

National Adoption Service for Wales

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



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

Achieving More Together /
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd

This report outlines the position at 31.03.19, the end of the 2018/19 business year. It focuses on key elements of the data set namely:

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

Regional Overview

- ✚ 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.
- ✚ 58 children had their adoption orders granted¹;
- ✚ 70 children, with the legal authority to be placed for adoption, were waiting to be matched or placed with their new family at the end of the year.

Although relatively static at the end of this year and last, the trend shows that SEWAS is placing fewer children and has more waiting. This year on average it took longer for children to be placed although at least two thirds of children are placed within the guideline timeframes. More children had their plans for adoption change to alternative permanence options.

In order to meet its own need for placements the region needs to more than double the number of adopters it approves to circa 100. SEWAS' response to prospective adopter enquiries is currently good and applicant assessments are completed within the guideline timeframes. If the region could scale this up including increasing enquiries and improving conversion rates it would be in a better position.

At 59% SEWAS has maintained its previously improved performance in respect of life journey work in place by the 2nd adoption review but not moved closer to the 100% target.

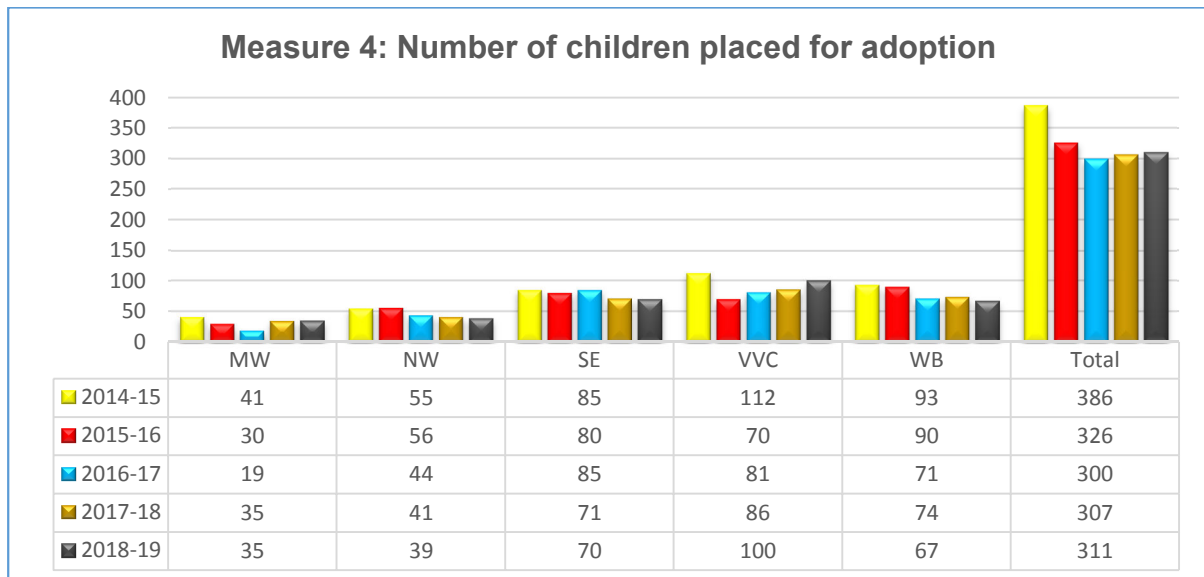
¹ NAS data from regions to be verified against WG statistics later in the year

Key points

- The children placed for adoption in SEWAS were on average placed within 16.8 months from becoming looked after, longer than months in 2017/18 and moving away from the benchmark of 13 months or less.
- 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. Within SEWAS 64% of children were placed within this benchmark for 'placement order to placement' (6 months).
- 34% of the placements made were for children in sibling groups.
- 77% of placements made with local authority approved adopters.
- The level of SEWAS matches that do not proceed increased this year to 4 but disruptions remained at a similar level 3%.
- The number of children waiting for an adoptive family was 70. This compares to 41, 47 and 76 at the end of the last three years.
- Enquiries to SEWAS from adopters decreased by 6%.
- Fewer assessments of adopters were commenced 45 compared to 67 last year.
- The average time from enquiry to approval for a SEWAS adopter decreased to 7.5 months while the time frame from formal application to approval is 5.2 months. Both are better than the national averages and meet or are close to the Welsh Government guidelines.
- The number of adopters being approved in SEWAS increased to 47 in 2018/19.
- Projections indicate that circa 100 placements will be needed to place the children currently waiting and those for whom a placement order is likely to be granted during the coming year.
- In SEWAS 59% of children placed this year had their life journey materials by the 2nd review, maintaining similar performance to last year.
- More SEWAS children had had an ongoing adoption support service in place at the point of placement, 62 (89%).
- SEWAS saw a similar level of post adoption support being sought. 58 new requests for post adoption support were received during 2018/19. The majority of the assessments completed resulted in practical or therapeutic support being provided.
- SEWAS provided a service to 75 birth parents.

Children placed for adoption.

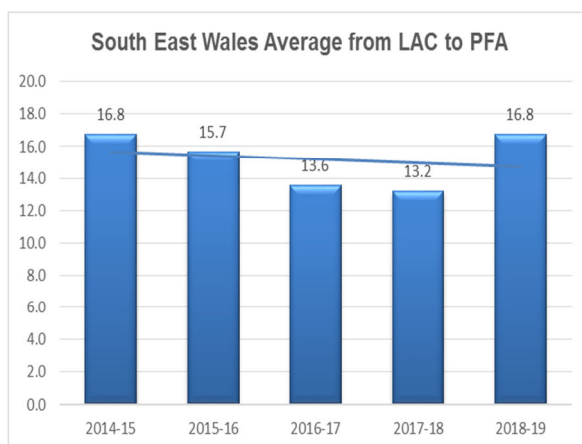
The **number of children placed for adoption** by SEWAS in 2018/19 was 70, a similar number to last year but lower than the first three years of data collection.



After a period where children were being placed more quickly, this has now reversed across Wales as outlined below:

- The Wales average for a child between becoming 'looked after' and being placed was 16.4 compared to 14.5 months in 2017/18. This aim is to reduce this to 13 months; in 2018/19 50% of children were placed within 13 months.
- The Wales average between the Placement Order being granted and placement was 9.9 months. Our aim is to reduce that to 6 months; in 2018/19 47% of children were placed within 6 months of their Placement Order.

SEWAS had made improvements in the timeframe between children becoming looked after and being placed for adoption but this has reversed this year and the timeframe between placement order and placement is also increasing.



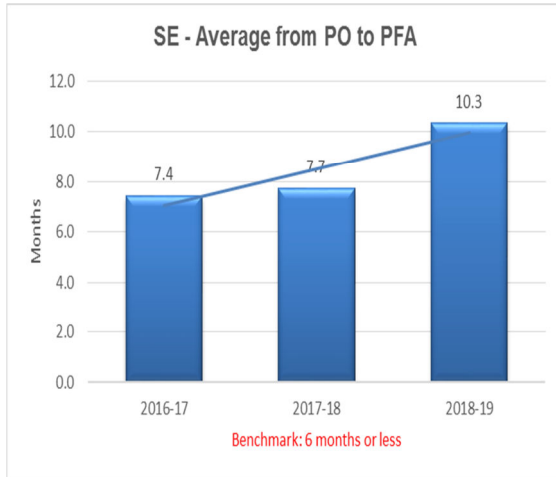
The average for a SEWAS child between becoming 'looked after' and being placed was increased to 16.8 months compared to 13.2 months in 2017/18.

73% of SEWAS children are placed within 13 months of becoming looked after.

The average between a SEWAS child having their placement order granted and placement is 10.3 months higher than last year.

64% of SEWAS children are placed with 6 months of their placement order being granted.

The region indicated that over this year it has placed a number of children who had been waiting for some time; some with their longstanding foster carer.



The children who take longer to be placed inevitably influence the average timeframe to placement. It is however positive that regions are being successful in placing more complex children. The following characterise those situations where placements took longer across Wales:

- Complex children
- Late or delayed assessment of foster carers as adopters
- Placement breakdown with family members
- Care proceedings extended.

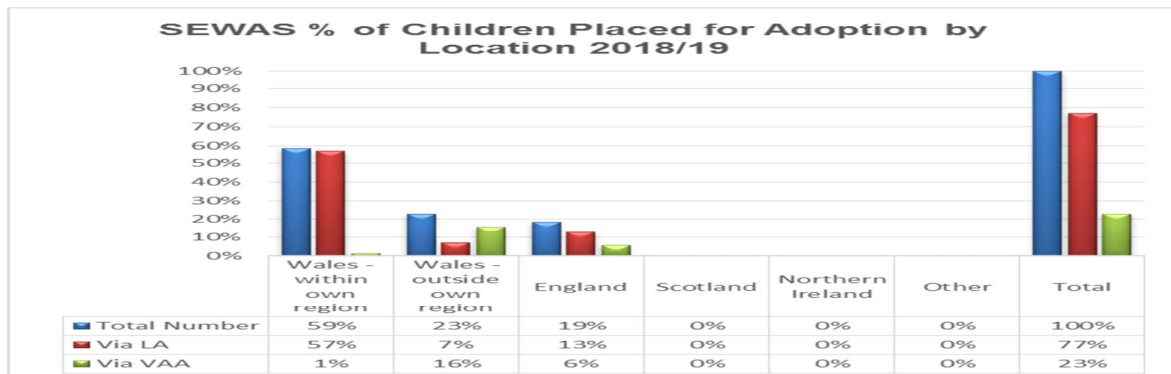
It is likely that similar reasons apply to SEWAS children placed. Over the year regions, reported on specific delays relating to up to 63% of all children placed.

The region placed 12 sets of sibling groups this year, at 40% of children placed a higher proportion than last year (34%).

Where are placements being made?

The analysis of placement activity nationally shows that 77% of placements were made within Wales, a similar proportion to last year with the majority in local authority placements. However, there was an increase in children placed in England particularly in VAA placements.

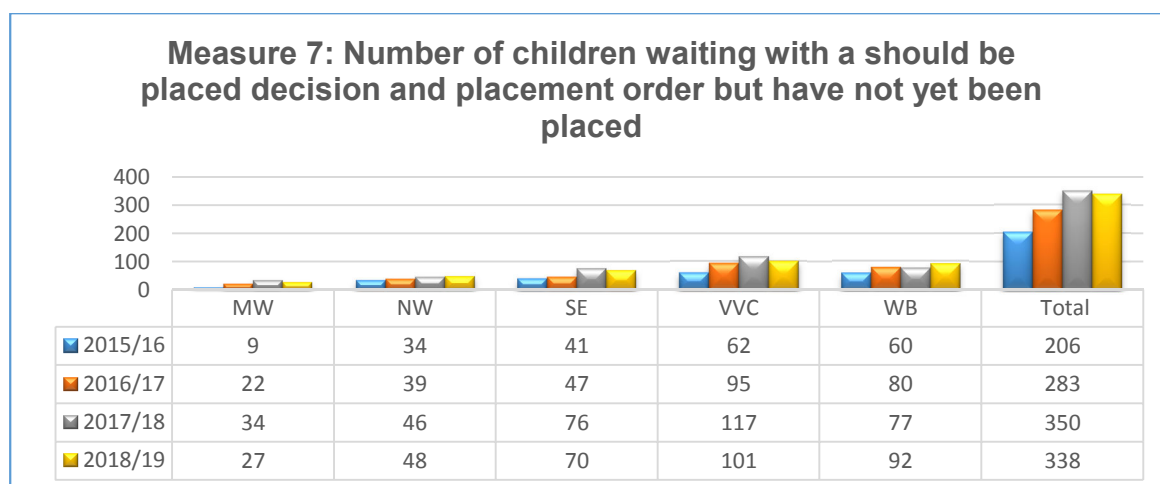
SEWAS placed 59% of their children within the region, a further 23% elsewhere in Wales and 19% outside of wales. This compares to 65%, 20% and 15% last year.



Children waiting

The level of children being placed is not keeping pace with the levels of new children being made subject to placement orders regionally or nationally. All regions except Western Bay have however seen a slight decrease in the number of children waiting this year.

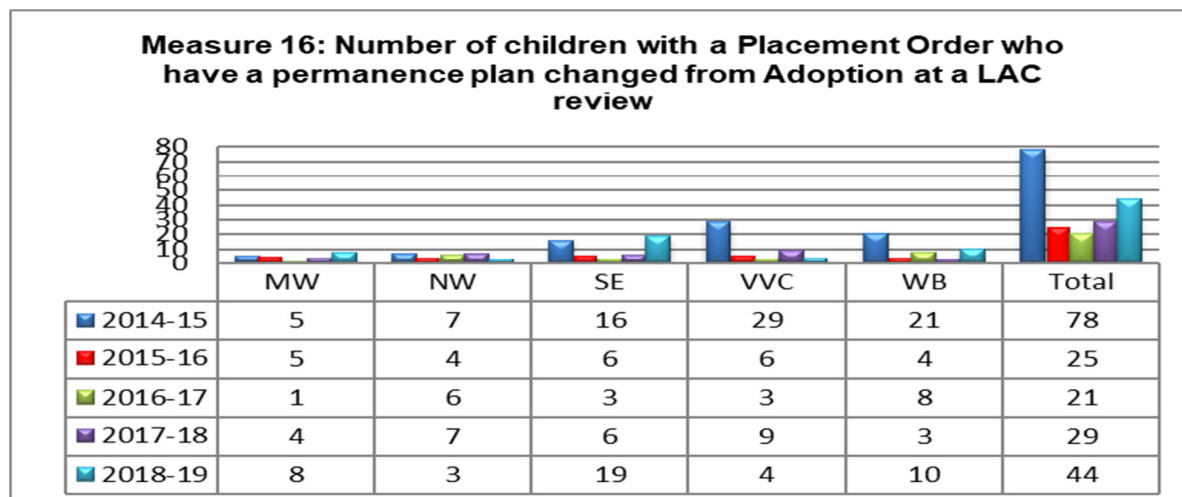
At March 31st SEWAS had 70 children subject to a placement order, for whom no match had yet been identified and were therefore waiting for a placement. This is fewer than last year but significantly more than previous years.



Information from the **Wales Adoption Register (WAR)** at year end indicates that of the children for whom the Register was family finding 22, or 14%, were SEWAS children.

SEWAS had 4 matches that did not proceed to placement this year more than in previous years but only 2 post placement disruptions a similar level to previous years.

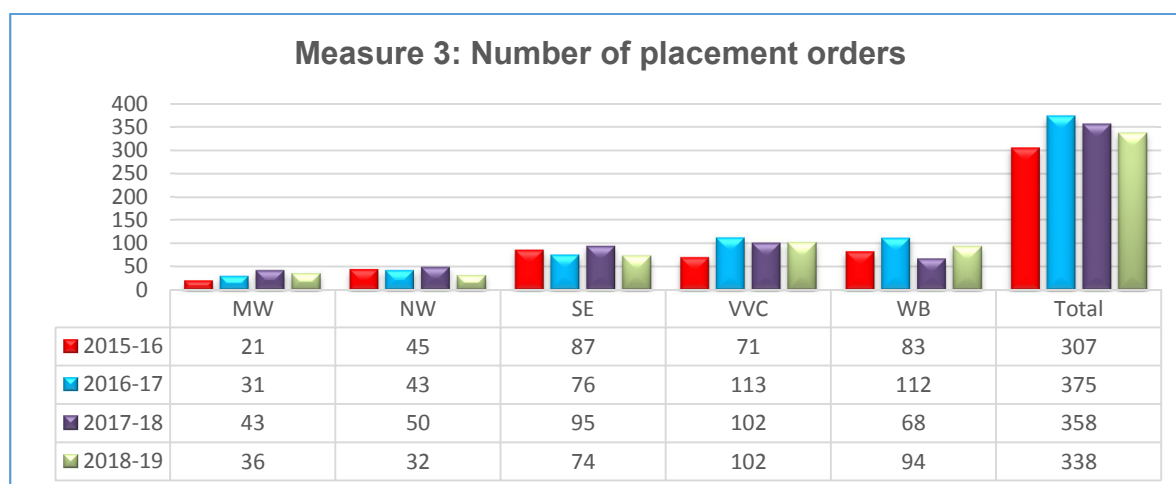
At 19 a higher number of SEWAS children had their adoption plan changed at their care and support plan review this year. This is a similar level to the first year of data collection.



Demand for adoptive placements and adopter recruitment

Adopter recruitment across Wales is not keeping pace with the level of children waiting nor those becoming subject to new placement orders; in this respect SEWAS mirrors the other regions. Nationally and regionally recruitment needs to double.

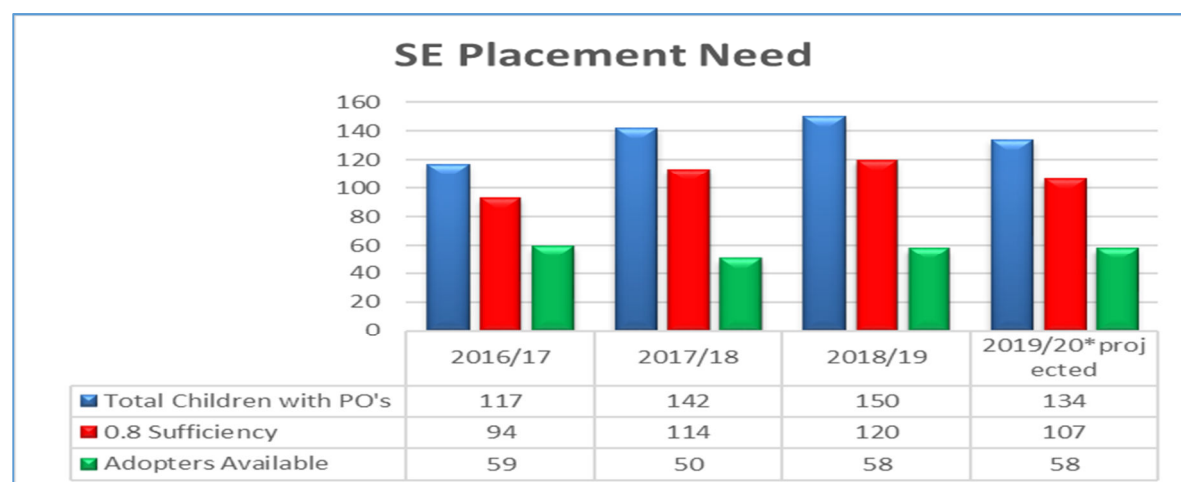
The overall number of **Placement Orders** reported as granted by courts across Wales in 2018/19 was **338**, a small reduction of about 6%, this is reported data and we await verification through official Welsh Government statistics.



Fewer placement orders were granted in the SEWAS region during 2018/19 (n74), a similar decrease to two other regions while VVC stayed the same and Western Bay increased. This is the second year of a small overall reduction across Wales albeit that numbers are still higher than in the years immediately post Re:B and Re:BS.

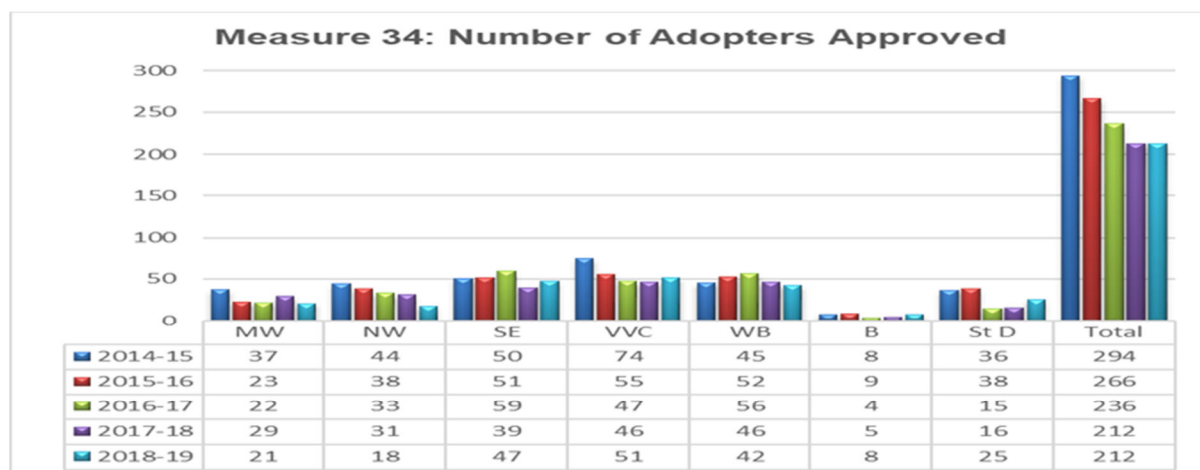
A further 84 'should be placed for adoption' decisions were made during the year in SEWAS. This was fewer than in 2017/18; when there were 101.

The analysis of the adopter gap the region has been facing since 2016/17 is below with projections for 2019/20.

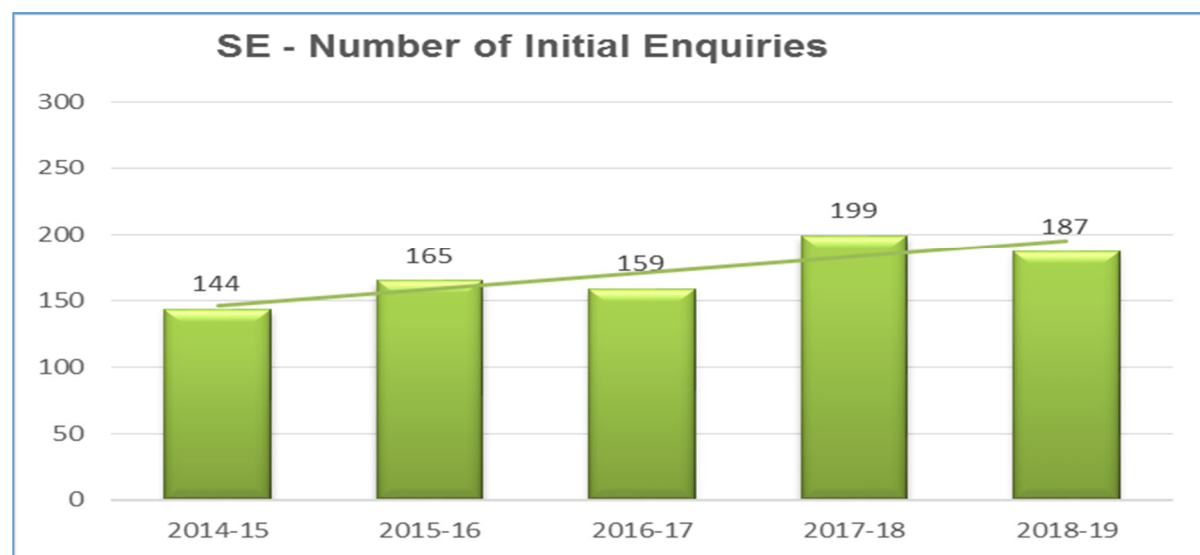


SEWAS made **47 adopters approvals** during 2018/19, higher than the previous year but lower than the goal of 65 set by the region. As above the projected sufficiency goal for adoptive placements is circa 100; the region should seek to recruit or have access to this level of adoptive placements.

The region is currently agreeing its recruitment plans and goals for 2019/20 and beyond.



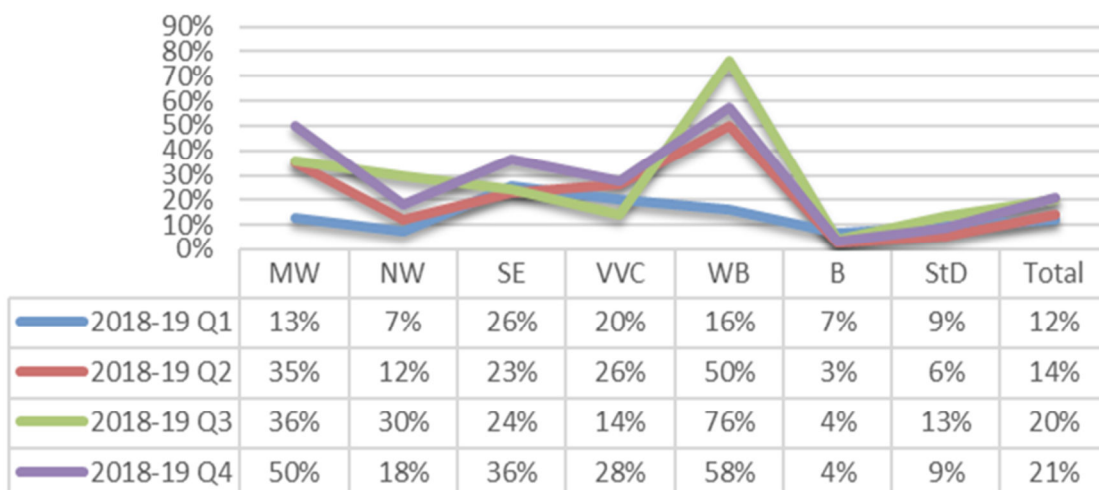
It is arguably too early to have seen a significant impact from the national focus on recruitment during 2018/19 but **SEWAS saw a 6% drop in enquiries**, which is against the trend in other regions. Circa 500 enquiries would be needed in order to reach the level of recruitment the region requires.



Response times to enquiries, within 5 working days, remains good; 100% of enquiries in SEWAS are responded to within 5 working days.

The average conversion rate from enquiry to assessment was 27% for 2018/19 a similar level to last year. Conversion rates for SEWAS varied in a similar way to other regions.

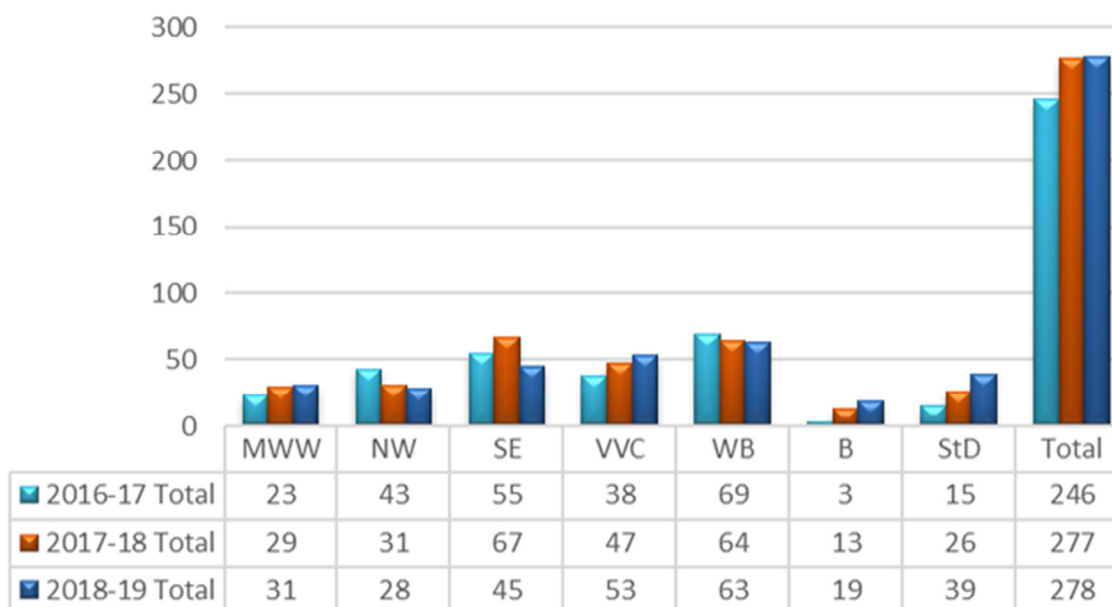
% of Initial Enquiries progressing to Application



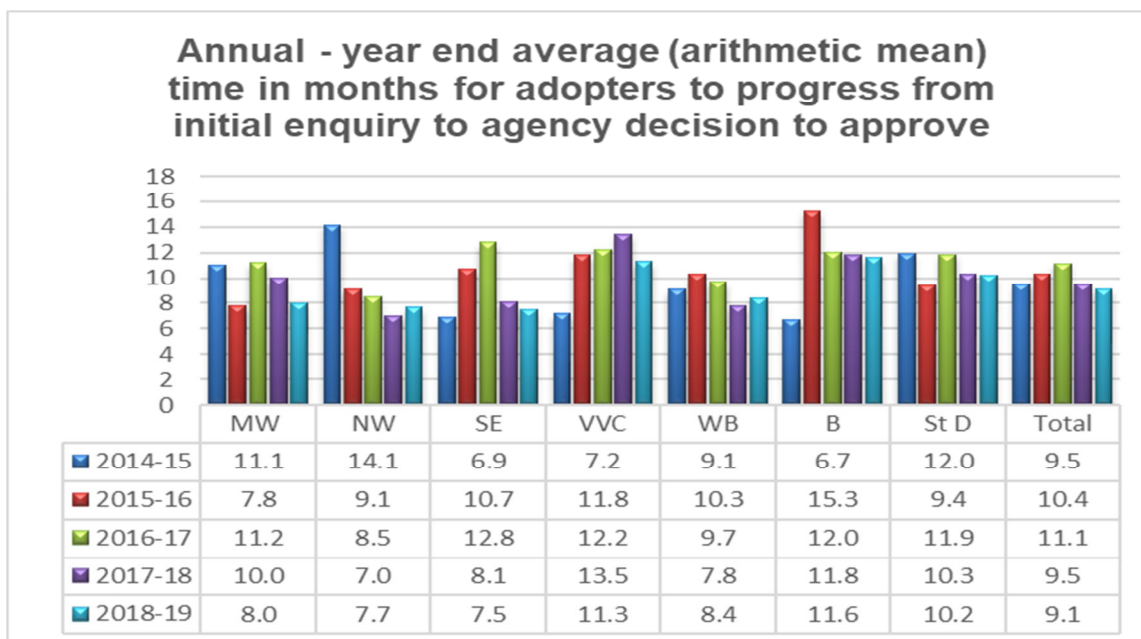
% is based on assessments commenced in a quarter compared to enquiries received 2 quarters before, to take account of the average delay in an application being made

SEWAS commenced 45 assessments during 2018/19, fewer than in previous years, a level which needs to increase to meet its need for placements.

Measure 36: Number of Assessments Started



The **average timeframe** for **adopter approvals** nationally was **9.1 months**, a further improvement on the year-end figure for 2017/18 which was 9.5 months.

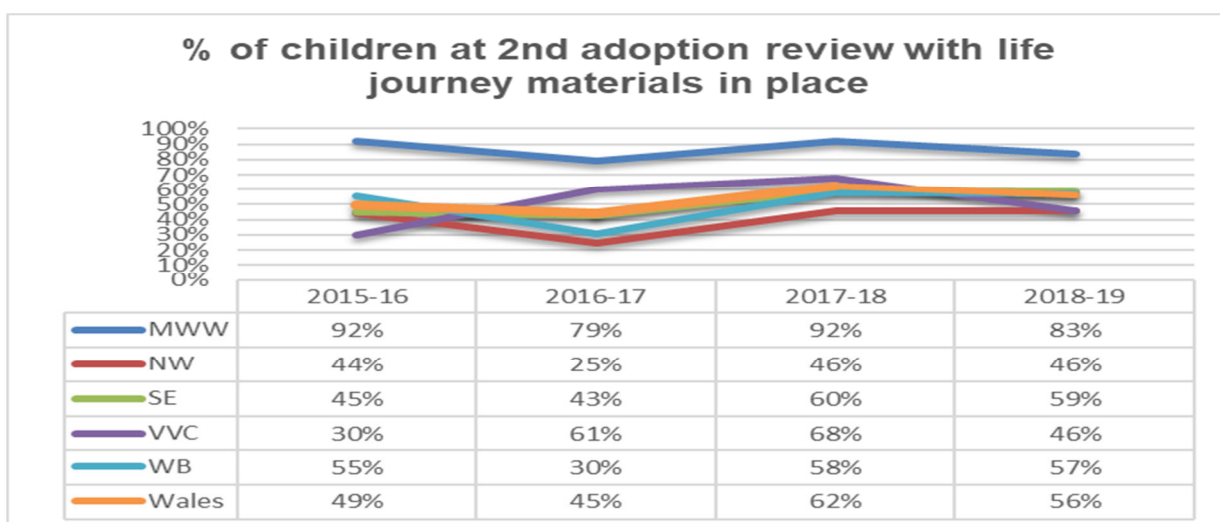


SEWAS' performance on this measure **improved this year to 7.5 months**. Which is within the benchmark and Welsh Government guidelines.

SEWAS' performance in respect of **formal application to approval is 5.2 months** over the year, meeting the Welsh Government guidance that this stage should take 6 months on which the NAS benchmark is based. SEWAS was within this benchmark for all of 2018/19.

Life Journey Materials

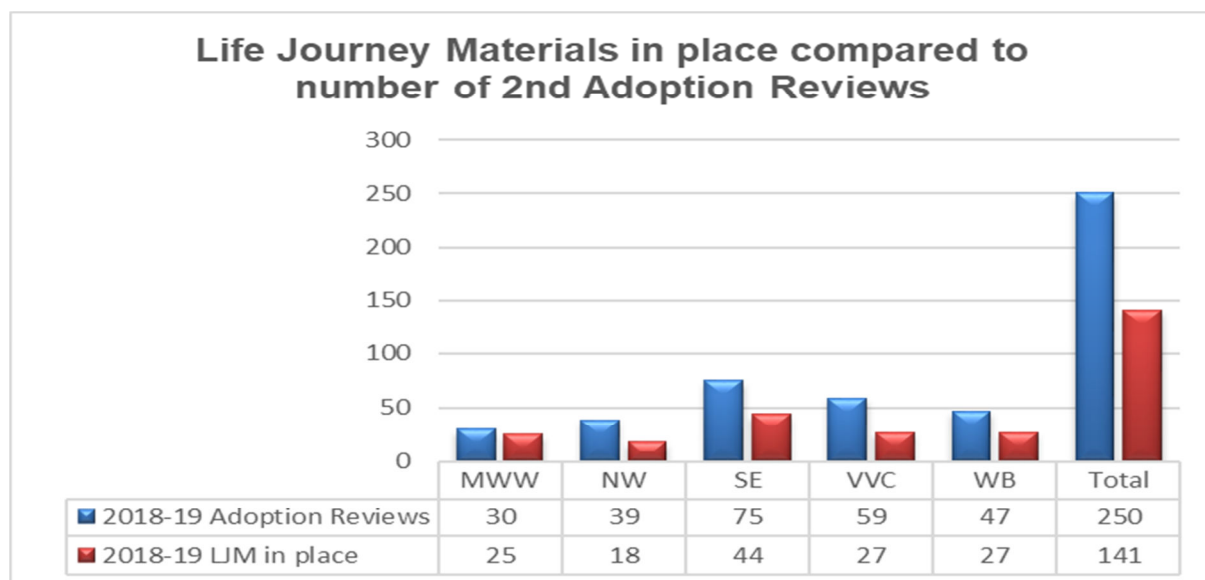
The improvement made in 2017/18 has not been maintained during 2018/19 in the availability of life journey materials for children and their families. The whole year averages shows that 56% of children placed this year had their life journey materials by the 2nd review; compared to 62% in 2017/18.



SEWAS maintained its performance at 59% against ongoing quarterly and regional variation. The plans to improve this were hampered by unanticipated staff changes.

The aim is for this performance to improve further within the context of investment since 2017/18 and the Life Journey Work Framework development project. The benchmark increased to 100% for 2018/19.

There were 31 SEWAS children placed where these materials were not available by the second adoption review as shown below.



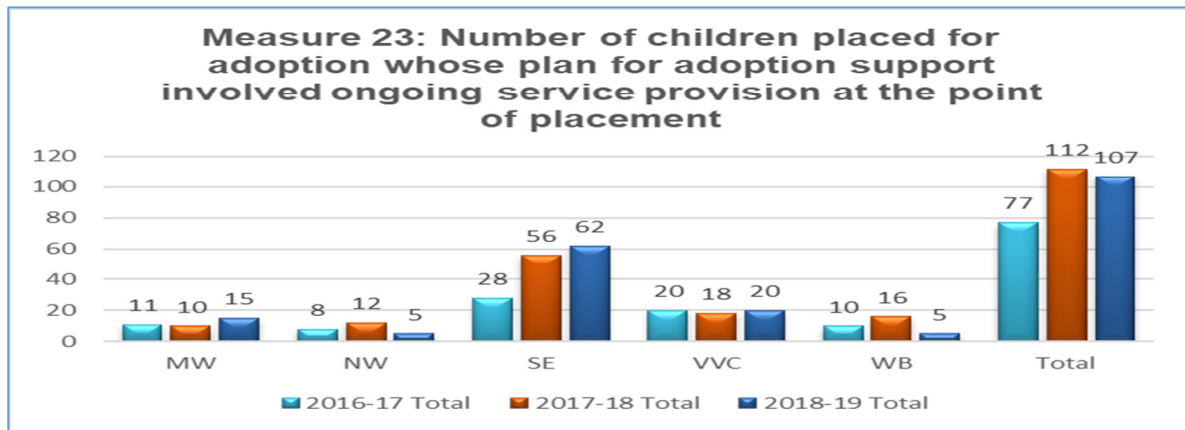
SEWAS was not able to collect data for the availability of materials at matching for 2018/19.

Adoption support

During 2018/19 SEWAS:

- facilitated more than 477 active letterbox contact arrangements 10% more than reported in 2017/18
- provided a service to 75 birth parents
- received 8 birth sibling requests for support and 2 from other relatives (both less than last year)
- received 53 requests for access to birth records compared to 49 last year and
- received a similar level of requests for intermediary / tracing support, 8 compared to 9 last year.

All the children placed by SEWAS had had their need for adoption support services assessed while more children placed had an ongoing service in place at the point of placement, 89% (n62) compared to 79% (n56) last year.



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.

Suzanne Griffiths. Director, May 2019