
VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE – ANNUAL
REPORT 2020/21

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 2020/21. A copy is attached at **Appendix A**, with further Appendices as follows:
 - *Appendix 1* – Family Finding
 - *Appendix 2* – Recruitment and Assessment
 - *Appendix 3* – Adoption Support
 - *Appendix 4* – Adoption Panel
2. The report set out at **Appendix A** is the sixth VVC Annual Report and covers the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. 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 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. The governance structure of the Collaborative involves a Joint Committee and a regional Management Board. The Joint Committee involves the lead Cabinet Member from each of the four Local Authorities and Heads of Service; it meets twice a year. The Management Board meets quarterly. It is comprised of the Heads of Service from the four Local Authorities which make up the Collaborative and representatives from Health, Education and the Voluntary Sector. The Management Board is chaired by a Director from one of the partner authorities. In October 2020, this transferred to the Director of Social Services for the Vale of Glamorgan. The Regional Adoption Manager reports to the Management Board and Joint Committee.

6. In addition, Regulation 39 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019 require the Collaborative to create and maintain a system to monitor, review and improve the quality of its' service. Section 15 2 (c) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 also requires each regional Collaborative to provide an Annual Report to the Director of Operations for the National Adoption Service. It is envisaged that the Annual Report attached at **Appendix A** will meet all these requirements. The performance of the Collaborative continues to be regularly reviewed by the Management Board and the Joint Committee.

VVC Report 2020/21

7. The report, attached at **Appendix A** focusses on the following areas of the region's work:
- Governance, staffing and service development
 - Performance in respect of children and family finding activity
 - Adopter marketing and recruitment
 - Adoption support services
 - Consultation, Engagement and Quality Assurance
 - Complaints and compliments
 - Adoption Panel
 - Future priorities and challenges
8. In terms of regional performance, the report outlines the ways the service adapted to the challenges imposed by COVID 19 and developed new ways of working to reduce delay and engage with service users.
9. The report provides information in respect of children against key performance indicators set by the National Adoption Service Performance Framework. It highlights a healthier end of year position in respect of children placed for adoption despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic and the overall decrease in Placement Orders. The report provides information in respect of the number of children waiting and the

reasons for this. It also highlights a continued increase in those children being placed within the region enabling the region to utilise its' existing pool of adopters effectively and providing easier access to support services for those families.

10. The report outlines the impact of VVC's Marketing Strategy and the use of social media platforms to raise VVC'S profile. A further increase in adopter enquiries was noted during year, and the number of households approved was comparable to the previous year despite the constraints on the service. There continues to be challenges in being able to recruit sufficient adopters to be able to meet the more complex range of needs of children referred.
11. The report provides information in respect of post adoption support services and the increase in workload in this area and the impact upon the capacity of the service to meet the increased demand.
12. The report outlines the posts created as a result of the investment from Welsh Government and the way these roles have enhanced service delivery within the region. There has been a significant improvement in the provision of life journey work for children with a plan for adoption during the period largely as a result of the investment. Other positive developments can be seen in improved transition planning for children moving into adoptive placements and birth parent support.
13. The posts linked directly to national programmes, TESSA and the Connected service have also become more established during the reporting period and activity levels associated with these roles have been significant.

14. The report outlines the ongoing requirement to report upon performance and the additional measures imposed as part of the investment to the National Adoption Service and Welsh Government.
15. The report highlights the key challenges going forward in terms core business specifically the placement of more complex children, adopter recruitment and meeting the ever-increasing demand for adoption support services. It also outlines some of the new challenges imposed with the implementation of the Good Practice Guides and the two-stage model of adopter assessment.

VVC Priorities for 2021/22

16. As well as the results of performance for 2020/21, the report also sets a number of priorities for the current year (*Paragraphs 15.1 – 15.6 of the report*). These are:
 - The priorities going forward remain as in previous years. The VVC needs to continue to build upon our performance and ensure that we can meet the range of needs presented by children requiring adoptive placements within the region. The increased complexity and profile of the harder to place children will continue to challenge our ability to secure timely, appropriate matches for these children.
 - There is a need to evaluate which functions can continue to be delivered via virtual platforms and which parts of the service will require a combined approach. This will continue to inform the VVCs recovery planning.

- The investment received from Welsh Government has been a significant, positive development for the service as a whole and there is clear evidence of the benefits of the additional roles in enhancing performance. These improvements will however need to continue to be monitored and evaluated to meet the objectives and targets set by NAS. This is particularly important in respect of the provision of life journey work due to the large amount of the investment secured for completion of this work.
- One of the key priorities for the service highlighted during the period and continuing into the current year is how best to address the ever-increasing demand for post adoption support services.
- The full implementation of the Good Practice Guides will impact directly upon Family Finding practice and Adoption Support Service, although the need to promote ongoing and in some cases direct contact with birth families will need to be factored into the assessment process for prospective adopters.
- The easement to the Regulations in respect of the two-stage process for adopter assessments ceases on 30 September 2021 and the new process is to be fully implemented from 1 October 2021. VVC will need to collect data in respect of compliance with the new timescales for assessments and performance will need to be closely monitored.

Previous Scrutiny

17. The Committee has scrutinised the Annual Report over a number of years, with 2019/20 VVC Annual Report being considered in December 2020. A copy of the Chair's letter is attached at **Appendix B**. The response to this letter is also attached at **Appendix C**.

Scope of the Scrutiny

18. 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;
 - 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

19. Angela Harris, Regional Adoption Manager, VVC, will introduce the report, which will be followed by a Q&A. Councillor Graham Hinchey, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Sarah McGill, Corporate Director People & Communities and Deborah Driffield, Director of Children's Services will also be available to answer any questions.

Legal Implications

20. 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

21. 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.

RECOMMENDATION

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

02 December 2021