

NAME OF COMMITTEE	Scrutiny Committee Gwynedd Council
DATE OF MEETING	30 January, 2020
TITLE OF ITEM	The North Wales Adoption Service
PURPOSE	To give an update on the North Wales Adoption Service
AUTHOR	Aled Gibbard, Senior Manager
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Dilwyn Morgan

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The introduction of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the related regulations and guidance as well as government set targets, put increased statutory responsibilities on local authorities to deliver a broader range of adoption services. With limitations on staffing levels and resources, concerns were raised about the ability to comply with these regulations and smaller authorities struggled to place children within their own communities.
- 1.2 In order to resolve some of these issues the six local authorities in North Wales began working in partnership to deliver a regional service where they could pool resources and become more cost efficient. Consequently with the assistance of government grant funding under “Making The Connections the 6 local authorities entered into a partnership agreement to set up the North Wales Adoption Service. The service became operational in April 2010 and was the first Region in Wales to establish a regional service. It was established some 5 years prior to the National Adoption Service being created.
- 1.3 The National Adoption Service for Wales was launched in November 2014, is an innovative collaborative for the provision of adoption services. It brought together Welsh local authority adoption services into a 3 tier structure which includes partnerships at all levels with Voluntary Adoption Agencies based in Wales, Health and Education Services as well as others.
- 1.4 At local authority level all 22 Welsh councils continue to provide services to all looked after children whilst identifying and working with those children for whom a plan for adoption is appropriate.
- 1.5 Regionally, local authorities work together within five regional collaboratives to provide a range of adoption services. Each regional collaborative has links with the voluntary adoption agencies, health and education. The services provided differ in each collaborative but all provide the adoption agency functions for children, recruit and assess adopters, offer counselling to birth parents and advice to adopted adults. Some currently directly provide adoption support services whereas in others this remains with their local authorities.
The current priority is to improve adoption support services and we are implementing our ‘Framework for Adoption Support’.
- 1.6 The National Adoption Service as a whole is overseen by a Governance Board and an Advisory Group. At the local level Regional Management Committees oversee the regional services. The service reports to Welsh Ministers twice a year.

2. Current Position

- 2.1 The North Wales Adoption Service is hosted by Wrexham County Borough Council. Since 2010 staff have been seconded into the service and continue to be based in their own local authorities except for some Flintshire social workers who are located in the Wrexham office.

2.2 The North Wales Adoption Service in partnership with the six local authorities is responsible for providing the following services:

- Recruitment, Training, Assessment and Supporting prospective and approved adopters
- Matching children to adopters
- S98 Access to records, Search and Intermediary Services for adopted adults and their relatives
- Birth Parent counselling
- Adoption Support– Support Groups, Fun Days and Newsletters.
- Development and management of joint adoption panels
- Partner of Parent Adoptions
- Adoptions with a Foreign Element

3. Statistics

3.1 The data below was taken from the North Wales Adoption Service end of year statistics for 2018-19:

Recruitment activity

LA	Conw	Denb	Flint	Gwyn	Wrex	Ynys Môn	Other/ NWAS	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Enquires	26	24	42	19	37	12	7	167	173	162
Response Forms	11	12	11	5	12	5	3	59	63	61
Initial Visits Undertaken	9	12	13	4	11	4	2	55	53	62
Application Forms	4	6	7	2	3	3	1	26	26	43

Number of Adopters under Assessment

	Conwy	Denbigh	Flint	Gwyn	Wrexham	Ynys Mon	Other	Total 18/19	Total 17/18
Adopters Currently Under Assessment	4	4	4	1	2	3	0	18	16
Foster Carers wishing to adopt under Assessment	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	3	2
Partner of Parent Under Assessment	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	4	7
Total No: of Assessments	4	7	5	1	5	3	0	25	25

Approved Adopters

	Conwy	Denbigh	Flint	Gwyn	Wrexham	Ynys	Other NWAS	Other Agency	Total
Available	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	3
On hold for potential matches	3	2	2	1	0	0	1	4	13

Children placed April 2018 – March 2019

	Conw	Denb	Flint	Gwyn	Wrex	Ynys	Total 18-19	Total 17-18
Number of children referred	16	8	9	3	12	3	51	55
Number of children recommended for match at panel	9	8	5	5	9	3	39	41
Number of children placed for adoption	11	6	6	6	7	3	39	41
Number of children adopted	11	10	5	5	2	2	35	39
26 children placed with NWAS Adopters (2 sibling groups)								
13 children with other agencies (1 sibling group)								

Children currently awaiting for an adoption placement

	Conw	Denb	Flint	Gwyn	Wrex	Ynys	Other	Total
Children On Hold for potential matches or matched but not placed	6	1	3	3	5	3	0	21
Children - no identified match at present	4	7	1	2	7	1	0	22
Total No: of Families Required	4	6	1	2	6	1		20

Panel Activity

Panels	Flint/Wrex	Conw/Denb	Gwyn/Ynys	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2018
Adoption Assessments	7	5	6	18	26
Should Be Adopted	3	0	0	3	0
Matching (no: of children)	11 (14 children)	15 (17 children)	7 (7 children)	33 (38)	32 (42)
Deferred	3	0	2	5	4
Deregistered	0	0	0		0
Review	0	2	0	2	8

Total	24	22	15	61	70
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4. The National Adoption Service

4.1 Performance for all the regions in Wales is collated by the National Adoption Service (see annual report in Appendix 1).

4.2 For North Wales the main achievements for 2018-19 were:

Appointment of a Contact Coordinator Officer, offering a consistent response and support to adopters and birth parents, with in-direct and direct contact.

- Worked with expert Richard Rose, to implement the Life Story Framework.
- Expanded the Buddy scheme for adopters.
- Invested in upskilling Training Officer – completed Dyadic developmental psychotherapy level 2 and is currently undertaking a diploma in therapeutic parenting.

4.3 The national plan for 2019-20 is to build on the improvements made over the first five years of NAS; with the significant benefit of the availability of new investment funding. This is in the form of £2.3m from Welsh Government for service improvement; around £250,000 via Adoption UK Cymru for TESSA from the Big Lottery and Communities Fund, in addition to grant aid of around £300,000 to the Voluntary Adoption Agencies from Welsh Government Third Sector grant scheme currently agreed up to 2020. The National Adoption Service will continue to work to deliver services to high numbers of children, young people and families and others affected by adoption; mainly through NAS regional services and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The core business of the service will continue to be, recruiting adopters so that children who cannot be cared for by their own families can live in stable, loving homes as the best alternative. The work of NAS is closely linked with the Welsh Government Ministerial Advisory Group for Children (MAG). Adoption features across the numerous work streams of this important national initiative.

5. Priorities for NWAS in 2019-20

5.1 A review of the service was carried out in 2017-18 with following remit:

- To identify and clarify the current funding model of the NWAS
- To gain an understanding of the funding models of the other Regional Adoption Services
- To recommend any changes required to the current funding model of the NWAS
- To prepare a Review Report for presentation for the NWAS Management Board

The conclusion drawn from the review outlined that there is insufficient management capacity, both at strategic and operational level to manage and develop the service. Further, it is not possible to deliver the Post Adoption Support element (additional Welsh Government funding) with the existing staffing complement.

Work has therefore begun on revising the structure and move to a fully managed lead authority. All staff currently employed will be transferred to Wrexham County Borough Council, continuing to work from their current local authority bases. This should be completed by the end of March 2020.

5.2 The £2.3 million Welsh Government funding includes additional funding of £378,000 for North Wales. This additional funding will be used to invest in adoption support. The North Wales Adoption Service has produced an action plan that includes employing additional Adoption Support Workers across the

North Wales region and the post are currently being advertised as part of the review of the service. Some of the new posts will require different knowledge and skill sets and will enable NWAS to provide an improved and expanded range of services to Adopters and their Adoptive children and also meet legislative requirements.

5.3 NAS has worked alongside Adoption UK, to develop the Wales element, of a successful UK wide bid for funding from the National Lottery Community fund for the TESSA service. TESSA is a therapeutic education support service for adoptive families began to be established in Wales in February 2019. It is the intention that NAS adds to the resources available for TESSA through match funding from the investment in 2019/20 and this will be developed within NWAS. The service sets out to deliver:

- A focus on early intervention and support as soon as postsettling in concerns are raised
- Professional psychological assessments for children, with information shared with parents and other support staff
- 6-session therapeutic parenting support, delivered by teams consisting of a clinical psychologist and experienced adoptive parents (parent partners)
- Ongoing parent partner support.