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AGENDA

Committee	CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date and Time of Meeting	TUESDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2017, 4.30 PM
Venue	COMMITTEE ROOM 4 - COUNTY HALL
Membership	Councillor Lee Bridgeman (Chair) Councillors De'Ath, Philippa Hill-John, Joyce, Morgan, Murphy, Phillips, Taylor and Singh Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative), Carol Cobert (Church in Wales representative), Rebecca Crump (Parent Governor Representative) and Karen Dell'Armi (Parent Governor Representative)

*Time
approx.*

1 **Apologies for Absence**

To receive apologies for absence.

2 **Declarations of Interest**

To be made at the start of the agenda item in question, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

3 **Minutes** (*Pages 1 - 12*)

To approve as a correct record the minutes of 19 July and 12 September 2017.

4 **Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional Adoption Service - Annual Report** (*Pages 13 - 34*) 4.35 pm

- (a) Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member for Children and Families) will be in attendance and may wish to make a statement.
- (b) Angela Harris, Regional Adoption Manager, Tony Young, Director of Social Services, Irfan Alam, Assistant Director Children's Services and Rachel Evans, Head of Children's Services, Vale of Glamorgan County Council, will present the report and be available answer any questions Members may have;

- (c) Questions from Committee members;
- (d) The way forward for this item will be considered at the end of the meeting

5 Developing the School Estate in Cardiff - Draft Cabinet Report (to follow) 5.35 pm

- (a) Councillor Sarah Merry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Education, Employment, Skills) will be in attendance and may wish to make a statement.
- (b) Nick Batchelar, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, Jackie Turner, Assistant Director Education and Lifelong Learning will present the report and answer Members' questions;
- (c) Questions from Committee members;
- (d) The way forward for this item will be considered at the end of the meeting

6 Way Forward

7 Date of next meeting 6.30 pm

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for 14 November 2017.

Davina Fiore
Director Governance & Legal Services
Date: Wednesday, 4 October 2017
Contact: Mandy Farnham,
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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 JULY 2017

Present: Councillor Bridgeman (Chairperson)
Councillors De'Ath, Philippa Hill-John, Joyce, Murphy, Taylor and Singh

Co-opted Members:
Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic representative), Carol Cobert (Church in Wales representative), Karen Dell'Armi (Parent Governor representative)

73 : APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRPERSON AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Council at its meeting held on the 25 May 2017 appointed Lee Bridgeman as Chair and the following Members to this Committee:

Councillors De'Ath, Phillip Hill-John, Joyce, Morgan, Murphy, Phillips, Singh and Rhys Taylor.

Carol Cobert (Church in Wales Representative), Patricia Arlotte (Roman Catholic Representative) and Karen Dell'Armi (Parent Governor Representative).

74 : TERMS OF REFERENCE

To scrutinise, measure and actively promote improvement in the Council's performance in the provision of services and compliance with Council policies, aims and objectives in the area of children and young people, including:

- School Improvement
- Schools Organisation
- School Support Services
- Education Welfare & Inclusion
- Early Years Development
- Special Educational Needs
- Governor Services
- Children's Social Services
- Youth Services & Justice
- Children's Play Services

To assess the impact of partnerships with and resources and services provided by external organisations including the National Assembly for Wales, Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies and quasi-departmental non-governmental bodies on the effectiveness of Council service delivery.

To report to an appropriate Cabinet or Council meeting on its findings and to make recommendations on measures which may enhance Council performance in this area.

75 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Linda Morgan and Mike Phillips.

76 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part 3 of the Members' Code of Conduct. There were no declarations of interest.

77 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on the 7 March 2017 were presented and noted.

78 : FAMILIES FIRST PROGRAMME - ARRANGEMENTS FOR RECOMMISSIONING

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member for Children & Families), Tony Young (Director Social Services), Irfan Alam (Assistant Director Children's Services) Angela Bourge (OM, Strategy Performance and Resources), and Ceri George (Improvement Project Manager – Prevention and Partnerships) to the meeting. Members were provided with a presentation in respect of the new commissioning arrangements:

- Reasons for the Report;
- Current Position;
- New Guidance;
- Review;
- Lessons Learned;
- Team Around the Family;
- Disability Focus;
- Parenting Services;
- Youth Support Services; and
- Draft Timetable.

Members were invited to comment, raise questions or seek clarification on the information received. Those discussions were summarised as follows:

- Members have queried the commitment from Welsh Government (WG) and were advised that WG have confirmed the funding for 2017-18 and that annual contract runs until March 2018.
- WG are only able to confirm funding levels annually however concern was raised that the Council are entering into 4 year contracts worth £5m each year.
- Members expressed concern about the timetable provided and questioned whether it was realistic. Officers advised that it was ambitious but believe that it is realistic.
- Members queried the procedure for ensuring that the public are made fully aware of Families First services and were advised that a Communication Strategy is currently being planned.
- The whole purpose of Families First is to ensure that services for children and young people are improved. It is important for consideration to be given to what families need; it is about working with them and supporting them.

- Members were advised that there is currently a good central team and a much clearer contract management approach.

AGREED – That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations.

79 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES PART OF SOCIAL SERVICES DELIVERY PLAN 2017-19

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Graham Hinchey (Cabinet Member for Children & Families) and Tony Young (Director Social Services) to the meeting to present the report. The purpose of which is to allow the Committee to review and appraise the Directorate's key achievements during the previous year, their contributions to the Councils Corporate Plan 2017-19 and the future challenges facing Children's Services.

Members were invited to comment, raise questions or seek clarification on the information received.

The Committee reviewed the report and comments received from the Director and AGREED to note this report.

80 : EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING DELIVERY PLAN 2017-19

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Sarah Merry (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member Education, Employment and Skills) and Nick Batchelar (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning) to the meeting.

The Chairperson invited the Cabinet Member to make a statement in which she confirmed that education was a priority for the last administration and it is also a priority in the new Capital Ambition 5 year plan.

Members were invited to comment, raise questions or seek clarification on the information received. Those discussions were summarised as follows:

- Members queried the nature of the provision of schools within the new developments referred to in the LDP and were advised that the Band A proposals for 2019-24 refer to 2 major developments and the Schools Organisational Planning Team, together with the Planning Department are giving consideration to how many schools will be required, and that medium they will be.
- Members expressed concern regarding the sufficiency of school places and queried whether thought it being given to redrawing the current catchment areas. The Director advised that there has to be consultation and publication of the School Admission Arrangements each year. Professor Chris Taylor, Cardiff University is currently undertaken an assessment of whether the current procedure is fit for purpose, catchment areas will be one of those arrangements that will be considered. He is due to report back at the end of September and a report will there after go to Cabinet in October or November.

- Members referred to previous Estyn reports and in particular as to whether there is an adequate teaching pool and queried what is being done to ensure that there is an adequate pool. Officers indicated that there had been changes in the education of teachers in Wales, the existing arrangements having been criticised which resulted in the changes being made.

AGREED – That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee expressing their comments and observations.

81 : WORK PROGRAMME

AGREED – To hold a forum to discuss the Work Programme

82 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 12 September 2017.

The meeting terminated at 7.34 pm

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 SEPTEMBER 2017

Present: County Councillor Bridgeman(Chairperson)
County Councillors De'Ath, Philippa Hill-John, Morgan, Murphy,
Phillips, Taylor and Singh

Co-opted Members: Patricia Arlotte (Roman catholic
representative) and Carol Cobert (Church in Wales
representative)

11 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Joyce and Karen Dell'Armi.

12 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

13 : SCHOOL HOLIDAY ENRICHMENT PROGRAMME - BRIEFING

The Committee received a report on the work of the School Holiday Enrichment Programme 'Food and Fun'. The programme is an innovative way to prevent children from going hungry during the school holidays and to reduce the impacts of poverty and social deprivation.

Members were advised that school holidays sometimes present difficulties for low-income families whose children benefit from free school breakfast and lunches. Some children miss meals during the school holidays. Furthermore, the lack of free play schemes and sports activities impact most on disadvantaged children. Missing meals, a sedentary lifestyle and social isolation in the holidays reinforce existing health inequalities and social isolation and also undermines the success of free school breakfast and lunch policies.

The 'Food and Fun' summer enrichment programme was developed and piloted in Cardiff in 2015 and it was then introduced across more areas of Wales in 2016. The programme is the first UK example of a multi-agency project providing healthy meals, nutrition skills, sports and other physical activities in the school holidays. The aim is to improve children's health and promote learning.

The Chairperson welcomed Sarah Merry, Cabinet Member for Education, Employment and Skills; Nick Batchelar, Director of Education; Katie Palmer, Food Cardiff, Judith Gregory, Education Catering and Emma Hill, Sport Cardiff to the meeting. The Cabinet Member was invited to make a brief statement.

The Committee received a brief presentation. Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members asked for clarification on the numbers of children attending the programme and the selection criteria used to allocate places on the programme.

Officers stated that the schools which sign up to the programme are located in areas of high deprivation. Last year 416 children from across 10 schools attended the programme. There was an increase in the numbers attending this year but the finalised figures will not be available until October. Each school will apply their own selection criteria. Children are mainly in KS2 where need is identified.

- The cost per child attending equated to approximately £20 per child per day in Cardiff, which compared to £30 per child per day across Wales. Costings are difficult to calculate because funding was provided by a number of agencies. However, the cost was approximately £8k per school. Members noted that if the number of children attending the programme increased then the cost per child would be reduced accordingly. The largest cost is that of staffing. The child/adult ratio in some schools is optimal and in other schools is not. Therefore, further efficiencies are possible.
- When compared to voluntary schemes such as ‘Chomp’ which is run by Albany Baptist Church, the voluntary scheme is run by parents and volunteers. They offer a 2-hour programme where children are accompanied by parents/carers and Foodbank Plus delivers a meal to a child.
- Officers advised that schools were able to offer the programme during the Summer recess – either 4 days per week for 3 weeks or 3 days per week for 4 weeks. The programme was offered to 21 schools on 13 different sites.
- Members asked whether consideration had been given to shortening the hours from 0900 hours to 1500 hours so as to minimise the cost of providing the programme. Officers stated that feedback indicated that parents support longer days as shorter turnaround times were more difficult to manage. The longer day also offered more opportunity to vary the activities offered as part of the programme.
- Officers were asked whether any consideration has been given to identifying children at risk from obesity as well as focussing on social deprivation. Members were advised that no consideration has been given to date, but some consideration could be given.

AGREED – that the Chairperson writes on the Committee’s behalf to the Cabinet Member to convey their comments and observations.

14 : PROVISIONAL PERFORMANCE OF CARDIFF'S SCHOOLS 2017 AND EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee received a verbal update on provisional performance results in Cardiff Schools for 2016/17. The Director of Education also presented the Directorate Performance Report Quarter 1 2017/18 prior to its consideration by the Cabinet on 21 September 2017. Members were advised that the Quarter 1 Performance Report attached as Appendix A to the report provided an update on progress towards the strategy priorities identified in the Directorate’s Delivery Plan 2017-19. The Performance Overview for Education and Lifelong Learning was attached at Appendix B.

School Performance 2017

The Committee received a brief presentation on the provision performance results. The presentation included data on Foundation Phase outcomes; Key Stage (KS) 2

and Key Stage 3 Core Indicators; Free School Meal (FSM) V Non-FSM outcomes at Foundation, KS2 and KS3; KS4 data; and provisional KS5 data.

The key themes identified in the presentation are summarised as follows:

- Foundation Phase outcomes for Cardiff are above the Consortium average
- FSM v Non-FSM outcomes – 77% of FSM pupils achieved the expected level compared to 91% of Non-FSM
- 89.4% of KS2 achieved the expected level which is in line with the average
- The gap in attainment at KS2 between FSM and Non-FSM attainment was 13%, which is below the Welsh average of 14.3%
- There was a slight fall in Mathematics results at KS3
- KS4 data was calculated under new arrangements. The data provided a new baseline which is not comparable to 2016 data.
- KS4 Level 1 threshold results were below the consortium average. A number of factors affected performance. Members will receive full details in the January 2018 performance report.
- KS5 results were good. Boys out performed girls for the first time.

Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information provided. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members asked whether it was reasonable that year 5 exams were marked differently this year. Officers stated that the exams were marked at the end of a 2-year period of study. Pupils were aware that these exams would be marked differently from the outset.
- Members noted the FSM v Non-FSM data and the additional resources allocated to closing the attainment gap between the two groups. Members asked whether there was any data available beneath FSM that would make closing the attainment gap more difficult, such as children with additional learning needs or ESOL needs. For example, Members suggested that some schools may be better able to close the gap because there were fewer ESOL pupils in attendance. Officers stated that many factors affect attainment and FSM is one of them. Schools are becoming more sophisticated in recognising these issues.
- Officers confirmed that the FSM v Non-FSM attainment data will be available on a school by school basis in the future. From that data it will be possible to assess how effective pupil deprivation grant expenditure has been. The Committee will have an opportunity to probe these issues at the January 2018 meeting.
- Members also requested data on the attainment of pupils who had stopped claiming FSM and further details of the EOTAS improvement plan.

Quarter 1 Performance Report

The Director of Education presented the Education and Lifelong Learning Quarter 1 2017/18 Performance Report. Referring to the priorities set out in the report, and in particular, the need to improve provision for children and young people with additional learning needs, Members were advised that placements outside of Cardiff

were placing huge pressure on budgets. There was an urgent need to expand provision in within the City.

Priority 4 – Ensuring there are sufficient and high quality school places to meet the population growth in the City – the Director stated that bids for 21st Century Schools Band B funding were oversubscribed. The Asset Renewal Board has been established and it is working through priorities and budgets for this year to address condition and suitability issues throughout the school estate. Affordability remains a key challenge as there are a large number of schools in the city are in a poor condition. The Director considered that an Asset Renewal Improvement Plan is needed.

Priority 6 – Work with the Central South Consortium to further develop the capacity of the school system to be self-improving – Members were advised that efforts were being made to introduce more consistency across the 4 Welsh consortia. The Director suggested that such policy changes may be of interest to the Committee.

Priority 7 – Build effective partnerships between schools, business, the voluntary sector and wider public services and communities to enrich the school curriculum and strengthen school governance – Members were advised that there have been notable successes against this priority, particularly in terms of Eastern High and the Cardiff West Community High School.

The Chairperson invited comments and questions from Members of the Committee. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members asked what the challenges are facing Cardiff's 21st Century Schools Band B submission. The Cabinet Member stated that Cardiff is in significant need of additional school places, the condition of school buildings and improving provision for young people with additional learning needs.
- Members asked officers to comment on the recruitment and retention of Welsh language teachers. The Director advised that as provision continues to expand the need for larger numbers of teachers remains challenging. There are also some challenges in faith schools, particularly in the Catholic sector.
- Members supported the new framework for measuring the performance of looked after children. The Director stated that, whilst it was too early to judge the framework, he welcomed the focus on this group. Consideration is being given to placing pupils in schools using the looked after children admissions lever.
- The development of the Welsh Education Leaders Academy has provided an opportunity for education leaders to learn from each other and share practices. Some headway has been made in introducing a formal approach for aspiring head teachers.
- Members noted that Full Time Exclusions (FTE) were in the 'red' category for the period and this related to one school in particular. Officers were asked to comment. Officers indicated that the FTEs related to two schools in the west of the city which are now closed. The Director stated that, in his view, the over-use of FTEs was counterproductive but there were circumstances where other pupils needed to be protected from bad behaviour.

AGREED – that the Chairperson writes on the Committee’s behalf to the Cabinet Member to convey their comments and observations.

15 : SIGNS OF SAFETY - BRIEFING

As part of the Committee’s 2017-18 Work Programme, Members had previously requested a briefing report on the implementation of Signs of Safety in Cardiff Council. Signs of Safety is an integrated framework for Childrens Services which sets out principles for practice; disciplines for practitioners; a range of tools for assessment and planning, decision-making and engaging with children and families; and describes the processes through which the work is undertaken with families and children.

The Committee received a report providing an overview of the Signs of Safety framework and a summary of the three key principles, or columns, used to address key challenges of the work, namely: Working in relationships is paramount; Thinking Critically; and Based on Everyday Experience.

In Cardiff, in response to the challenges facing social work practice, Childrens Services embarked on the implementation of a single risk framework by adopting the Signs of Safety model, which would enable the service to work towards a strategic vision based on prevention and reducing the need for statutory interventions. It was agreed that a project approach would be used to embed the framework across the service. A Project Team was established to work alongside a Signs of Safety consultant and an implementation plan was produced.

Furthermore, a steering group was agreed as a means of developing internal forms and processes to best assist the implementation of Signs of Safety. The steering group membership included staff from across the service.

Members were advised that Signs of Safety is focussed on keeping children and young people safe. Its successful implementation is predicated on a whole service change to social work practice and a commitment to keeping families together by managing and reducing risks. Significant progress had been made but some challenges remain.

The Chairperson welcomed Graham Hinchey, Cabinet Member for Children and Families; Irfan Alam, Assistant Director of Social Services; Jo-Anne Phillips (Project Manager; and Marissa Moon (Team Manager, Intake and Assessment); to the meeting. Following brief statements from the Cabinet Member and the Assistant Director, the officers were invited to deliver a presentation entitled ‘Implementing Signs of Safety in Cardiff Council’.

The Chairperson thanked the officers for their presentation. The Committee was invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members asked whether Childrens Services involvement with families is brought to an end when cases are closed. Officers confirmed that Children Services involvement is ended but a safety plan is put in place and there was an expectation that stakeholders, such as schools or the family, would report back to

Childrens Services should problems arise.

- The Assistant Director stated that staff within the service are committed to the Signs of Safety approach. Staff are still facing demands and challenges from high caseloads and work to recruit additional social workers into newly established posts was continuing.
- All Social Work Teams were visited and staff were invited to provide examples of who they are trying to face the challenges. A good response was received and those examples were shared across the service area.
- Members supported the service's aspirations but asked for further clarification with regard to how these could be achieved without reducing social workers' caseloads. The Assistant Director stated that growing capacity within the service was critical. It was accepted that more staff and more managers are needed. However, changes to working practices are also necessary, such as providing reflective areas away from the main office. The ultimate aim is to improve practice and reduce the numbers of looked after children.
- Officers advised that Signs of Safety practices are discussed in internal meetings. Feedback from staff has been overwhelmingly positive. Structures are being put in place to support changes and maintain the positive momentum.
- Members sought clarification regarding the legal implications of the changes. The Assistant Director stated that Children Services have engaged with other agencies. Judges are familiar with the Signs of Safety framework and, whilst sceptical, some positive feedback has been received. Members were asked to note that there are some child protection cases where the Signs of Safety approach is not appropriate and the existing procedures will be utilised.
- With regard to the case study referred to in the presentation, Members noted that the child had 13 years of Childrens Services involvement, including the closure of cases, prior this case being closed. Members asked what was different about this closure and was there still a need for ongoing awareness of the case. Officers stated that the case is not closed in the 'traditional' way. A meeting is held and support networks are put in place. If the safety plan is unsuccessful there is an expectation that Childrens Services will be notified.
- Members asked whether there were any plans to revisit previous decisions and apply the signs of safety framework. Officers stated that where children are placed for adoption there is no recourse. Consideration is being given to the establishment of a dedicated team to discharge care orders using the Signs of Safety approach.

The Cabinet Member made a closing statement. The Committee was advised that there is no hiding from the numbers of children being presented. Whilst this presented budgetary difficulties, the best outcome for those children is paramount. Patience will be required before numbers of looked after children are reduced.

AGREED – that the Chairperson writes on the Committee's behalf to the Cabinet Member to convey their comments and observations.

16 : CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION
- QUARTER 1 REPORT

The Committee received the Childrens Service Performance Management report setting out performance data outlining progress against commitments for the quarter ending 30 June 2017. Members were advised that the continued development of the Cardiff Performance Management Framework has brought into line the monitoring and evaluation of progress against the commitments set out in the Corporate Plan and the performance indicators set to assist the overall performance position of the Council. The performance data relating to Children Services was appended to the report.

The report provided an overview of the performance of the service area, including slippage in progress against Corporate Plan objectives.

Members were invited to consider the report and comment, seek clarification or raise questions the information contained within. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- A Member noted the improvement in engagement with faith communities referred to in the report. Officers stated that whilst there had been improvement with faith groups at large, mosques and madrasas were a priority due to the large numbers of children attending.
- Members asked whether there were any plans to recruit social workers from BAME communities. Officers indicated that the recruitment drive was seeking social workers from all backgrounds. An adoption/fostering event aimed at attracting foster carers from BAME communities would be held in the near future.
- Officers were asked to explain what budget monitoring was in place. Officers stated that it is difficult to manage anticipated spend. Decisions to accommodate children at risk are taken at Operational Manager level. During a recent review of 40 cases, everyone case had compelling reasons why the child should be accommodated. Children need safeguarding, but alternatives will be explored. Cases where children are protected are success stories.

AGREED – that the Chairperson writes on the Committee’s behalf to the Cabinet Member to convey their comments and observations.

17 : WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the Work Programme 2017-18 for approval. The Principal Scrutiny Officer advised that the Work Programme 2017-18 was reviewed at the July meeting of the Committee and the resulting items were included on the calendar appended to the report at Appendix A and it provided a balanced programme for the year.

The Principal Scrutiny Officer invited expressions of interest from Members who wished to participate in the ‘Out of County’ and ‘Young People and Drug Dealing’ task and finish groups. Members received a summary of their likely commitments. The Principal Scrutiny Officer agreed to circulate an email inviting volunteers to participate in both Task and Finish Inquiries.

AGREED – That the Committee Work Programme 2017-18 be approved. Members agreed to undertake an inquiry into Out of County placements.

18 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on 10 October 2017.

The meeting terminated at 8.00pm

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

**CYNGOR CAERDYDD
CARDIFF COUNCIL**

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 October 2017

**VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE – ANNUAL
REPORT**

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a copy of the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Regional Adoption Collaborative's Annual Report 2016/17 (copy attached at **Appendix A and A1**). The report sets out the key information about the Regional services together with quarterly performance information for the period 2016 – 2017.

Background

2. As a key part of the implementation of the Social Services and Well Being Act (Wales) 2014, the National Adoption Service for Wales has been created to bring together existing local government services into a three tier system, with partnership arrangements for services provided in other sectors, to co-ordinate and deliver adoption services in a different way. These tiers are:
 - local authority level – where all local authorities will continue to identify and meet needs of children for whom adoption is the most appropriate plan;
 - regional level – where five local authority collaboratives have been created to deliver agreed adoption functions and develop operational links, as appropriate, with voluntary sector and other services to develop and improve service delivery; and at

- national level – a small team to co-ordinate and drive improvement and consistency, while maintaining strategic and planning links with Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) and the delivery of certain national functions.
3. The previous Committee scrutinised the National and Regional Adoption Service proposals in December 2014. Members supported the key principles contained within the proposals, but expressed some concern about the role of this scrutiny committee in the governance of the National and VVC Regional Adoption Service, to ensure that plans are put in place to optimise performance monitoring and future service delivery.
 4. The Regional Adoption Service agreed to provide its annual report to committee to enable Members to review performance and assess the services future priorities.
 5. The Collaboration's Annual Report for last year, 2015- 2016, included a number of specific improvements and priorities for implementation during the year 2016-17, these included:
 - To review the feasibility of implementing a more specialised, functional model of service delivery.
 - To improve efficiency and reduce administrative costs of the Adoption Panel by implementing a paperless Panel system.
 - To develop VVC's website and to improve the range of information available for users of our service.
 - To develop the family finding process within the region to improve practice in relation to the timely placement of children
 - To target the recruitment and assessment of adoptive families to better meet the needs of children awaiting placements within the region and reduce reliance upon external sources of placement.
 - To develop the plan to enhance the Adoption Support service in the short term and evaluate its' effectiveness to inform future planning of the service

- To further develop processes, procedures and guidance to support the work of the Collaborative ensuring compliance with Welsh language requirements.
- To develop opportunities for engaging and obtaining feedback from service users.

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC) Regional Adoption Collaborative

6. The Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) brings together the adoption services of the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council. It is one of the five regional Collaborative's which form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS) .The Vale of Glamorgan Council host the Regional Collaborative.
7. In March 2015 Welsh Government published the (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015, known as “ The Directions Powers “ , which prescribe the regional areas and the governance structure for the service at a national and regional level. The merger of the adoption services within the region in June 2015 was the culmination of much co-ordinated effort and joint working on the part of all partners in progressing the plan to implement the service.
8. The Annual report brings together into one document a review and analysis of the activities of the collaborative, together with a number of performance measures which monitor performance in relation to the key stages in the adoption process for children with particular emphasis upon the overall timeliness off the process. The report also provides the annual review of the service as required by Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007 and section 15 (c) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Direction 2015.

9. The report, copy attached at **Appendix A** focusses on the following areas of the regions work:

- a. Service and Governance Structure
- b. Service Areas
- c. Family Finding
- d. Recruitment & Assessment of Adopters
- e. Adoption support
- f. Adoption Panel
- g. Complaints and Compliments
- h. Conclusion
- i. Future priorities

10. Also attached at **Appendix A1** to the Annual Report is a copy of the Region's performance data for each Local Authority in the Collaborative together with quarterly data of the year.

11. The Regional report also acts as the Regions Annual Report to the Director of Operations for the National Adoption Service, the Management Board and Joint Committee.

Scope of the Scrutiny

12. The Report will provide the Members with the opportunity to review the progress made in the management and operation of the Regional Adoption Service. Members may wish to evaluate the following aspects of the reports:

- a. How well has the VVC Regional Service progressed against the targets and performance measures;
- b. The progress that the VVC Region has made in addressing the improvements and priorities highlighted in paragraph 5.
- c. What are the plans for the future for the VVC Region.

Way Forward

13. Rachel Evans, Head of Children's Services , Vale of Glamorgan County Council, Angela Harris, Regional Adoption Manager, VVC, will present the report on the implementation and performance of the regional collaborations following which they will all be available to answer questions Members may have. Councillor Graham Hinchey, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Tony Young, Director of Social Services and Irfan Alam Assistant Director Children's Services will also be available to answer any questions.

Legal Implications

14. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

Financial Implications

15. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are

implemented with or without any modifications. These financial implications will need to be considered before any changes are implemented. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members review the information contained in **Appendices A & A1** together with any additional information provided at the meeting and submit any comments, concerns or recommendations about the services to the Cabinet Member for discussion with the Regional Manager.

Davina Fiore

Director of Governance and legal Services

3 October 2017

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC)

Annual Report: 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) 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. VVC is one of the five regional Collaboratives which form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS). The Vale of Glamorgan Council hosts the Collaborative.

1.2 All adoption services are required to provide an annual review of their service as set out in Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007. In addition, Section 15 (c) of The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 sets out the responsibilities of regional Collaboratives to report to the Director of Operations for the National Adoption Service on a quarterly and annual basis.

1.3 The legal agreement underpinning the operation of the Collaborative sets out the reporting requirements to partner local authorities. This report aims to encompass the various reporting requirements in one report.

This is VVC's second annual report and covers the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.

Appendix 1 to the report sets out the performance data by quarter and local authority.

2. SERVICE AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

2.1 Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative continues to be managed by a Regional Adoption Manager and three service specific managers for Family Finding, Adoption Support, and Recruitment and Assessment. The Adoption Support Manager's post has been increased to full time on a temporary basis during this period.

2.2 Staff within the service have increasingly moved to working to their functional specialism during the year within the expectation that they will pick up work in other areas as the need arises. Managers within the service have developed a more strategic overview of the performance of the region which has helped to embed this in the culture of the region.

2.3 The service reviews undertaken into the specific functions performed by the Collaborative have fully highlighted the increased demands within the service and the shortfall in staffing resource to meet these demands. An Options Paper detailing the capacity issues and pressures across the whole service was presented to Management Board in November 2016. This report detailed the original assumptions

upon which the service structure and staffing within VVC was based, the current pressures and the increase in workload, and proposed a number of options to increase resource within the Collaborative to address the shortfalls in service.

2.4 This report was presented to the Directors of Social Services across the four authorities and Joint Committee in December 2016. The Directors agreed to the appointment of an additional staff member for Adoption Support utilising monies within the budget and to the extension of temporary staff within Adoption Support , pending the outcome of a Best Value Review of the whole service, that was then commissioned.

2.5 The Review is being undertaken by an Officer from the Vale of Glamorgan Business Improvement Team and a Finance Officer from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. A Project Brief and Plan has been put in place and a timetable set for finalisation and consideration of the Review.

2.6 VVC has experienced some resourcing issues during the second half of the year created by one full time Social Worker leaving to pursue agency work, one part time Social Worker leaving to pursue training and independent work, and three Social Work posts being reconfigured to accommodate a reduction in working hours. These vacancies were advertised and the region was successful in receiving a high number of applications for these posts which have enabled offers of appointment to be made. It is anticipated these posts will be filled by June 2017. The region has had to rely upon the employment of some short term agency cover in the interim.

2.7 The service has continued to be based in Ty Pennant, Pontypridd although RCT staff vacated the premises in October 2016 and the licence to occupy the building transferred to Trivallis as new owners of the premises .The licence is in place until September 2018. The transfer of ownership has meant additional costs being placed upon the Collaborative in terms of payment of rates etc.

2.8 The pooled budget for the Collaborative is managed by the Vale of Glamorgan as the host and is monitored on a regular basis and reported to the Management Board and Joint Committee. A Finance Technical Group has remained in place attended by the Finance Officers from each of the partner authorities.

2.9 VVC's governance structure is by way of a Management Board and Joint Committee. The Management Board has continued to meet bi-monthly. Board meetings have been well represented and supported by Heads of Service from the partner authorities and membership from a Voluntary Adoption Agency and Health and Education representatives. The Chair of the Board transferred to the Director of Social Services for Merthyr Tydfil CBC in line with the legal agreement in July 2016.

2.10 Standing agenda items for meetings include performance reporting, budget monitoring, service user and stakeholder engagement, VVC's interface with local authority partners alongside reports from the Voluntary Sector, Health and Education representatives. The Board also considers any items referred from the National Adoption Service Advisory Group and Governance Board.

2.11 The Management Board has considered reviews of all the service areas provided by the Collaborative during the year and considered reports in relation to capacity issues within the service. Specific performance measures such as the provision of Life Journey Material for children placed for adoption have been highlighted by the Board as areas for improvement and actions have been put in place to address any shortfall in practice.

2.12 The Director of Operations for NAS attended the VVC Management Board in September 2016 to present the NAS plan to address areas of national improvement, and again in July 2017 to present the NAS end of year report in respect of VVC's performance.

2.13 A workshop on the role of the local authority Agency Decision Maker was commissioned by the Management Board and facilitated by AFA Cymru Legal Adviser in January 2017. This session drew upon the implications of case law and was attended by all Heads of Service and Agency Advisers.

2.14 The Joint Committee meets twice a year and is comprised of elected members from the four authorities. Joint Committee meetings were held in July and December 2016. The Joint Committee has responsibility for approving the annual plan for the service and annual budget.

3. SERVICE AREAS:

3.1 The National Adoption Service set the following priorities for service improvement during 2016-17:

- *Placing children effectively and quickly*
- *Effective recruitment of adopters who are and are likely to become available for adoption.*
- *Improving adoption support.*

These priorities formed the basis of VVC's annual plan and the progress made in each of these service areas is evaluated below.

4 . Family Finding

4.1 The Family Finding Manager undertook a review of the Family Finding function within VVC which was presented to Management Board in September 2016. This aspect of the service has seen a marked rise in the number of children being referred for adoption and increase in workload overall.

4.2 The region alongside other regional Collaboratives reports upon performance on a quarterly basis to NAS. The performance measures which make up the Performance Management Framework have increased during the year to take on board new measures particularly in relation to Adoption Support. The measures

monitor performance in relation to key stages in the adoption process. Some of these relate directly to local authority performance and some are shared jointly between the local authority and the Collaborative.

4.3 The recording of the number of children referred for adoption is a new measure although VVC previously recorded this data. VVC received a total **280** referrals for the year which represents a 66% increase from 2015-16. **81** children were placed for adoption which is an increase from **70** in the previous year.

4.4 At the end of the reporting period **103** children had a 'should be placed' for adoption decision but had not been placed for adoption which is an increase on the previous quarter and previous returns and **95** children of these children were subject of a Placement Order.

4.5 The region has recorded **113** Placement Orders being made during the year which also represents an increase of 70% on 2015-16. The number of Adoption Orders granted during the period is **65**. This is a decrease on the previous year which may partly be due to more protracted Court proceedings in some instances as a result of legal challenges from birth parents.

4.6 The measures in relation to the timeliness of the process from key decision making points to placement for adoption indicate an increase in the length of time it takes to place children. In some instances overall timescales were skewed by outliers i.e one or two children with more complex needs where it has taken much longer to place them for adoption. VVC is now more able to identify these children and explain the reasons for the delay as part of the reporting framework.

4.6 On 31 March 2017, there were **10** children who had been waiting longer than six months for a match which is an increase on the previous year. The reasons for the delay in the placement of these children can be attributed to their range of needs which could not be easily met within the available adopter resource.

4.7 There were **3** placement disruptions during the year and no matches disrupted during introductions, which is a decrease on the previous year.

4.8 In November 2016, the Adoption Support Manager undertook a review of early disruptions. This report covered a period of 4.5 years from April 2012 to October 2016 with the aim of assisting our understanding of the factors associated with disruptions of adoption placements.

4.9 The process involved collation of data regarding disruptions pre –Adoption Order and reviewing the relevant matching/placement documents in each of these cases. This revealed that out of 394 placements made during this period, 21 disrupted which represents 5.33%. A workshop was held for staff in late November 2016 to consider the findings and implications for practice.

4.10 The number of birth parents referred to the service for counselling is collected on a quarterly basis although the take up of the service is collated annually. Overall take up in this area continues to pose significant challenges for the region as out of **435** referrals for birth parent counselling received during the year only **126** parents took up the service. This represents a decrease on the previous year although the number of parents referred has increased by two hundred. The region has begun to pilot sending out information to birth parents in a less stigmatising form and so this will need to be evaluated to ascertain if this influences the level of take up in any way. VVC also continues to explore different venues and approaches to reach birth parents in an effort to improve performance. These figures take into consideration a number of parents who were unobtainable.

4.11 The provision of Life Journey Material for children at their second adoption review has been a consistent agenda item for Management Board and action point for regional partners. Some overall improvement in performance has been noted as a result of proactive measures taken by Heads of Service within the region; 61% of children had been provided with Life Journey Material at their second adoption review compared to 30% in 2015-16.

4.12 Some of the initiatives developed to improve local practice and performance include the development of a new regional family finding process which builds upon national guidance developed by NAS.

4.13 The process requires a minimum of 12 weeks between the child being referred for adoption and the agency decision on adoption to ensure that there is sufficient time for the adoption medical to be completed and that the decision is not delayed. A pre-Placement Order meeting between Child's Social Worker and VVC Family Finder has been added to the process to share information and complete paperwork prior to the making of the Placement Order in an effort to reduce delay. Staff resources within VVC and staff turnover with local authority teams has inhibited full implementation of the changes in some cases but there have been ongoing discussions with LA partners as to how best to improve practice and reduce delay.

4.14 The Family Finding process developed within the region requires staff to be proactive in tracking plans and delays and to challenge Childcare Social Workers in relation to their family finding expectations. Childcare Social Workers will also sometimes reject profiles of adopters they have considered previously which often necessitates challenge by the Family Finder.

4.15 The Family Finding Manager and the Recruitment and Assessment Manager facilitate monthly Placement Meetings where children's referrals are presented, their needs discussed and suitable adopters are considered. This ensures that decisions in relation to the need for external placement funding are completed in a timely way.

4.16 A family finding report is generated monthly which provides an analysis of how many placements have been made, the children who are waiting, their ages and the potential reasons for this to inform ongoing family finding.

4.17 All children are referred or registered with the Wales Adoption Register to ensure that delay is minimised in family finding if there are no suitable VVC adopters.

4.18 The region also purchased the licence for Link Maker, a national data base of children waiting which prospective adopters can access directly. VVC staff also attended and profiled 16 children at two national Coram BAAF/ Welsh Adoption Register Activity Days during the year. Activity days involve participation of children, their foster carers and Social Workers and direct interaction with prospective adopters. This has been a new experience for VVC but which has been found to be a useful alternative means of family finding.

4.19 There is regular dialogue and meetings between the Medical Advisers and VVC Managers to ensure that issues which delay family finding /medicals are resolved and strategies to reduce recurrence are put in place.

4.20 A Children's Guide has been created and provided to children and adopters

4.21 The Family Finding Manager provided the following overview of the numbers, ages and range of needs of children subject of a Placement Order on 31 March 2017:

Currently there are 95 children with a Placement Order. This compares with 60 children with Placement Orders at the end of 2015-16. The profile of needs we are family finding for are as follows:

Sibling Groups:

40 of the children are in a sibling group of 2.

There is 1 sibling group of 3.

Matching Considerations:

6 children are defined as having an ethnicity which is not white British.

8 children have additional health needs i.e. genetic condition/ foetal alcohol syndrome.

3 children have behavioural needs which would be considered to require therapeutic parenting.

2 have to be placed outside of Wales due to risk from birth parents.

Care Planning:

3 children are on hold due to a placement breakdown.

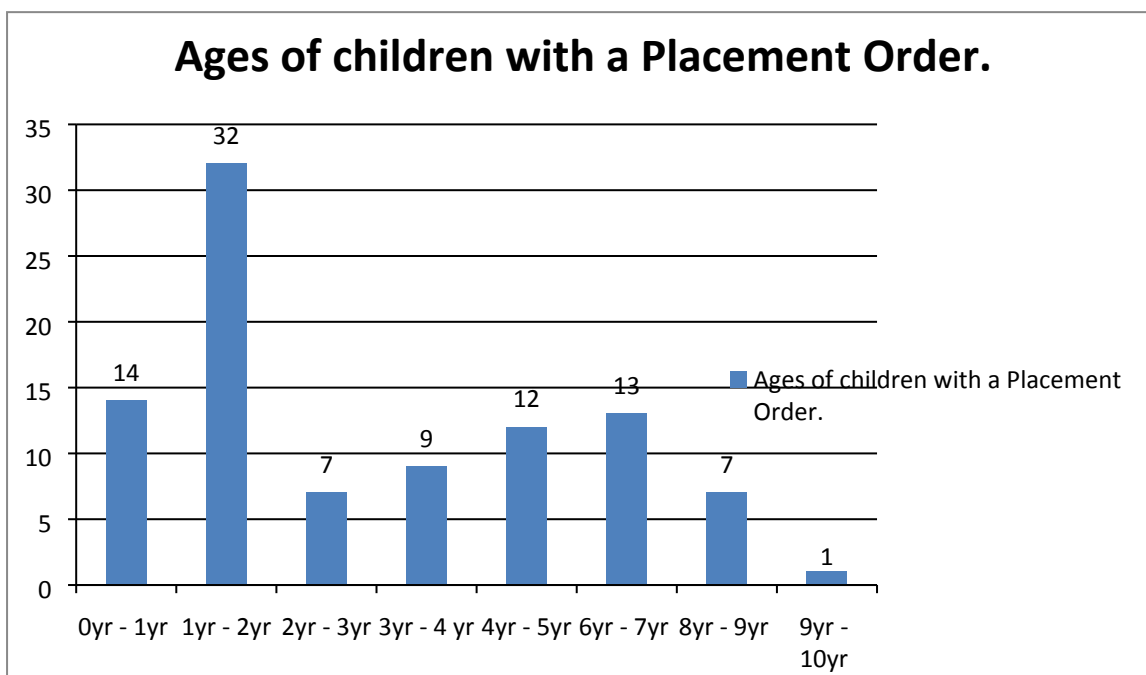
1 child is on hold due to a legal challenge from birth parents.

2 are on hold whilst a placement with siblings is being explored.

1 child is waiting due to a delay in receiving a profile to complete searches.

8 have matches which are proceeding within VVC.

2 children have a change of care plan to long-term fostering.



All of the children who are over 5 are either part of a sibling group or have needs which require therapeutic parenting.

In addition to the above children there are 16 children where it is currently anticipated they will be placed with VVC adopters.

It is anticipated that 63 of the above children will require placement outside VVC due to availability of adopters who can meet the needs of a sibling group, children whose ethnicity is not white British, children requiring placement outside of Wales for safety reasons and those with additional health and behaviour needs.

4. 22 During 2016-17 VVC was in fact successful in placing a high proportion of children within the region (62 out of 81 placements). Due however, to the reasons outlined above and a large percentage of the available stock of adopters having being used during the year, it is likely that more external placements will be required in the coming year.

5. Recruitment & Assessment of adopters

5.1 A review of Recruitment and Assessment activity within the region was presented to the Management Board in November 2016. This area of activity is a significant one for the region and one which presents its' own set of challenges in terms of being able to effectively recruit to meet our ongoing needs.

5.2 The Performance Framework records key activity around enquiries, response times to enquiries, applications and timeliness in respect of approval of adopters. The returns in respect of adopter activity during the year represent some worrying trends. The region received **150** enquiries from prospective adopters in total which represents a 30% decrease on the previous year. Part of the reason for this may be explained when it was discovered during quarter 3 that email enquirers were not always being captured in the same way. Improvements have therefore been made to recording mechanisms to ensure that all email enquirers are recorded accurately.

5.3 There has also been a slight decrease during the year in VVC's response to enquiries within 5 working days which at year end totalled 99%. VVC has however, been able to track the enquiry where information was sent outside of this timescale and report this as part of the performance reporting.

5.4 The region approved **47** adopter households compared with **55** in the previous year. Part of the reason for the decrease in approvals can be attributed to some of the capacity issues being experienced within the service resulting in staff involved in recruitment having to focus upon family finding. The other area of concern has been on relation to our overall performance in relation to the timeliness of assessments which has significantly deteriorated during the year to **12. 2 months** which is significantly below the national benchmark of 8 months. The region is able to account for the delays and is now supplying an explanatory narrative to accompany the return in respect of this measure. Again it is evident that the increased workload in other areas of the service has significantly impacted upon timescales in respect of this area of work.

5.5 Some of the measures VVC has put in place to address the gaps in recruitment have been to develop the initial approach to recruitment. In line with national direction, VVC has developed a targeted approach to recruitment with the intention of increasing the breadth of age range and needs that prospective adopters would feel confident parenting. Improved analysis of the children being referred and requiring placement has also informed this process.

5.6 The evidence which has also emerged from the analysis of adoption support within the region has also helped shape the information provided to prospective adopters at the initial stage. VVC has taken the approach that those interested in adoption should be provided with more information on the needs of children at a far earlier stage in the process in order for them to make a more informed decision around whether adoption is the right choice for them. To this end VVC has

revamped the format of their information evenings, which are currently held bi-monthly, to provide a comprehensive information pack which attendees are invited to digest before progressing to an initial visit from a Social Worker.

5.7 As a result of this approach there has been some decline in the numbers of people seeking an initial visit and some potential applicants may delay before making contact about an initial visit. This approach has however yet to show a marked difference in the numbers coming forward for siblings and a number of those approved for more than one child have gone on to be matched with a single child. The recruitment of families for siblings and children with additional needs remains a challenge.

5.8 The region has invested in the service of a part time Marketing Officer employed by NAS. A project group has been established with her support and the IT Department to develop VVC's website which is now nearing completion. Three members of staff will receive training in order to be able to update the website. The website will provide a useful mechanism to monitor enquiries from prospective adopters and the different geographical areas, information which can be used to target future marketing.

5.9 There had been a noticeable decline in relation to enquiries from Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, both areas which have previously generated a significant number of enquiries with no need for active awareness raising. It therefore felt that should this trend continue then consideration would need to be given to more active awareness raising within these geographical areas in the coming year.

5.10 Towards the end of the reporting period, the decline in enquirers seeking an initial visit as evidenced during quarter 3 appears to be showing signs of reversing. Information evenings held in January and February 2017 produced a significant number of initial visits compared to the previous quarter and this has resulted in an increase in the number of adopters attending the most recent Preparing to Adopt training course held at the end of the year.

5.11 As of 31st March 2017 there were 29 assessments being completed by the region, with 11 first time assessments and one second time assessment awaiting allocation.

5.12 Over the past year there has been a conscious effort, wherever possible, to allocate assessments to those workers specialising in recruitment and assessment. There are significant benefits to this approach in building expertise and skill but improvements to performance have not been seen due to those staff also undertaking generic work. Assessment plans and mid-point reviews are now more routinely established to improve practice and timeliness

5.13 VVC continues to receive high numbers of non-agency adoption referrals, the majority of which are from step parents wishing to adopt their step child. This is not

an area currently collated by NAS. As a result of having to prioritise the recruitment of adopters for children waiting to be adopted, this area of work now has a growing waiting list.

6. Adoption Support

6.1 Improving adoption support services within the region has also remained consistently challenging. The Adoption Support Manager has undertaken regular reviews of the service to assess ongoing service needs, shortfalls and resource implications. The workload in this area is high and data collected since the establishment of the Collaborative indicates that it has increased significantly in key areas.

6.2 In April 2016, NAS introduced a range of measures in respect of Adoption Support which are collated and reported upon each quarter. During the past year **83** requests for adoption support services have been received representing a 54% increase on the previous year and this support had been provided in **61** cases. In terms of Access to Birth Records requests, **66** referrals were received during the year which represents a slight decrease from 70 having been received in 2015-2016. **34** requests for intermediary services were received during the period which is an increase of 79% from the previous year when only 19 were received. Open letterbox cases have also increased from 636 at the end of 2015-16 to **767** on 31 March 2017.

6.3 The workload within the team has posed difficulties in terms of prompt allocation and there is a backlog of unallocated work in all these areas. As outlined previously temporary measures utilising underspend monies from 2015-16 have been put in place to address some of the service deficits. The Manager's role has been increased to full time and two part-time Social Workers have been employed to manage the letterbox system and to clear some of the waiting list for ABR, as a pilot exercise to enhance the staffing resource within the Adoption Support Team. An additional Social Work post has also been agreed and an appointment has been made. In addition, the Directors have agreed to the extension of the pilot into 2017-18 pending the outcome of the Best Value Review of the service.

6.4 Another aspect of the plan put in place to improve adoption support has focused upon training and support of adopters and training staff. Membership of Adoption UK was secured for the region and a Non Violent Resistance training programme for adoptive families was facilitated by Adoption UK. This course was run for 20 families with the support of two VVC staff and concluded in November 2016.

6.5 One of the adopters who attended the training has set up a quarterly peer support group supported by Adoption UK for a year.

6.6 The service has also invested some resources in upskilling staff within the team to more adequately support adoptive families. Training in therapeutic interventions and approaches has been provided for staff to improve practice.

6.7 Staff within the Adoption Support Team are experienced and committed to service improvement. Quarterly support groups have been established to address key issues for adoptive families, in addition to the maintenance of monthly toddler groups which provides opportunities for early intervention as well as bi-annual fun days which have high attendances.

6.8 A family fun day was held in November 2016 which was well attended. It has been noted that attendances at the bi-annual fun days are increasing to around 100 children with the result that alternative venues will have to be explored for future days. There have been two workshops run for adoptive parents in respect of life story work. Other topics covered in support groups have dealt with managing contact issues and managing behaviour.

6.9 Within the team, there is a commitment to improve the provision of services to all families requiring support through the means outlined above and there is a commitment to develop services further. There is a need to develop consultation and information mechanisms with adoptive families but this has been delayed due to capacity within the team. There has been a delay in being able to produce the newsletter for families but it is anticipated that the development of the website will provide a much needed source of information for families and adopted adults.

6.10 During the past year, which was VVC's first full year of operation, the service has been able to develop a clearer picture of the demand for targeted and therapeutic services with families needing support and the cost of these to the local authorities. At present the adoption support budget is not held centrally in the region and is retained by the individual local authorities. This has posed some challenge in terms of equity of service and timeliness of decision making, but generally local authority partners concur with the assessment undertaken by VVC and packages of support are being put in place as needed.

6.11 In the autumn of 2016, NAS produced a national framework to improve adoption support services and commissioned the Institute of Public Care (IPC) to produce a business case and action plan to develop the framework across Wales. As part of this work a national Project Board was set up to oversee the plan which the Regional Manager and Adoption Support Manager have been actively involved in. Members of the Management Board and regional stakeholder representatives have also met with IPC to contribute to the national discussions regarding improving adoption support across Wales.

7. ADOPTION PANEL

7.1 The Collaborative operates a joint regional Panel from two sittings, a north sitting covering RCT and Merthyr and south sitting covering Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

7.2 The workload of the Panel remains high and Panel meetings are now scheduled four times a month. During 2016-17, the north sitting met twenty times, three Panels were cancelled due to no cases being presented. The south sitting met twenty three

times, one Panel was re-arranged due to quoracy issues and three were cancelled because no cases were booked in.

7.3 VVC's Panel recommended **51** approvals to adopt, **1** review of approval, **75** matches of children with prospective adopters and **3** recommendations for children to be adopted in the cases of 3 relinquished children.

7.4 A significant area of development for the Panel is to move to a digital system. Tablets have been issued to Panel members and a licence with Egress obtained to enable secure transfer of Panel information. Panel members have received training on the new system and some trialling has taken place with a view to full implementation.

7.5 Maintenance of the central list of Panel members serving two sittings has caused some difficulties to the Collaborative in terms of available independent members and available Social Workers to become Panel members. Some recruitment of new members has taken place and induction and training is scheduled for the first quarter of next year.

7.6 Capacity issues within the management team have inhibited progress in conducting annual reviews of Panel members which will need to be prioritised in the coming year.

8. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

8.1 During 2016- 17, the region received two complaints.

8.2 The first complaint was from prospective adopters who had come forward for a specific child. The Family Finding Social Worker and Childcare Social Worker had visited the couple and decided not to proceed further with the enquiry for a number of reasons. The couple complained about the decision, the content of the initial visit and the approach of the Family Finding Social Worker. The complaint was investigated by the Recruitment and Assessment Manager and resolved at Stage 1.

8.3 The second complaint was from another couple following VVC's decision not to proceed to the application stage due to the male applicant's psychiatric condition. This was dealt with under Stage 1 by the Regional Adoption Manager. Following this the male applicant made representation to NAS and a meeting has now taken place with the couple, NAS Policy Officer and the Regional Adoption Manager to explain the reasons for VVC's decision.

8.4 Both these complaints have similarities and concern complaints from couples who have complained about the decision not to proceed with an adoption application or link. The Complaints Procedure is the only mechanism available for making representations against a decision not to take up an application to adopt and does not afford potential applicants the right to make representations to an independent review mechanism which highlights a gap in existing regulations.

8.5 There have been eleven compliments and records of thanks received during the year. Two of these have been from birth relatives; one from a grandmother in relation to the management of direct contact with adopters and one from a birth mother in respect of their letterbox contact. One of the compliments was from a voluntary agency expressing their satisfaction in working with VVC regarding the placement of a child with additional needs. The other compliments have been from adoptive parents and prospective adopters expressing their gratitude for the support and service they have received from regional staff.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 The first full year of operation of the Collaborative has provided an opportunity for further consolidation of the service and to build upon the performance of the region in the initial year. The region has maintained and improved performance in key areas such as the matching and placement of children for adoption and the provision of Life Journey Material. It is however apparent that the increased workload in terms of referrals of children for adoption, children waiting for placements and for adoption support services has impacted upon performance in other areas, particularly the timely recruitment and assessment of adopters. This coupled with the downturn in the number of enquiries received from prospective adopters makes effective recruitment of adopters a key priority going forward.

9.2 Capacity and resourcing issues within the service have featured significantly during the period but it is hoped that the forthcoming review of the service will assess whether the current structure and staffing is fit to meet the current demands placed upon the service to ensure that performance is improved during the coming year.

10. FUTURE PRIORITIES

10.1 Capacity issues and workload pressures within the regional management team has impacted upon key service developments and has resulted in the need to carry forward some of the priorities identified in year one.

10.2 Our priorities for 2017-18 will focus upon focus upon key activities required to improve performance in respect of our core service areas.

10.3 There is an urgent need to develop a recruitment and marketing strategy for adopters and to increase our available adopter resource to better meet the needs of children being referred and ensure more timely placements.

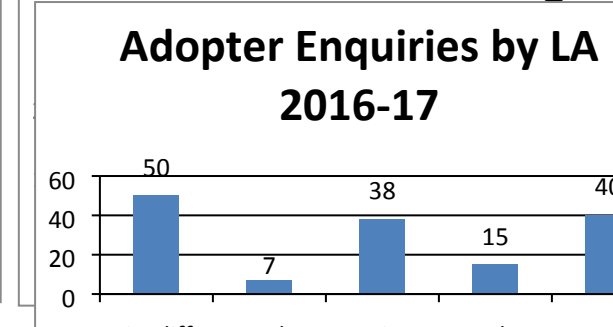
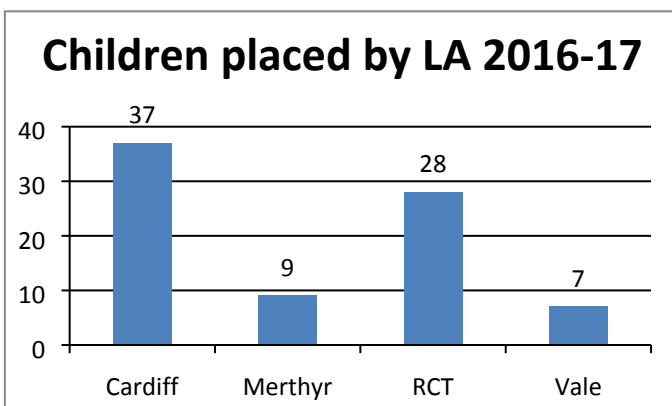
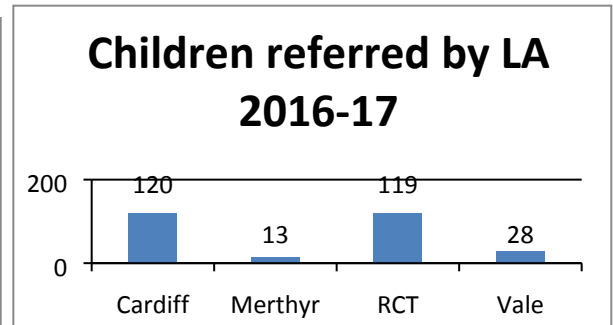
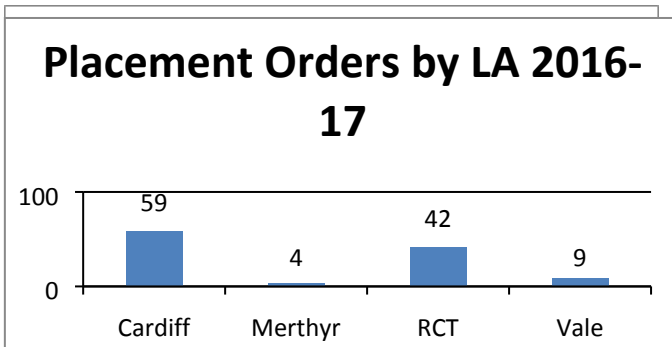
10.4 Other priorities to support our infrastructure and create efficiencies will be to induct and train new Panel members, complete annual reviews of existing members and secure full implementation of the digital Panel.

10.5 Finally, the region will need to be able to absorb the findings arising from the development of the national framework for adoption support and continue to look to ways to better support adoptive families and engage them in the development of services.

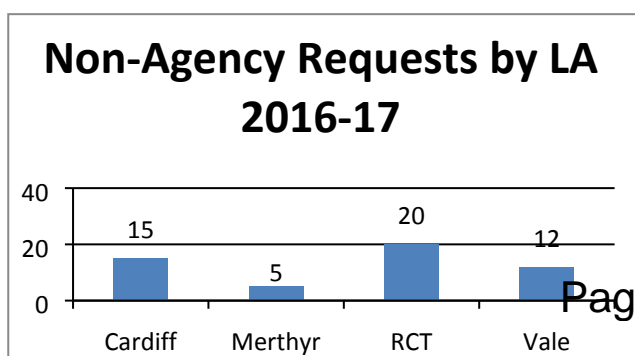
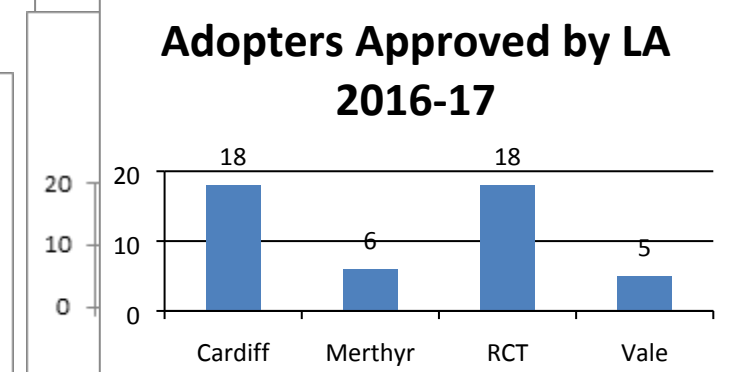
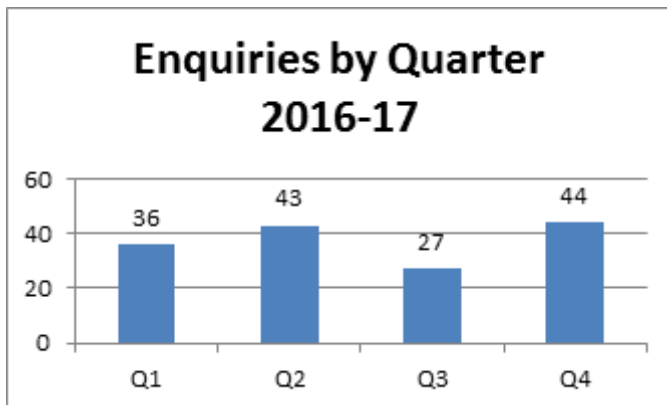
Angela Harris
Regional Adoption Manager
September 2017

VVC Annual Report 2016-17

Family Finding:



Recruitment and Assessment:



Post-Adoption Support:

