
VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE – ANNUAL
REPORT 2019-2020

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 Annual Report 2019/20. A copy is attached at **Appendix A**, with further Appendices as follows:
 - *Appendix 1* – Family Finding - sets out key performance data in respect of children by quarter and local authority.
 - *Appendix 2* – Recruitment and Assessment - provides information in respect of adopter enquiries and recruitment of adopters.
 - *Appendix 3* – Adoption Support - provides information in respect of Adoption Support
 - *Appendix 4* – Adoption Panel - provides information in respect of Adoption Panel activity
2. The report set out at **Appendix A** is the fifth VVC Annual Report and covers the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. The report seeks to combine the reporting requirements set out in regulation, and the governance arrangements for the region in one report.

Background

3. As a key part of the implementation of the Social Services and Well Being Act (Wales) 2014, the National Adoption Service for Wales was 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
- 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.

4. 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 Collaboratives which form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS). The Vale of Glamorgan Council host the Regional Collaborative.
5. 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.
6. 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 of 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.

VVC Report 2019/20

7. The report, attached at **Appendix A** focusses on the following areas of the region's work:
 - i. Service Development and Governance (*pages 1 – 5 of the report*)
 - ii. Service Functions:
 - Family Finding (*pages 5 – 9 of the report and Appendix 1*)
 - Recruitment & Assessment of Adopters (*pages 9 – 12 of the report and Appendix 2*)
 - Adoption support (*pages 12 – 15 of the report and Appendix 3*)
 - Adoption Panel (*pages 7 – 8 of the Report and Appendix 4*)
 - iii. Complaints and Compliments (*page 16*)
 - iv. Conclusion and 2020-21 priorities (*page 16 – 17*)

8. 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.

VVC Priorities for 2020/21

9. As well as the results of performance for 2019/20, the report also sets a number of priorities for the current year (*pages 16 & 17 of the report*). These are:
 - The need to continue to recruit more adoptive parents to meet the needs of children requiring placements will remain constant features of the service we provide. Considerable improvement in both these areas was achieved during the reporting period which hopefully can be built upon year on year.

- The ongoing challenge for the service is being able convert more (prospective adopters) enquiries into applications to ensure that they continue to build on its existing pool of adopters and to improve placement choice.
- Following successful recruitment into specialist roles..... These posts will continue to be evaluated in terms of service improvement and therefore will need to be further embedded across the region to ensure that performance targets are met. This is particularly important in respect of the provision of life journey work for the region due to the large amount of the investment secured for this work
- Just prior to the end of the reporting period the impact of the pandemic and national lockdown was beginning to take effect with staff working from home and key services temporarily halted. The service however adapted quickly to the challenges presented and has been able to deliver its core business partly on a virtual basis or via risk assessed face to face contact. This has enabled key functions to continue to be delivered although it is too early to assess the impact upon overall performance during this year. Going forward the service will need to continue to evaluate the effect upon services and develop plans to mitigate the overall impact upon service delivery.

Previous Scrutiny

10. The Committee has scrutinised the Annual Report over a number of years, with 2018/19 Regional Adoption Service proposals being considered in December 2019. A copy of the Chair's letter is attached at **Appendix B**.

Scope of the Scrutiny

11. 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:

- i. How well has the VVC Regional Service progressed against the targets and performance measures;
- ii. The progress that the VVC Region has made in addressing the improvements and priorities highlighted in paragraph 9;
- iii. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the service and its resilience going forward; and
- iv. What are the plans for the future for the VVC region?

Way Forward

12. Angela Harris, Regional Adoption Manager, VVC, will present the report on the implementation and performance of the regional Collaboration. This will be followed by a Q&A. Councillor Graham Hinchey, Cabinet Member for Children and Families and Deborah Driffield, Assistant Director of Children's Services will also be available to answer any questions.

Legal Implications

13. 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

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 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, 1, 2, 3 and 4** 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

8 December 2020