

<u>BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL</u>	
Report to	Social Services Scrutiny Committee
Report Subject	National Adoption Service 1st Annual Report
Report Author	Tanya Evans
Report date	12th October 2015
Directorate	Social Services
Portfolio	Childrens Services
Date of meeting	
Date signed off by Monitoring Officer <i>Report author to note - this applies to reports being submitted to committees and will be facilitated by the Business Support model arrangements</i>	
Date signed off by Section 151 Officer <i>Report author to note - this applies to reports being submitted to committees and will be facilitated by</i>	

<i>the Business Support model arrangements</i>	
Date signed off by Chair <i>Report author to note - this applies to reports being submitted to committees and will be facilitated by the Business Support model arrangements</i>	
Key words <i>Report author to list key words that illustrate the main content.</i>	

Report Information Summary

1.	Purpose of Report*
	To inform scrutiny of the progress made by the South East Wales Adoption Service since it was formed as part of the National Adoption Service in April 2014.
1.1	
2.	Scope of the Report*
	The National Adoption Service (NAS) has developed a protocol outlining the role of the nominated regional councillor who sits on the NAS governance board and their links into their collaborative Local Authorities. This protocol highlights the need for formal arrangements to be in place to report on the performance of the regional and national elements of the National Adoption Service. This report is part of the formal arrangements required. The report highlights the 1 st years performance of the National Adoption Service.
2.1	
3.	Recommendation/s for Consideration*

	It is recommended members scrutinize the developments and performance of the regional and national elements of the National Adoption Service highlighted in the report.
3.1	

Why this topic is a priority for the Council?*					
<i>Report author to identify links to the main corporate strategies.</i>					
Single Integrated Plan (SIP)	Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP)	Performance Management Improvement Framework (PMIF)	Operating Model	Transforming Blaenau Gwent (TBG Programme)	Other (please state)
		X			

Reporting Pathway*							
<i>Report author to identify proposed reporting pathway. (To include dates where possible)</i>							
Directorate Management Team (DMT)	Corporate Management Team (CMT)	Audit	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny	Executive	Council	Other (please state)
X	X			X			

*Denotes mandatory section

Main Report

1.	Background and Context*
	In February 2014 a report was presented to the Social Services and Active Living Scrutiny Committee. It proposed the development of the South East Wales Region of the National Adoption Service. It was also proposed Blaenau Gwent host this regional arrangement. Scrutiny committee supported this proposal and executive committee agreed it. The South East Wales Adoption Service came into being on the 1 st April 2014. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 came into force in March 2015. These regulations set out the governance arrangements for the National Adoption Service and what is required regionally to support the service.

The regions under the National Adoption Service are as follows:

- North Wales – Conwy, Wrexham, Gwynedd, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Anglesey
- South East Wales – Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen
- Mid and West Wales – Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Powys
- Western Bay – Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea
- Vale, Valleys & Cardiff – Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff.

The National Adoption Service has developed a governance board which has responsibility for the monitoring and oversight of the National Adoption Service. The South East Wales representative on this board is the executive member for social services within Blaenau Gwent.

Each region is required under the regulations to develop a management committee to manage and have oversight of the regional collaborative operations.

The South East Wales Adoption Service management committee has been in operation since April 2014 and has met quarterly since this time. The committee is chaired by the Head of service of Blaenau Gwent as Blaenau Gwent hosts the regional collaborative. Each local authority is represented on this committee by their Heads of Children's Services. The committee also has representatives from Health, Education and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies as required under the regulations.

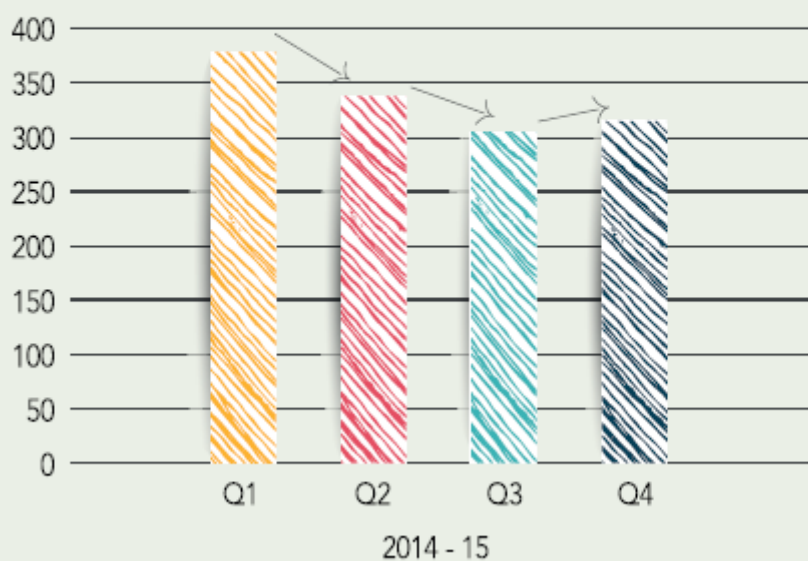
The South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) is based at Mamhilad which is centrally located to deliver services across the region. The service has specific teams to undertake the various functions required for example recruiting and assessing adopters, family funding (matching adopters and children) and adoption support (supporting children and adopters pre and post adoption).

The National Adoption Service has developed a performance framework which SEWAS reports into on a quarterly basis. This

	<p>performance information was used to develop the 1st Annual report of the National Adoption Service 2014/2015. This is the first time adoption information has been collated and reported on across Wales. This reporting helps improve services as we are able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare the activities of the 5 regional collaboratives and (where relevant) the two voluntary adoption agencies that approve adopters • Understand what the data means • Find out the stories behind the data • Compare data from Wales with data from other parts of the UK.
2.	Options for Consideration (to be completed in every case where relevant to the report topic and information)
	N/A
2.1	
3.	Performance Evidence and Information*
	<p>The 1st annual report does highlight a ‘note of caution’ in relation to the performance data as it was the first year of collating such for the first time. Areas for improving data collection have been identified and measures put in place.</p> <p>To understand the data presented in the Annual Report a basic understanding of how children move from being looked after to being adopted is required.</p> <p>Looked after children need a plan for their long term future. If they cannot live with their birth parents there may be a “should be placed” decision by the local authority that adoption is the best plan for them.</p> <p>The local authority then applies to the court for a “placement order” allowing them to place the child with approved adopters once a match is found.</p> <p>After the child moves in with the approved adopters there is a period of becoming a family before going back to court for an “adoption order”.</p>

During the year, the number of children with “should be placed” decisions who had not been placed for adoption went down (see Figure 3). On 31st March 2015, 316 children with a “should be placed” decision were waiting for a match.

Figure 3. Number of children with a “should be placed” decision who have not yet been placed for adoption



67% of the children who were matched in 2014-2015 were not matched until more than six months after the “should be placed” decision was made. This percentage varied considerably around Wales (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Number of children matched who have waited longer than 6 months between a “should be placed” decision and being matched for adoption

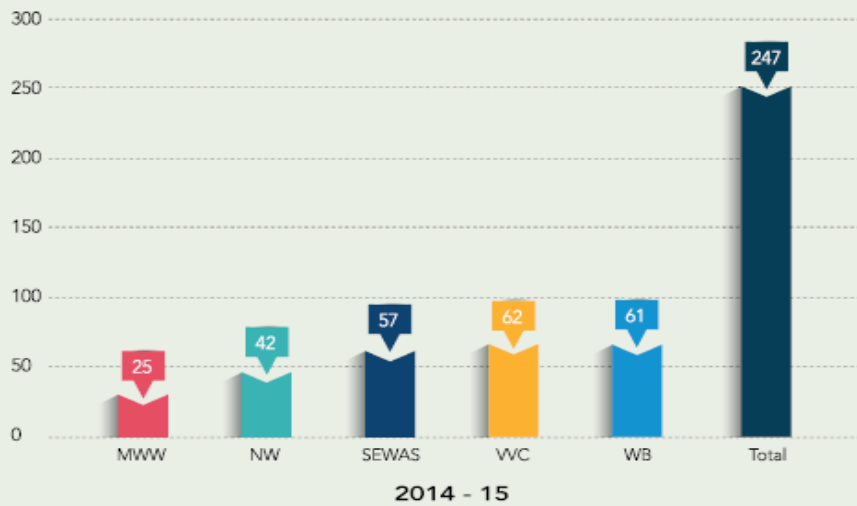
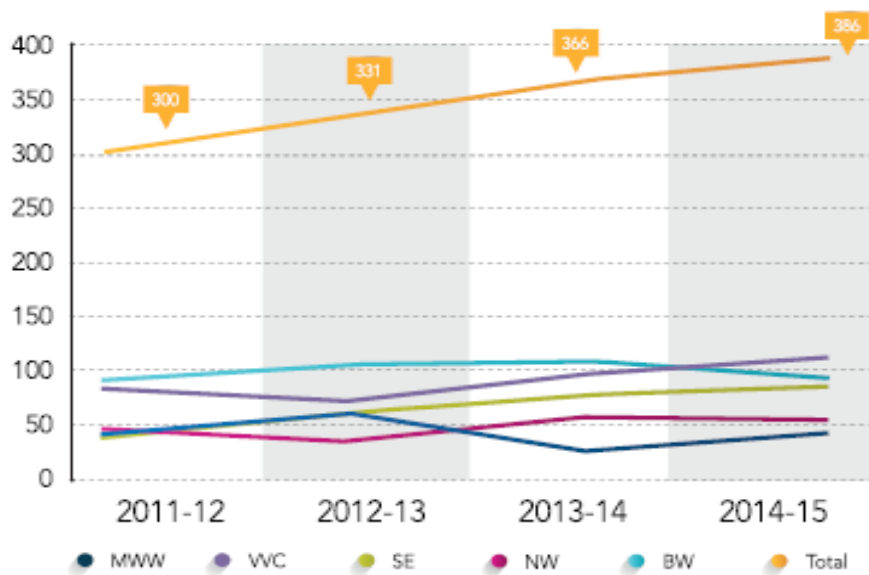
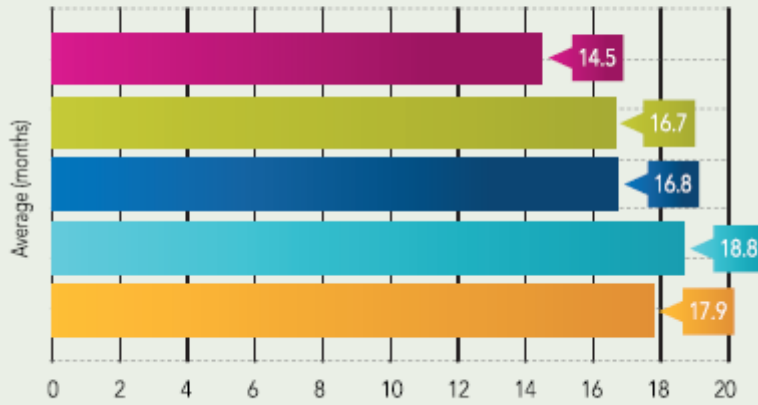


Figure 5 Number of children placed for adoption



386 children were placed for adoption in Wales (see Figure 5). This includes 38 children placed through St David’s Children Society and 11 placed through Barnardo’s. On average, it took 16.5 months from becoming looked after to being placed for adoption. The previous year’s average wait had been about 26 months. The average wait varied considerably around Wales (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Average time between becoming looked after and being placed for adoption



Average (months)	
WB	14.5
WC	16.7
SE	16.8
NW	18.8
MWW	17.9

Agencies received 1,161 enquiries about becoming adopters in 2014-2015. This is an increase of 27% since 2011-2012 (see Figure 9). We know that some people made enquiries to more than one agency, so we cannot give a definite number of people who made enquiries.

Figure 9

2011-12	913
2012-13	950
2013-14	1166
2014-15	1161

The target is to reply to 100% of initial enquiries within five working days. St David's, Western Bay and Barnardo's all

achieved 100% and North Wales was very close to this (see Figure 10).

Figure 10 Percentage of enquiries responded to within five working days

Mid and West Wales	94%
North Wales	99%
South East	90%
Vale, Valleys and Cardiff	90%
Western Bay	100%
Barnardo's	100%
St David's Childrens Society	100%

Welsh Government guidance says it should take 8 months between that first enquiry and when a person is approved as an adopter. The average time for Wales as a whole was 9.4 months. However, as Figure 12 shows, the average time varies between under 7 months and over 13 months.

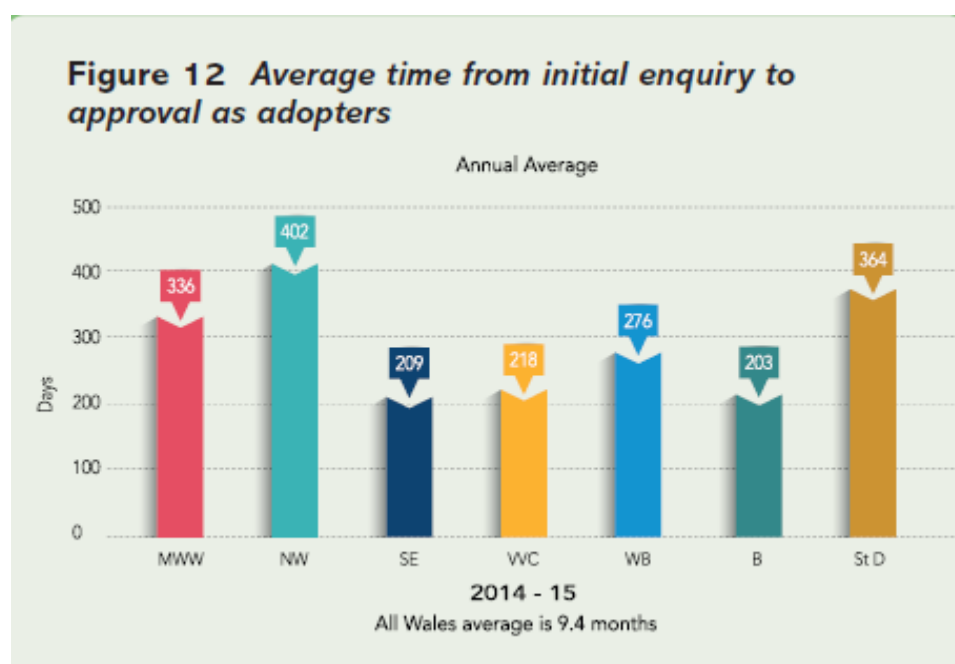
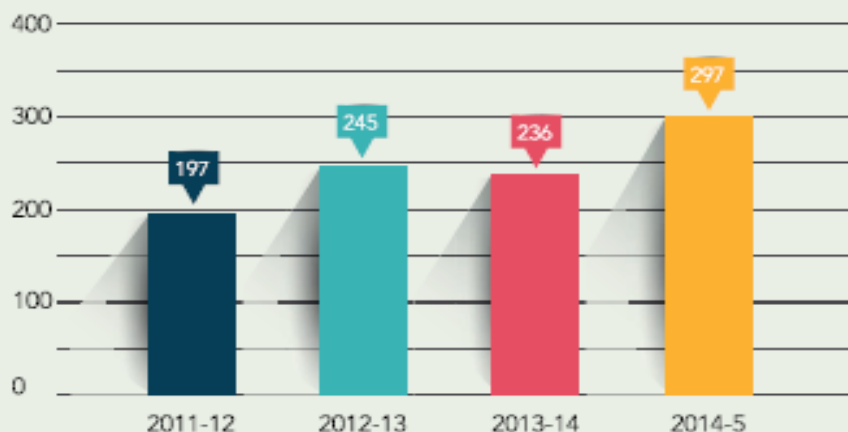


Figure 13 *Number of adopters approved*



Across Wales, 297 people were approved as adopters. This number has been going up year on year (see Figure 13) and we want to make sure this continues.

More people are being approved as adopters and there are more children needing adoption. Currently, most approved adopters want to adopt just one child, and almost all want to adopt a child under the age of eight.

The mismatch is clearest if we look at adults and children on the Wales Adoption Register on 31st March 2015.

- Most adopters want to adopt younger children, but there are fewer younger children needing adoption.
- There are not enough adopters available to adopt older children, especially children from the age of four upwards.
- There are too few adopters available to adopt sibling groups.

Based on this, the National Adoption Service aims to increase the number of adopters who are willing to consider older children and sibling groups.

The National Adoption Service has set the following priorities, during 2015/2016 a 3 year plan will be developed to achieve these priorities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit more adopters • Improve how children and families are matched • Improve adoption support services • Ensure everyone is involved and has a say about adoption services • Take messages from research into account. <p>SEWAS has a business plan which not only looks to achieve the priorities highlighted above but those recognised locally to improve service delivered.</p>
3.1	
4.	Impact Assessment Against Proposals / Options*
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
4.1	
5.	Financial Implications*
	SEWAS is a collaborative arrangement funded by the 5 local authorities within this region. The management committee is responsible for ensuring arrangements are in place for determining the amount of payment or other contribution to be made by the local authorities towards the cost of carrying out the partnership functions. A partnership arrangement is in place and under regulation should be reviewed every 2 years.
5.1	
6.	Risk Implications*
	No risks currently identified.
6.1	
7.	Staffing/Workforce Development Implications*
	No issues relevant at this time.
7.1	
8.	Conclusion*
	This report has highlighted the first year's performance of the National Adoption Service. The South East Wales region is one of 5 regions developed under the National Adoption service and performance information is integral to this report.

	<p>There are areas for improvement within the region in particular the response time to enquiries for adoption and a reduction in the time taken for children who have 'should be placed' decisions to be matched with adopters.</p> <p>As SEWAS has been in operation for over 18 months reviews of the functions are underway to look at these issues and improve service delivery.</p>
8.1	

Ref:PSEWAS.2169

Date: 12.10.15