

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**

Report Subject: **National Adoption Service Annual Report 2018/19**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**

Report Submitted by: **Damien McCann, Corporate Director Social Services**
Sue Radford, Service Manager, SEWAS

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
Virtual	24.9.19	07.10.19			17.10.19	Info Item 06.11.19		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To report on the performance of the South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) and the National Adoption Service (NAS) for 2018/19.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 This report is required in line with the Regulations as set out in The Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2005.

- 2.2 The regional performance report under **Appendix 1** and the National performance report under **Appendix 2** have been produced by the National Adoption Service. Both reports focus on key areas which include:

- Children placed and waiting for adoption;
- Demand for adoptive placements and adopter recruitment;
- Life journey materials; and
- Adoption Support.

- 2.3 The National Adoption Service (NAS) was launched in November 2014 with a remit of expectations to:

- Eradicate drift for children in care;
- Eliminate waiting lists for training and assessment of adopters;
- Improve the matching process for children;
- Allay adoption breakdowns by improving adoption support;
- Streamline the process to ensure better linking for children;
- Provide a wide choice of placements;
- Ensuring consistent delivery of adoption services across Wales.

2.4 National Adoption Service

There is a small central team headed by the Director of Operations. The national team provides national direction, development and coordination to all the regions.

2.5 The regions include:

- South East Wales Adoption Team (**SEWAS**) (Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Torfaen, Newport, Monmouthshire)
- Western Bay (**WB**) (Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea.
- Vale, Valley's Cardiff (**VVC**) (Cardiff, Vale, Merthyr Tydfil, RCT, Vale of Glamorgan.
- North Wales (**NW**) (Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd
- Mid and West Wales (**MWW**) (Carmarthen, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Powys.

2.6 Every region is responsible for:

- Placing children for adoption (Local Authority);
- Recruitment and assessment of adopters;
- Offering counselling to birth parents;
- Offering advice to adopted adults;
- Providing post adoption support;
- Matching children with adopters;
- Creating links with voluntary adoption agencies, health and education.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 Option 1 - Provide comment or any amendment to, or inclusion of, information on the content of the report to assist Executive in its function.

3.2 Option 2 - Accept the information as reported.

4. **Evidence of How Does This Topic Supports the Achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 The work of the South East Wales Adoption Service supports the following priorities for social services under the corporate plan:

- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
- To work with our partners including Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and neighbouring authorities to deliver integrated responsive care and support;
- To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering health and social care involving key partners and our communities

4.2 SEWAS also supports the Safe Reduction of Looked After Children Strategy 2017-2020.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget (Short and Long Term Impact)

- 5.1.1 SEWAS is a collaborative arrangement funded by the 5 local authorities within this region.
- 5.1.2 The Management Committee (required under regulation) is responsible for ensuring arrangements are in place to deliver the regional service and this includes financial arrangements.
- 5.1.3 Budget pressures are managed effectively resulting in no overspend at the end of the financial year 2018/19.

5.2. Risk Including Mitigating Actions

5.2.1 1. Shortage of adopters

The risk implication for this reporting period mirrors that of previous years in respect of the shortage of adopters available to meet the needs of the children referred to the service, although, there was an increase in the number of adopters approved by SEWAS (**47** 2018/19 compared to **39** 2017/18) there is still a gap in adopters who can meet the needs of our more complex children, resulting in the number of children waiting still being high.

- 5.2.2 Recruitment pressures are not unique to the SEWAS region. The other regions in Wales show a year on year decrease and similar in respect of more complex children be referred for adoption.

5.2.3 Mitigation

To improve performance in this area SEWAS will continue to invest in recruitment. It is known that a large majority of adopters come to SEWAS because of 'word of mouth' with this mind we are building on our core offer of support to adopters to ensure they have a positive experience of the service. This core offer includes:-

- Direct work pre and post approval which prepares children and adopters for placement;
- Additional post approval adoption training before placement using therapeutic models;
- Work with panel;
- Assessment being completed in a timely manner;
- Advertising our core offer including our psychology service input which is a 'big sell'.

- 5.2.4 Welsh Government recently allocated additional funding to improve adoption support. As a result new posts have been developed in 19/20 which should help increase the recruitment of adopters.

5.3 Legal

5.3.1 This report is required in line with the Regulations as set out in The Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2005.

5.4 Human Resources

5.4.1 No issues

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 *Performance Information and Data*

National Adoption Service Annual Report 18/19

The full report can be found under **Appendix 1**. The Highlights will be captured here.

The National Adoption Service has 2 priorities which are:-

1. Placing Children Effectively.
2. Continuing to improve adoption support by implementing the NAS Adoption Support Framework.

The National Adoption Service (NAS) has been working for five years to support better outcomes for children for whom adoption is the best plan.

6.1.1 **Some of the achievements from the last five years have been**

- Successfully raised the profile of adoption with the public, funders and policy makers.
- Accessed additional funding; a £90k development grant from the Welsh Government each year, £125k targeted investment in 2017/18 and a £2.3m investment for adoption support to commence in 2019/20.
- Improved performance in the key areas of approving adopters and placing children more quickly, alongside embedding a performance culture supported through regular evaluation and reporting.
- Increased the availability of life journey materials through a new best practice approach.
- Developed how we listen to adopters and their children and ensured their messages and input make a difference to the service.
- Created five regional adoption collaboratives as the focus for local government adoption expertise and access point for services.
- Developed and maintained a strong partnership with the Welsh Voluntary Adoption Agencies. This added value, different expertise, additional services and more choice, resulting in exciting new services such as Adopting Together Service, TESSA and a new Children and Young People's service.

- Commissioned and developed the all Wales website, which now provides a comprehensive source of information for parents and agencies.
- Brought the Wales Adoption Register into the service, giving greater breadth and depth of choice for prospective parents and children.
- Produced strategic plans, which not only outline what improvements are needed but help influence and improve legislation and policy, as well as achieve investment in times of constraint.

6.1.2 **However a number of challenges remain which are**

- Maintaining performance improvements and making them more consistent within services and across Wales.
- Improving service agility and access to resources to respond to emerging issues and changing service demands.
- Using our data and information to better effect.
- Making a complex governance and operational structure for collaboration, work effectively within local government and with partners.

One of the key messages from the National report is ensuring that there are sufficient adopters available to meet the number and needs of children who have a plan for adoption is critical to achieve.

6.1.3 **South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) End-year Performance Report 2018/19**

The full report can be found under **Appendix 2**. The Highlights will be captured here.

- 70 children were placed in their new adoptive home, a similar number to 2017/18. Numerically this compares to 85, 80, 85 and 71 over the last four years.
- The number of children waiting for an adoptive family was 70. This compares to 41, 47 and 76 at the end of the last be matched or placed with their new family at the end of the year.
- The children placed for adoption in SEWAS were on average placed within 16.8 months from becoming looked after, moving away from the benchmark of 13 months or less. We are aware the figures have been influenced by the courts ordering reviews of old placement orders which subsequently needed to be discharged, for example; change of plans for long term fostering, this coupled with some delay placing children with complex needs resulted in the average timescales increasing.
- At an average of 10.3 months, the time from placement order to placement, is an increase from last year and also higher than the

benchmark of 6 months or less. This figure will have also been affected by the discharge of placement orders and the delay in placing children with complex needs. On a positive note within SEWAS 64% of children were placed within the benchmark of 6 months.

- 34% of the placements made were for children in sibling groups.
- 77% of placements made with local authority approved adopters.
- In SEWAS 59% of children placed this year had their life journey materials by the 2nd review, maintaining similar performance to last year. This is disappointing given the target is 100 %. The service is using Welsh Government investment money to improve performance going forward.

6.1.4 Key messages in relation to Adopters in the SEWAS region

- Enquiries to SEWAS from adopters decreased by 6%.
- Fewer assessments of adopters were commenced 45 compared to 67 last year.
- The number of adopters being approved in SEWAS increased to 47 in 2018/19
- On a positive note SEWAS are the best performing regions in Wales in respect of the timescales for adoption approvals. The performance measure from initial enquiry to approval is 8 months – SEWAS have been completing these assessments in 7.5 months. In respect of formal application to approval the benchmark is 6 months – SEWAS are within the benchmark at 5.2 months.

6.1.5 Key Messages for Adoption Support

- SEWAS saw a similar level of post adoption support being sought and completed a similar number of assessments in the year. 58 new requests for post adoption support were received during 2018/19. The majority of these assessments completed resulted in practical or therapeutic support being provided.
- Birth parents - The numbers of Birth Parents referred to adoption services nationally reduced by 13% during 2018/19. In SEWAS the number stayed at a similar level 222. All of these birth parents were offered a service by SEWAS. In many regions data availability, particularly on take up has been affected by system changes within the local authorities for a number of regions or the loss of 3rd sector provider. SEWAS has been unaffected by this. Take up within a year tends to be low nationally but SEWAS performance was similar to previous years at 14% (n32). A service was also offered to another 43 parents who requested it.

The number of adopters available to the children waiting ratio continues to be a concern but despite the pressures the staff team have done well to maintain performance and remain committed to improving the service.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

6.3 **Involvement (Consultation, Engagement, Participation)**

SEWAS consults with all adopters following their attendance at training, adoption panel for approval and when they are matched with children.

The Adoption Support Team in SEWAS facilitates a number of support groups including; birth parent support, adopter support, therapeutic parenting support, and grandparent/ family and friend of adopters.

A quarterly newsletter is distributed to all adopters which advises them on where they can access support and training.

6.4 **Thinking for the Long Term (Forward Planning)**

SEWAS uses the performance information to plan for the longer term and changing the way in which services are delivered.

6.5 **Preventative Focus**

The focus is on avoiding drift for children in care by providing adoption placements that meet the needs of children who are referred to the service. The performance measures highlight that children are now being placed for adoption in a timelier manner which supports local authority looked after children reduction plans. A good standard of adoption support is also essential to avoid adoption breakdown and prevent children coming back into care.

6.6 **Collaboration / Partnership Working**

The regions continue to work collaboratively by sharing information and good practice. There are a number of work streams in process to improve collaboration with partner agencies including improving CAMHS services to adopted children and working with education so they have a better understanding of the issues for adopted children.

6.7 **Integration (Across Service Areas)**

SEWAS continues to form relationships with other department in the councils in the region to improve outcomes for children who are placed for adoption. An example of this is working with communication teams to promote adoption within the region to attract adopters. We also provide training for local authority social workers on a quarterly basis.

6.8 **EqIA (Screening and Identifying if Full Impact Assessment is Needed)**

The work of the SEWAS is a key part of the Blaenau Gwent safe children looked after reduction strategy. The strategy aims to reduce the inequalities children would face if they remained in the looked after system.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The performance of the National Adoption Service/ Regions is monitored by a National Governance Board and regional Management Committee.

SEWAS have a business plan which is reported on Quarterly to the Children's management team

Background Documents / Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – National Annual Report 2018-19

Appendix 2 – SEWAS End Year Performance 2018/19

REF: ICSRBCIW.2432