

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **10th December 2020**
Report Subject: **National Adoption Service Annual Report 2019/20**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John Mason, Executive Member of Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Damien McCann, Corporate Director of Social Services**

Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
12.11.20	19.11.20	25.11.20			10.12.20	13.01.20		

1. **Purpose of the Report**

To report on the performance of the South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) and the National Adoption Service (NAS) for 2019/20.

2. **Scope and Background**

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.

2.1.1 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.

2.1.2 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.

2.1.3 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.

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).

2.1.4 Blaenau Gwent host the South East Wales Adoption Service region.

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

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

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 *Impact on Budget*

5.1.2 SEWAS is a collaborative arrangement funded by the 5 local authorities within this region

5.1.3 The Management Committee (required under regulation) is responsible for ensuring arrangements are in place to deliver the regional service and this includes financial arrangements.

5.1.4 There have been no concerns regarding the budget for this reporting year. The budget has been managed effectively resulting in no overspend at the end of the financial year 19/20.

5.2 *Risk*

5.2.1 **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. Enquiries and new assessments commencing have decreased, although, it should be noted that recent investment in a marketing and recruitment officer and a new standalone website will not have impacted on the numbers for this reporting year.

5.2.2 **Mitigation**

To improve performance in this area SEWAS will continue to invest in recruitment. SEWAS now have a Marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) who is raising the profile of SEWAS using social media platforms. Investment in a marketing and recruitment officer and standalone website. We know that our core offer is good and we are now in a position to promote the service in a way that is more accessible to the general public. 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;
- Adoption support post order for adopters, children and birth parents
- Assessment being completed in a timely manner;
- Young person's support group
- Peer Support Groups using the TESSA (Therapeutic Education Support Service in Adoption) model
- Family and Friends training and support
- Dad's group
- In house psychology provision for adopter and children

- Advertising our core offer including our psychology service input which is a 'big sell'.

5.3 *Legal*

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*

No Issues

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 *Performance Information and Data*

6.1.1 **National Adoption Service Annual Report 19/20**

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

6.1.2 **ADOPTERS – TRENDS IN APPROVALS, ENQUIRIES AND NEW ASSESSMENTS (National)**

Adopter approvals increased by 18% overall, new enquiries by a further 5% and there was also a small increase of 3% in adopter assessments commencing.

Nearly half of adopters were approved within 6 months of their application; on average it takes 6.5 months for an adopter to be approved which is positive and in line with guidance.

The number of approved adopters waiting for a match at the end of the year increased

6.1.3 **ADOPTERS – TRENDS IN APPROVALS, ENQUIRIES AND NEW ASSESSMENTS (SEWAS)**

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

Enquiries and new assessments commenced have begun to reduce, although, the recent investment in marketing and a new website will not yet have had a significant impact.

Timeframes for approvals increased marginally but the region continues to perform well against recommended timeframes including 58% of approvals being within the 6 months benchmark for application to approval.

OVERALL IMPACT ON PLACING CHILDREN IN 19/20 (National)

6.1.4 309 children were placed, a similar number to the last three years.

270 adoption orders were granted for children already placed.

The number of children waiting at the end of the year (31.03.20) reduced to 270. This included a further 68 children with a 'firm link' which was likely to be agreed plus 22 children who were likely to have their status changed back to long term 'looked after'.

Average timescales for children being placed remained relatively static at 10.1 months, albeit a little above the benchmark of 8 months as outlined in guidance.

Referrals dropped by 21% from 2018/19 – all regions experienced reduction.

OVERALL IMPACT ON PLACING CHILDREN IN 19/20 (SEWAS)

6.1.5 SEWAS place 67 children in this reporting year

SEWAS increased the proportion of children placed within the region by 4% to 63%, with a further 10% placed elsewhere in Wales in both LA and Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

36% of children placed were sibling groups of two.

SEWAS improved the proportion of children placed within the 6 months of the placement order to 37%.

Linked to this SEWAS also improved the average time taken for a child to be placed once the placement order had been granted by almost a month, to 9.2 months.

Children – waiting

6.1.6 SEWAS children subject to a placement order but not yet matched stood at 58 as of 31.03.20. This figure does not include children with possible links

Life Journey Work (LJW)

6.1.7

SEWAS have struggled to improve on the performance measure for Life Journey work again this as indicated in the appendix 2 graph.

SEWAS appointed a LJW coordinator in September 2019. The new LJW model 'My story so far' was signed off by SEWAS management committee in January 2020 with a rolling programme to deliver training workshops to social workers, team manager and IRO's. Due to Covid the programme switched to remote platform training and reach a bigger audience than would have done pre lockdown. This didn't impact on the performance measure for this reporting year, however, the figures for quarter 1 2020

look impressive (95% completed for LJW made available at matching meeting)

OVERVIEW OF ADOPTION SUPPORT PROVISION DURING 2019/20 (National)

6.1.8

The number of children whose plan included support from the time of placement remained relatively stable during 2019/20 at around 35% of children placed.

Similarly, there was also an increase in the number assessments for adoption support carried out. These are for families / children who are not in receipt of ongoing support who develop support needs.

More than two thirds of new assessments result in therapeutic or practical support being provided.

The number of active letterbox arrangements reached 3,819, an increase from last year

Implementation of the TESSA programme

6.1.9

The Therapeutic, Education and Support Services in Adoption (TESSA) programme is a Wales wide initiative that aims to empower adoptive parents, who are raising traumatised children, by giving them early access to a clinical psychologist as well as peer support.

By the end of March 2020 the service had received 42 referrals.

Young Person Information and Support Service (Connected)

During 2019/20 the new 'Connected' service worked with 84 children and young people, alongside planning to expand into all parts of Wales in partnership with the NAS regions. Adoption UK are our strategic partner for this initiative.

New Best Practice Approaches

6.1.10

Transitions and early placement support
Contact arrangements for adopted children;
Work with birth parents; and
An updated good practice framework and approach to adoption support assessment, planning and review.

OVERVIEW OF ADOPTION SUPPORT PROVISION DURING 2019/20 (SEWAS) and update on Welsh Government investment for adoptions support

6.1.11

SEWAS has for a number of years provided higher levels of support due to its service provision which includes understanding the child days, supporting early placement and the access to psychology service. This

continued in 2019/20 resulting in support being provided to 85% of children placed, significantly more than in most regions.

SEWAS have implemented the TESSA programme and the Young Person advice service, although, those programmes are now being delivered remotely. We have also made significant contribution to the best practice guides alongside increasing Psychology support and direct work including understanding the child days. 14 additional Social workers in the service have received therapeutic training in DDP level 2 (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and Theraplay) and 1 team manager in DDP level 1. Two social workers attended Theraplay training.

A marketing and Recruitment Officer (MRO) was appointed in November 2019 (18.5 hrs). His focus has been building up our presence on social media, developing the SEWAS website, analysing data and building links with other agencies. He has made strong links with the Communications Teams across our 5 Local Authorities areas, other regional adoption services.

The SEWAS website has been launched and is now up and running. In order to improve the number of initial enquires, The MRO has analysed data on adopters in order to understand trends (age, gender, job role and location of adopters). This will enable SEWAS to better target our advertising as 60% of adopters are through online advertising.

SEWAS provided support for 27 birth parent and a further 7 are being supported in writing letters box correspondence. There are currently over 600 letterbox arrangements in place for our region.

The process of how birth parents receive support /information at the point their child is referred to SEWAS has been reviewed including feedback from birth parents themselves.

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. The region is also working to a NAS strategic long term plan

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 *EqlA (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 – South East Wales Performance Report – 2019/20

Appendix 2 – National Adoption Service Annual Report – 2019/20