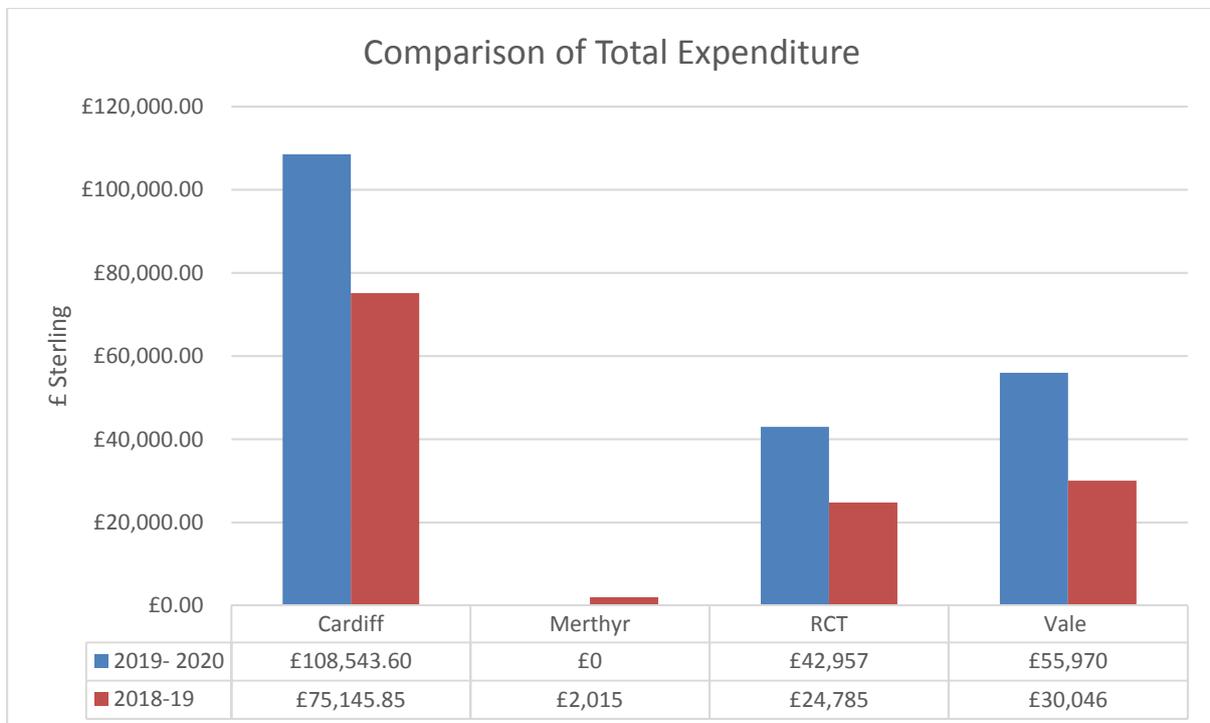


Appendix 4 – Adoption Support

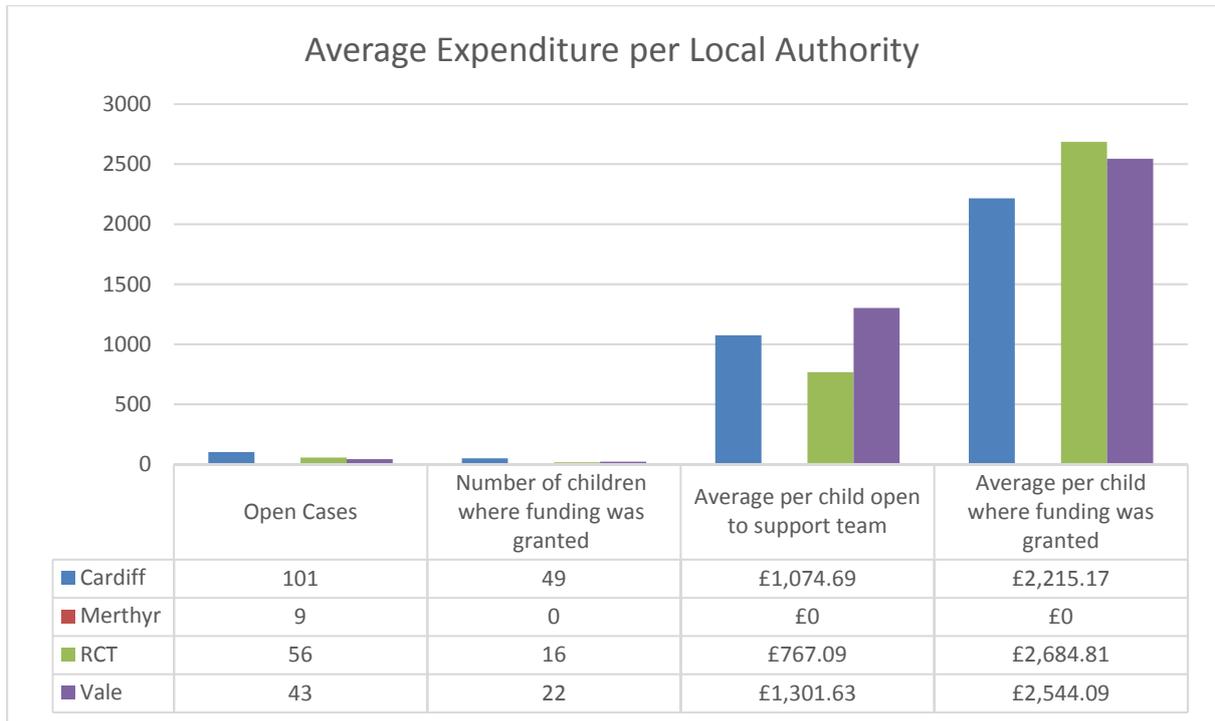
Referrals



Expenditure per Local Authority

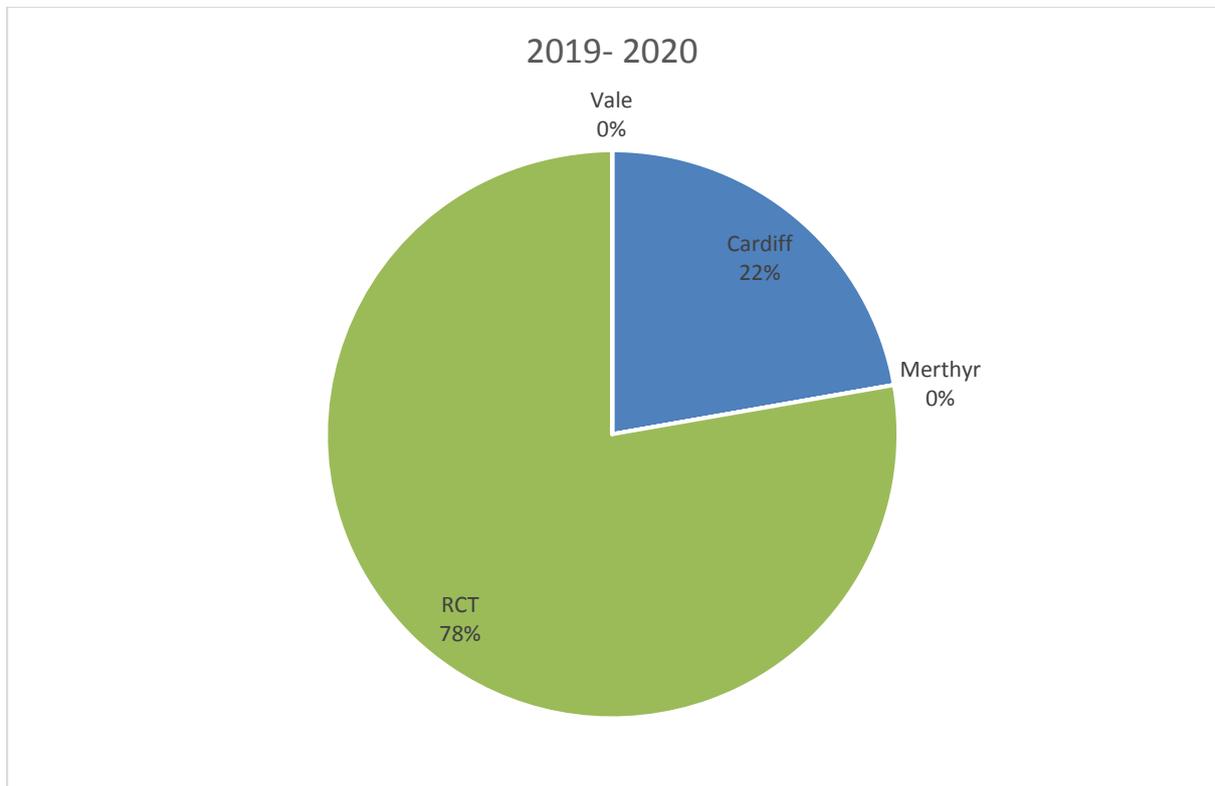


Average Expenditure per Local Authority

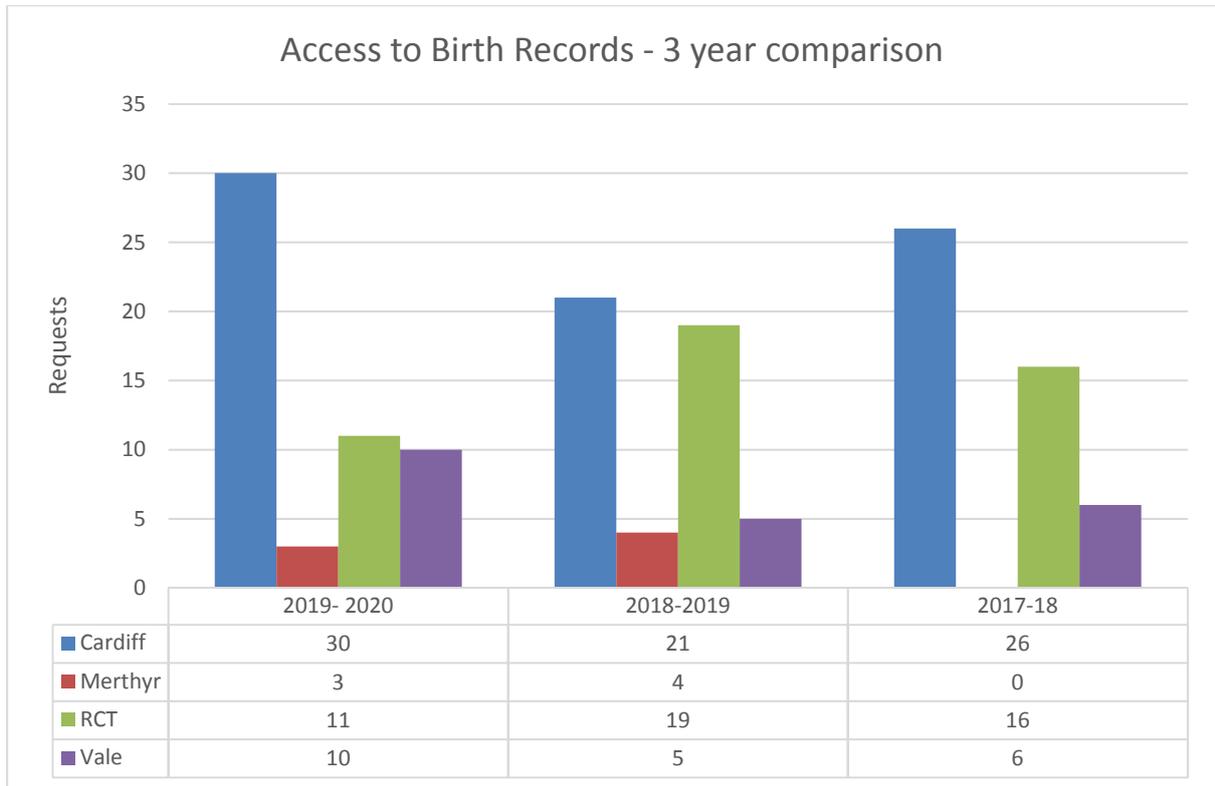


Other Services

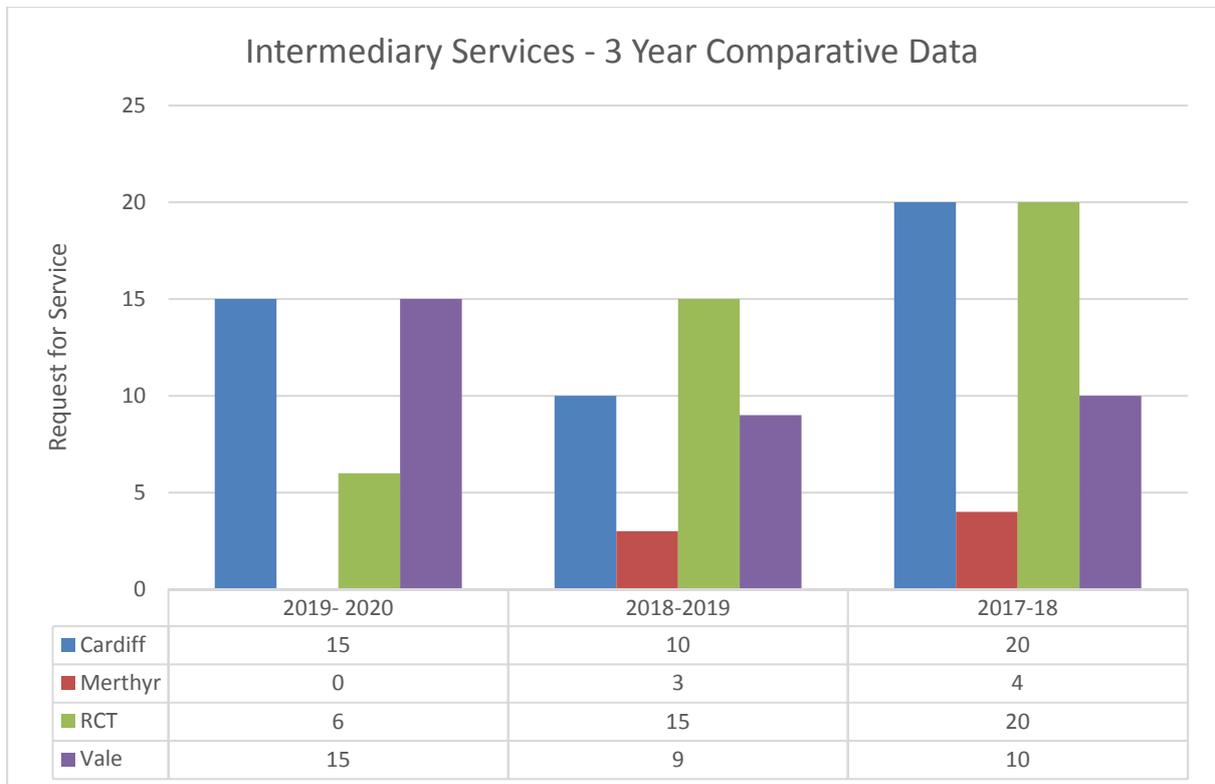
Birth Parent Support



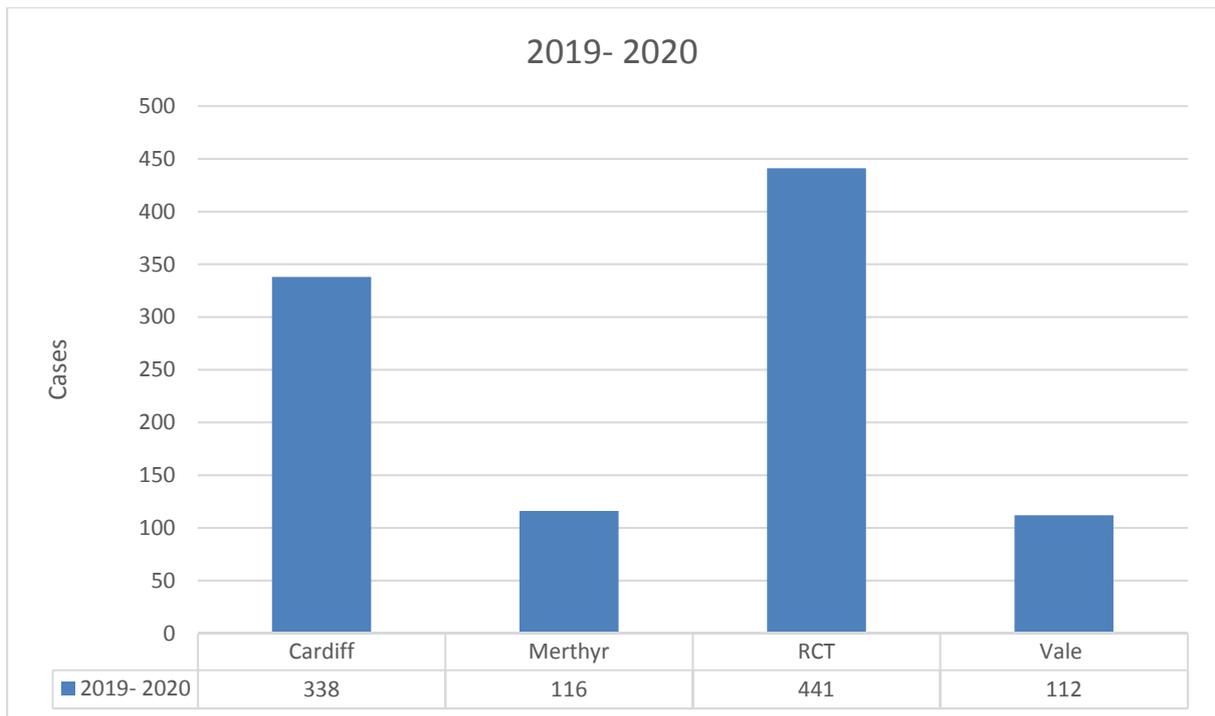
Access to Birth Records



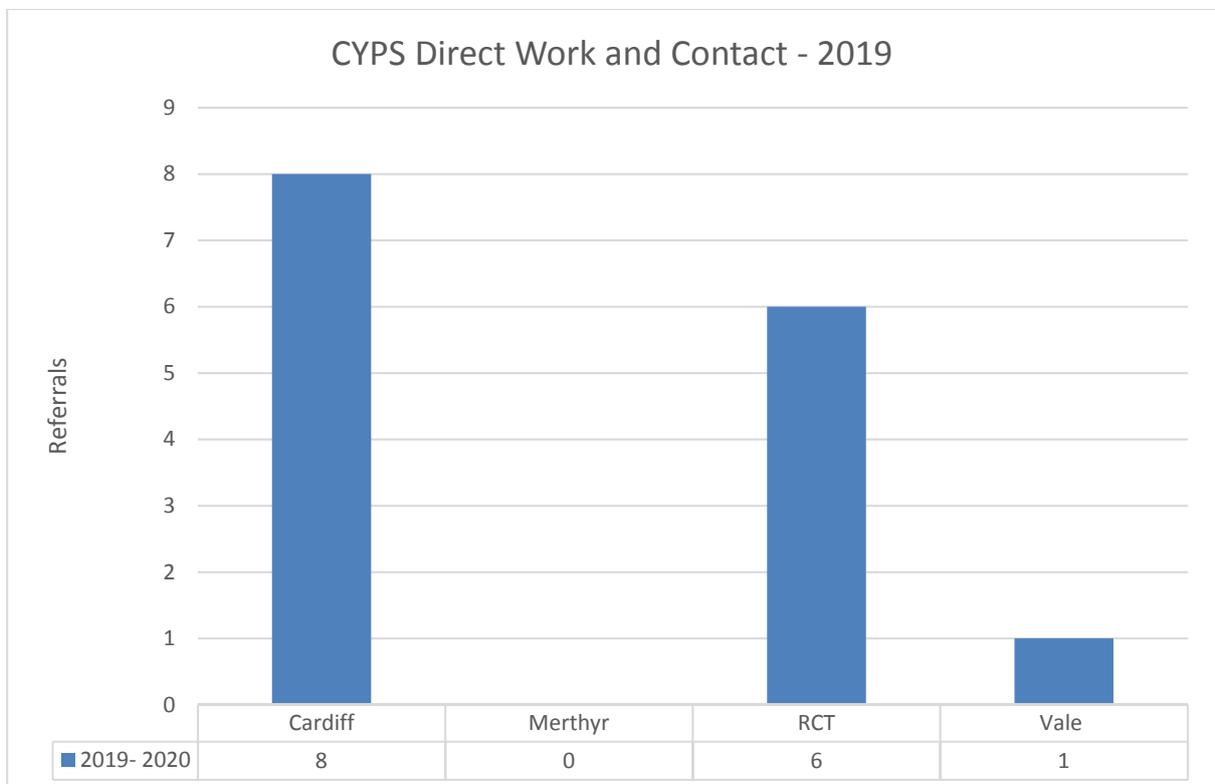
Intermediary Services



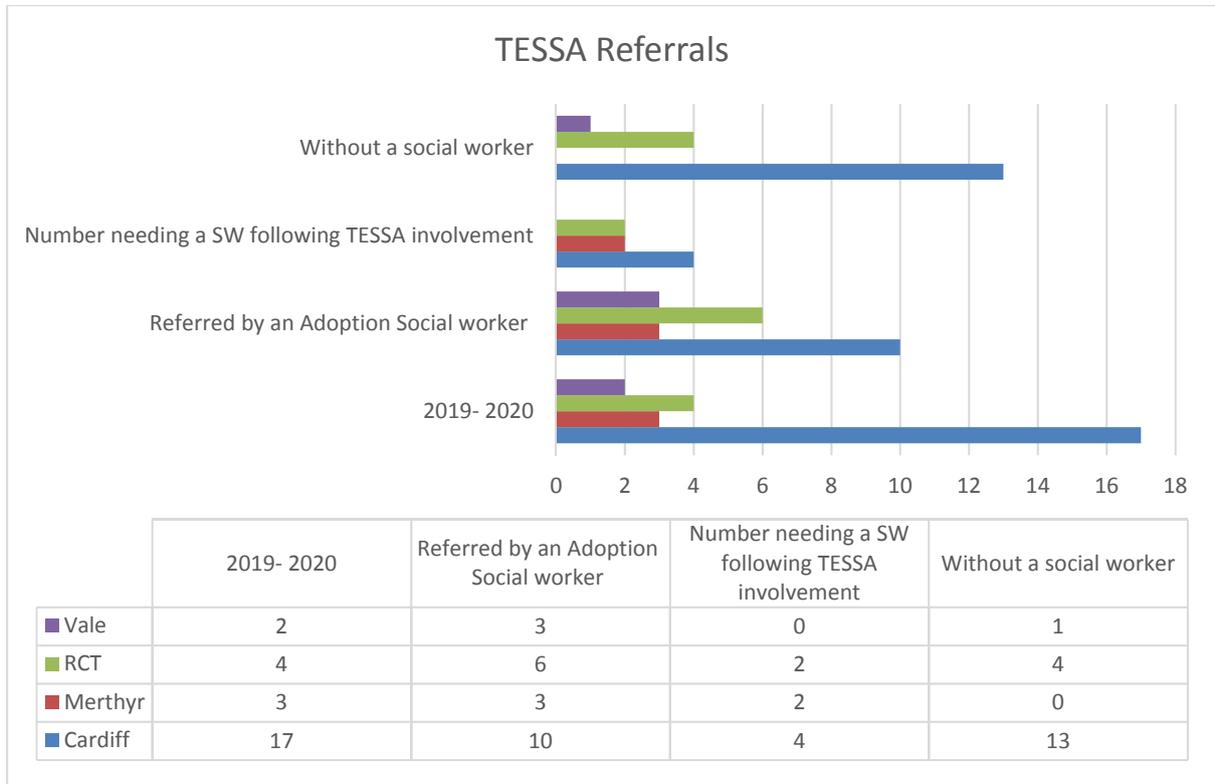
Letterbox



Children and Young People's Service



TESSA

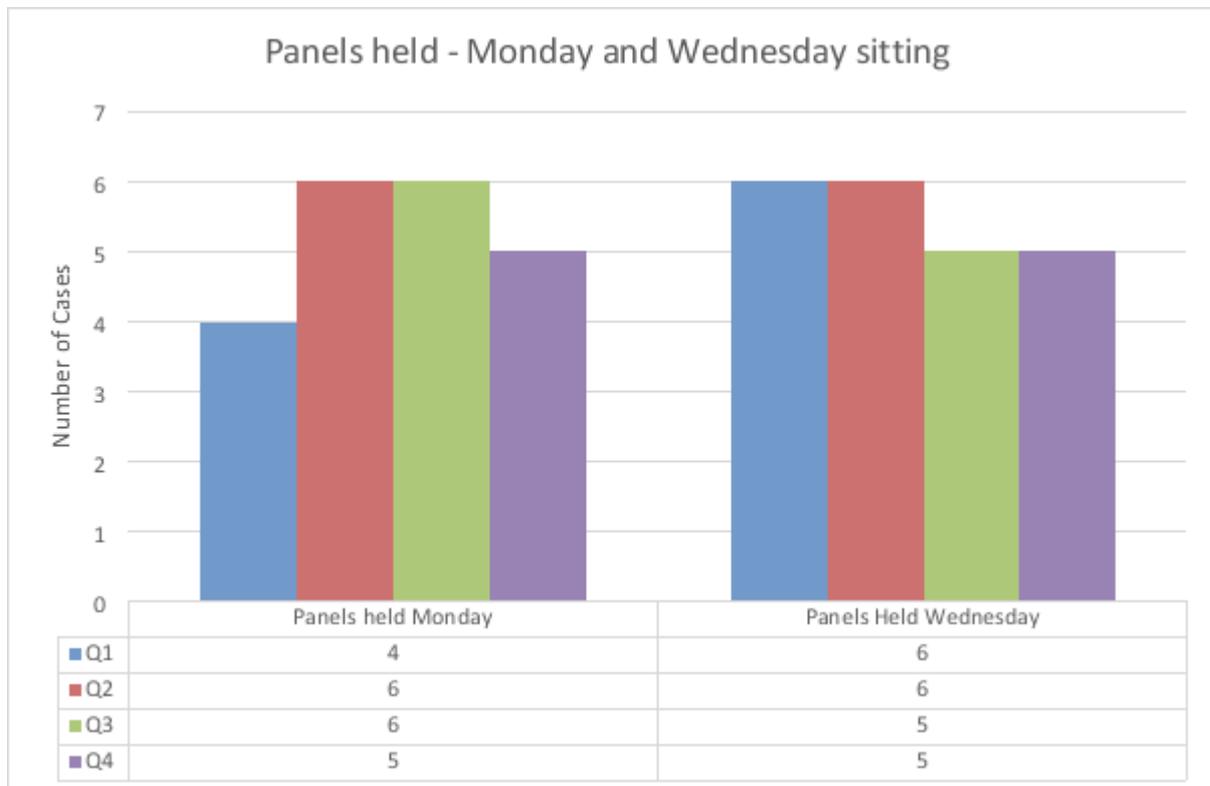


Training

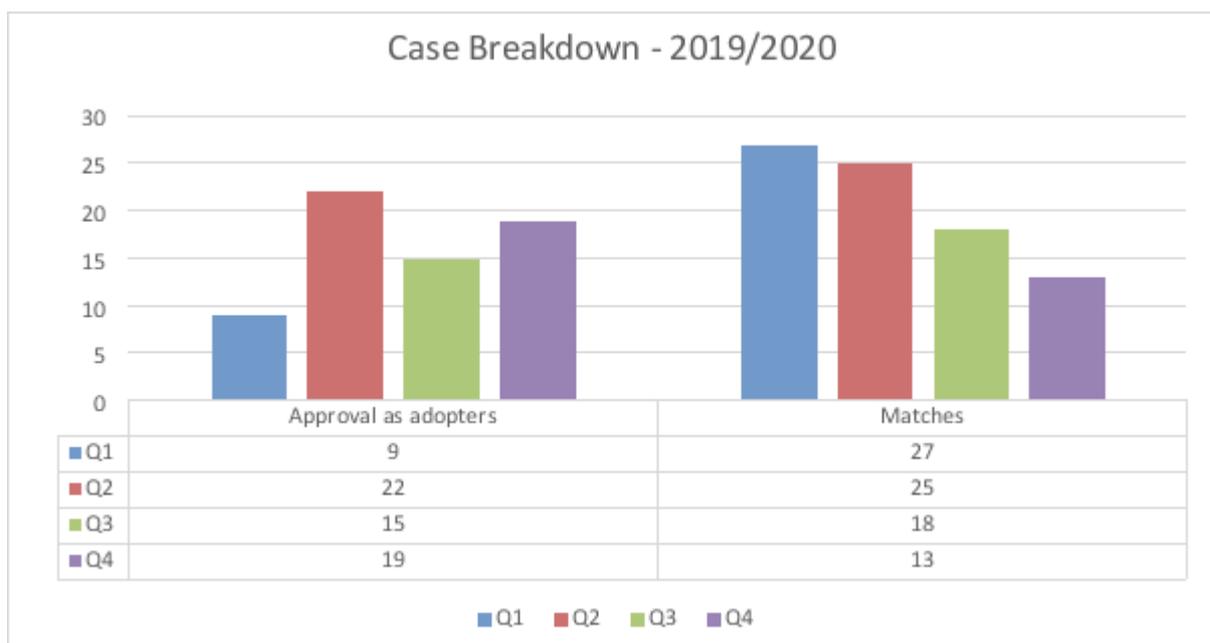


Appendix 5 – Adoption Panel

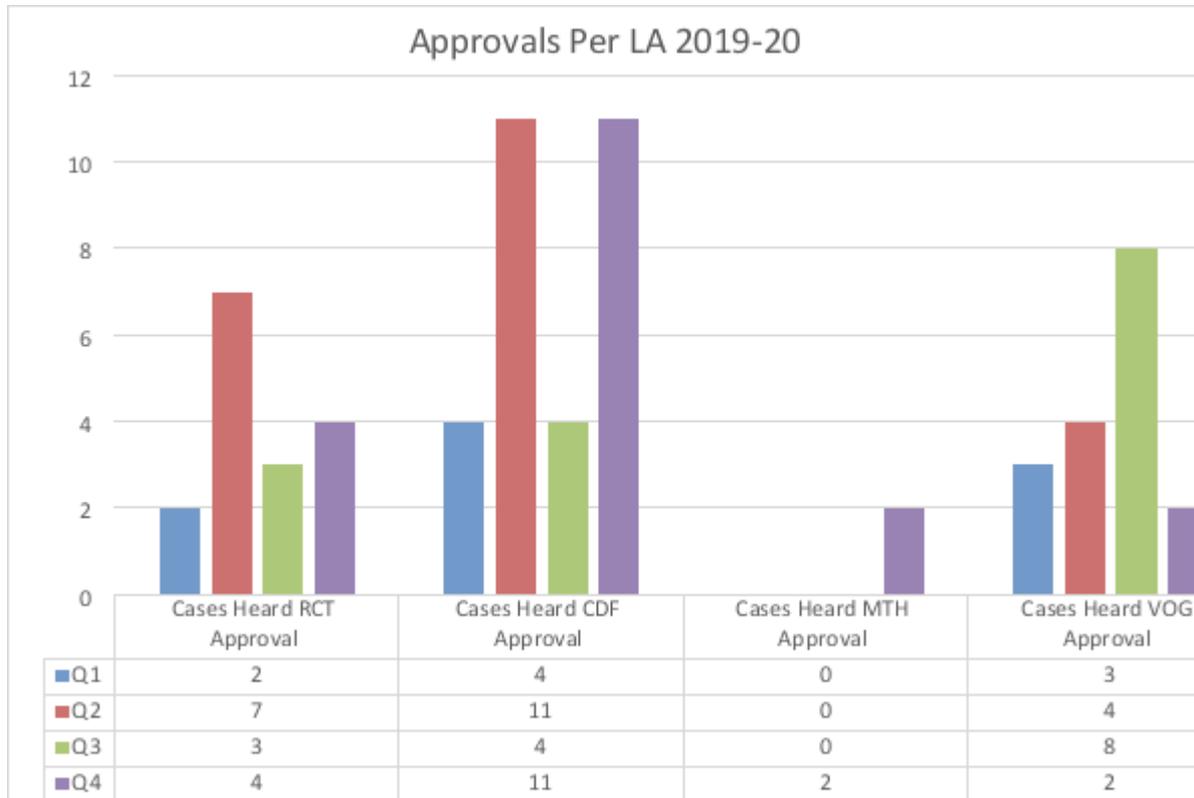
Panels convened



Case distribution



Approvals per Local Authority



Matches per Local Authority

