

Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Venue:
Committee Room 1 – Senedd

Meeting date:
23 May 2012

Meeting time:
09:00

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



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Agenda

PRIVATE – The Committee resolved to meet in private at its meeting on 17 May 2012 for Item 1.

1. Estyn Annual Report – Discussion of Draft Report (9.00 – 9.15)
(Pages 1 – 36)

2. Introductions, apologies and substitutions (09:15)

3. Inquiry into adoption (09:15 – 10:15) (Pages 37 – 74)

St David’s Children Society
Gerry Cooney – Chief Executive
Joan Price – Adoption Manager

Barnardo’s Cymru

Yvonne Rodgers – Director Barnardo’s Cymru
Melanie Jones – Adoption and Fostering, Operations Manager.
Trish Booker – Adoption and Fostering, Service Manager, North Wales

(Break 10:15 – 10:30)

4. Inquiry into adoption (10.30 – 11.15) (Pages 75 – 80)

Dr. Mike Davies – Independent Consultant Psychotherapist

5. Inquiry into adoption (11.15 – 12.00) (Pages 81 – 82)

Welsh NHS Confederation

Allison Williams – Chief Executive Cwm Taf Health Board

Dr David Williams – Clinical Director Aneurin Bevan Health Board

Agenda Item 1

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St David's Children Society

Children & Young People Inquiry into Adoption.

Submission of St. David's Children Society.
1st Feb. 2012.

Situation:

- There are four Local Authority (LA) adoption consortia operating across Wales. The consortia in SE & SW Wales (a total of 6 LAs), are meeting their internal demand for adoption placements, sometimes by purchasing from St. David's. These LAs service relatively small populations.
- There are a significant number of children within the South Wales Adoption Agencies Consortium (SWAAC – 9 authorities) and the N. Wales Adoption Consortium (6 authorities) with an adoption plan but without an available adoption placement resource.
- As the regionalisation agenda gathers pace, there will inevitably be some restructuring of consortia arrangements.
- No national data is recorded in Wales on the number of children currently waiting for an adoption placement.

Background:

- The Welsh Government has set out its aims in Sustainable Social Services for Wales, A Framework for Action, to develop a National Adoption Agency.
- Improving permanency through greater placement choice is a key part of the Sustainable Wales programme.
- WLGA & ADSS are exploring greater collaboration including moving towards regional services and a national adoption service. There remains the critical question of timescales in achieving all of this.

- These past 5 years have witnessed a 20% increase in the looked after childcare population. ¹
- LAs are burdened by critical mass of child protection. Partly driven by the Baby P case.
- Recent years have witnessed a decrease in number of qualified social workers.

St. David's Assessment::*Adoption works.*

- The legislation, processes & structures are fit for purpose.
- All approved prospective adopters within St. David's Children Society complete their training, checks, assessment & are approved within the 8 month guideline.
- If prospective adopters face delays, children face delays and as a consequence are disadvantaged before they reach an adoption placement.
- Yes we can always improve systems, but the critical issues that impact on children are to do with delays, adoption agency capacity, service delivery, low outputs and a limited understanding of the true costs of providing adoption services.
- Adoption works: Outcomes for children placed for adoption with a St. David's approved adopter far exceed the national average. In our last 100 placements we experienced a breakdown rate of 3% compared to a national disruption rate of 20%. ²

1: Personal Social Services Statistics Wales 2010–11 www.statswales.wales.gov.uk

2: Adoption UK 'Disruption Report.' 11th Oct. 2010. + PM Review of Adoption 2000. (Performance & Innovation Unit).

Emotional cost to the child:

- BAAF estimate that 1 in 4 children available for adoption will not be placed primarily due to the lack of an adoptive parent resource.
- Where children experience delays in being placed for adoption, this has a detrimental effect on their life chances. The chances of being adopted reduced by nearly 20% for every year of delay. ³
- Successful adoptions reduce the likelihood of an over representation of the adoption population dependant on mental health services, in prisons, etc ⁴.

Financial cost to the public purse:

- DCSF (2010) estimate that the cost for a local authority to secure an internal adoption placement is £36,000. ⁵
- The cost of an interagency fee for a single adoption placement with a St. David's approved adopter is £27,000. This includes life long support to the placement.
- The core cost of placing and keeping children in care is very expensive and represents an ongoing cost for many years
- The more instability there is in the child's care journey, including multiple fostering placements or residential care, the greater the financial impact. The equivalent annual cost for such a care journey has been estimated at £56,225 per annum. ⁶
- Swifter family finding by LAs & VAAs leads to reduced care costs per child resulting in substantial costs savings to local authorities including reduced fostering & residential care costs, legal challenges, reviews, etc.
- Efficient, effective adoption services enable children to exit care in a timely manner, helping to stabilise a rising looked after childcare population.

6 Recommendations:

1: Partnership:

- We suggest that the Welsh Government consider spearheading the exploration of partnership arrangements between LAs and St. David's as we work together to achieve high quality adoption placements for children.
- The highly successful Coram & London Borough of Harrow partnership provides a bench mark for such working: this partnership delivered a 100% success rate in placing all children with an adoption placement order with all children being placed within the recommended 6 month timescale. ⁷

2: Effective Financial Governance:

- Service commissioners should develop a greater understanding of the social value that adoption provides including the contribution of St. David's to reduce the LAs current & future spending costs.
- We suggest that the Audit Commission conduct a study into the financial costs of providing adoption services within Wales: for example:

3: Selwyn, J., Frazer, L. and Quinton, D. (2006) 'Paved with good intentions: The pathway to adoption and the costs of delay', *British Journal of Social Work*, 36, pp. 561–76

4: "Handle with Care" by the Centre for Policy Studies (Sept 2006).

5: DCSF: Selwyn, J. Sempik, J. Thurston, P. & Wijedasa, D. "Adoption & the Interagency Fee," 2010.

6: Hannon, C, Wood, C, Bazalgette, L, *In Loco Parentis* (2010), Demos

7: *A report on the partnership between Coram and Harrow Council to increase quality and reduce cost of care in Children's Services*

- Last year, an English County Council reported that its adoption team of 41 social workers achieved 43 placements.
- While adoption teams in Wales have lower staffing numbers, anecdotal evidence suggests that greater efficiencies could be achieved in the staffing to placement activity ratios.
- By contrast, five St. David's social work staff will achieve 35 adoption placements this year.
- Efficient auditing of services should measure inputs, outputs and outcomes.
- We acknowledge that local authorities' adoption budgets are at times under resourced. It is imperative that we change rigid structures to one that is cost effective and delivers a future for children requiring adoption.
- Currently, the adoption VAA Interagency Fee is paid in two lump sums over a period of a year. We propose that this fee be paid on a monthly basis out of the fostering budget.

3: Practice:

- We suggest that each local authority set itself a timescale of 2 months, after which if it is unable to identify a suitable family for a child within its own resources or consortia arrangements, that authority must look further afield including the voluntary sector to achieve a placement irrespective of the age of the child.
- Where an adoption agency is unable to progress an adoption enquiry within 2 month of first contact, that agency must refer the enquirer to another adoption agency with the capacity to immediately progress the enquiry.

4: Establish a disruption register for Wales:

- Adoption UK reported that as many as 1 in 5 adoptions in Wales breakdown (11th Oct 2010).
- Need to record accurate disruption statistics across Wales and to urgently agree a standard format for recording and reporting this data.

5: Establish a National Register within Wales for:

- All children with a placement order whose assessed need is adoption.
- All prospective adopters waiting for a placement.
- Given BAAF's experience of managing the National Adoption Register in England & Wales, we suggest that BAAF be considered for this task.

6: Establish a National Adoption Helpline for Adoptive Enquiries:

- Supported by an effective adoption recruitment campaign.
- This should be managed by professionals &
- Part staffed by service user volunteers.
- Offered as a localised free phone service.
- BAAF, Adoption UK & St. David's could pilot this service.

We believe that all 6 of these recommendations are consistent with the vision of a National Adoption Agency for Wales.

Adoption is a serious business for children... Because of the complex processes involved in adoption, young children quickly become older with more demanding needs and are considered harder to place.

Adoption works. It is our structures that are failing children. New approaches work as is clearly evident by the Coram Harrow model. Until we get past decisions that are driven by short term financial considerations, children will not succeed.

The 'Social Return on Investment' report (2011), concluded that for every successful adoption from care, where the adopter is able to support the child in resolving the issues from their past, there is a social return of over £1m per placement. ⁸.

Gerry Cooney
St. David's Children Society.
1st Feb. 2012.

8: PACT Domestic Adoption and Fostering: SROI Evaluation. Evaluation carried out by Baker Tilly and Cass Business School (April 2011).

Addendum:

Key facts about St. David's:

- In our last 100 adoption placements we had a breakdown rate of 3%. This is the lowest breakdown rate of any adoption agency in the UK. 97% of our adoption placements are successful.
- This year we anticipate achieving 35 adoption placements which will result in 1 in every 7 children placed for adoption in Wales being placed with a St. David's approved adopter.
- In the past 5 years St. David's has placed more children over 5 years of age for adoption than any other single member agency of SWAAC. St. David's has also placed more sibling groups of children than any other single member agency within the same period.
- Our Welsh placement strategy delivers high quality outcomes for children.
- 90% of our adopters have children placed with them within 4 months of approval.
- Our recent CSSIW inspection report reflected an outstanding service. There were no action points or recommendations.
- St. David's is the longest servicing adoption agency in Wales.
- St. David's is the only voluntary adoption agency in Wales that is approved and inspected by the Welsh Government.

Core strengths of St David's:

- Experience and knowledge is imparted to adoptive parents and LAs.
- St. David's has a high retention rate for adoption social work staff:
 - A higher likelihood in retaining expertise
 - Greater consistency of the relationship between agency social worker and adoptive family
 - = Better placement outcomes for children.
- St. David's has 70 years experience of the lifelong impact of adoption:
 - St. David's has a proven track record of positively developing its adopters
 - St David's provides a seamless service to adoption support that addresses the lifelong impact of adoption
 - Experience is used to inform best practice
 - Ability to innovate and develop user empowered support services.
 - Ability to identify regional and national trends and respond more quickly to changes in demand
 - = Better placement outcomes for children.

A suggested structure for the proposed National Adoption Agency:

St. David's fully supports the proposal for a National Adoption Agency viewing it as a moment of great opportunity for children waiting adoption. The National Adoption Agency had the potential to be the single greatest vehicle to deliver significant long term costs savings to child care budgets and has enormous potential to improve life chances for children in the looked after system in Wales.

While the proposal creates immense challenge in performance, scale and outcomes, it has the potential to place Wales at the vanguard of adoption services within the UK, a beacon for others to follow. This is a defining moment for adoption services in Wales. It must be seized.

The National Adoption Agency will:

- Reduce delays and achieve better outcomes for adopted children.
- Provide greater choice of prospective adopters for children.
- Establish clear targets for completed assessments, placements and reduce delay.
- Free up foster carers – (currently a shortage in England & Wales of 10,000), thus enabling LAs address their 'sufficient duty' requirement.
- Reduce the need for social workers, team managers, legal challenges, IRO, mental health services, CAMHs services, after care service, etc.
- Result in increased savings to the LA as child is looked after for a shorter period, which increases best value for the rate payer.

Aims & Objectives of new agency:

- It becomes a centre of excellence for domestic adoption – while this will be a challenge, it will be more easily achieved if the focus is on the fundamentals which is securing high quality, life long placements for looked after children and are not distracted by inter country or step parent adoption – or indeed birth parent counselling.
- It drives forward placement outcomes for adoptive children
- It is imperative that the new agency not only succeeds but in the first instance seeks to promote and provide high quality, accountable client focused adoption services.

National Adoption Agency Responsibilities:

- The new agency to become a single reference point for all children with an adoption plan.
- The new agency establishes and maintains a register for all children with an adoption plan.
- A similar register of approved available adopters.
- That is has responsibility for recruiting, training and approving new prospective adopters.

- That it has initial responsibility for identifying and recommending proposed links of children with prospective adopters.
- That it has the responsibility for ensuring that children are prepared for adoption and that life story books are in place, etc. These omissions create significant delays for children.
- The new agency being the placement support agency – until such time as the adoption order is granted.

LA responsibilities:

- That the LA retains the decision to approve children for adoption, including panel approval of the adoption plan.
- The LA adoption panel and decision maker retain responsibility for approving the link – the link being proposed to the LA by the new agency. – To further reduce delays, Guidance may be required for timescales between the link being identified by the National Adoption Agency and the LA panel approving the match.
- *Issues of Inter country and step parent adoption may require further careful consideration. The growing demands of step parent adoption are of concern and risk draining precious resources away from domestic adoption. The Assembly may wish to consider setting up a separate section for these two elements, but we would suggest that the initial focus of the new agency concentrate on domestic adoption, revisiting step parent adoption after a period of five years.*
- That responsibility for post adoption support after the granting of the order remains with the LA, or alternatively is commissioned out to Adoption UK or After Adoption.

Accountability:

- The Assembly may wish to consider the establishment of a 'Board with Special Responsibility to advise on Adoption Matters,' including a chair, a senior member of CSSIW, a local authority chief executive, a civil servant, an experienced child care & family law solicitor, a child psychologist or paediatrician, an experienced researcher in child law and family law outcomes, and an experienced adoption social worker.
- The board works with the Chief Executive on matters of governance, strategic planning, accountability and financial oversight.
- The chief executive / director of the new agency to report to the board.
- The Chair of the Board prepare written six monthly reports to the Minister with Special Responsibility for Social Services

Precursory staffing numbers...

- In 2010 there were 229 children adopted in Wales. The increase in looked after child care population suggests it is prudent to estimate an increase in adoption placements to 250 children.
- To secure widest possible placement choice for children the new agency would require a pool of 300 approved prospective adopters.
- The St David's team of social work staff deliver training, assessments, support to adopters, response to high numbers of initial enquiries, support to existing placements, support groups for adopters & children, workshops and an increasing role (and number) in providing guidance

to individuals seeking contact with their birth parent, child they gave up for adoption, brothers and sisters etc.

- Each member of the team achieves an average of 6 prospective assessments per year, each making approximately 5 – 6 adoption placements per year.
- Using that staffing ratio, the national adoption agency would require a compliment of approximately 50 social work staff all working at an exceptionally high level of skill, outputs and outcomes – achieving 300 assessments.
- 50 social work staff would require approximately 10 - 12 managers, plus 3 higher tier management. *The National Adoption Agency would lead to substantive savings in existing budgets. 50 social work staff may initially appear excessive. A quick precursory analysis of SWAAC (the 9 member local authorities of the South Wales Adoption Agencies Consortium), suggests that it employs an approximate total of 48 adoption social work staff, excluding team leaders and principle officers. The 13 remaining Welsh authorities probably employ at least another 35 social work staff between them, again excluding management layers.*
- Children often experience delays due to the slow response of district social workers in reading the prospective adoptive assessment report (PAR.). This is due to the critical mass of child protection, court work and staffing shortages. A designated linking team of 3 – 4 experienced social workers employed by the new agency to specifically explore and identify links between children and prospective adopters would significantly reduce delays for children, free up foster placements and provide substantive savings to budgets.
- Additional social work staff would be required should the new agency consider preparing children for adoption, including life story books (this being another source of delay for children).
- Admin support of approximately 15 full time equivalents.
- Approximately 5 - 6 regional offices.
- The new agency to consider securing the services of a pool of experienced self employed social work staff to respond to periods of increased demand, sickness periods, holiday leave, etc.

Adoption Panel.

- The new agency would need to plan for the approval of approximately 300 prospective adoptive applicants.
- A workload of 5 – 6 applications per panel.
- A permanent adoption panel that would meet weekly x 2 day's activity: 1 x day report reading. 1 x day attending panel. Alternatively the panel could meet fortnightly though this would still require 4 days work over a period of 2 weeks.
- The primary task of this panel would be to make recommendations to approve prospective adopters, including de-registration. – Approving children for adoption and linking children with new families would remain the task of the local authority panel.
- A permanent adoption panel would require a change in legislative guidance.

Training:

- Training programmes for prospective adopters consume a significant proportion of social work hours.
- Where social work staff are providing training, this is usually sporadically delivered requiring three days delivery by 2 -3 social workers with another 1 – 2 days preparation.
- The appointment of 3 lead experienced trainers, (one North Wales, / two South Wales, each supported by a social worker from the new agency during the training programme), consistently delivering all training across Wales, would lead to significant time and cost savings for the main task which is assessing and approving prospective adoptive resources. – The linking being secured by designated staff.

Recruitment / Marketing officer: - 1 post.

- Advertising, marketing, raising the profile of the new agency.
- The National Adoption Agency will have its own unique, exclusive 'brand.' It will attract considerable media attention and quickly be viewed as a centre for excellence in adoption services.
- Its uniqueness will do much to raise the profile of adoption and give rise to a new generation of prospective adopters.

Risks, contingency planning:

- It is imperative that in preparation for the new agency, the Assembly capture greater statistical data on children with an adoption plan. The annual number of children adopted each year in Wales may not represent the total number of children with an adoption plan. *(It is not unusual to find approximately 15 – 18% % of the looked after child care population initially referred to the local authority adoption agency. While the adoption plans for a significant number of these children will change, the 4% – 4.5% annual statistic of adopted looked after children appears modest and considerably short of the initial referral rate. A successful National Adoption Agency may witness a considerable increase in referrals).*
- On occasions, the plans of children waiting for adoption are altered due to the lack of an available adoptive placement resource. *(Situations occur where the adoption plan is changed with the child moving to long term fostering for reasons such as within a pre determined period an adoptive resource has not been identified, or that the child has reached a certain age, is part of a sibling group, has contact arrangements, etc. The Assembly may wish to devise an early formula for capturing such data, perhaps sourced from the IROs. Such data may evidence a marked increase in the number of children being referred to the new agency potentially leaving it under resourced at an early stage of its development).*
- Last year saw an increase of 500 children entering the looked after system in Wales, in part driven by the Baby Peter case. Eventually this will lead to an increase in the numbers of children being placed for adoption.
- The establishment of the National Agency will result in a greater emphasis being placed on adoption with LAs viewing it as a positive option for children and budgets leading to a marked increase in the number of children being referred.
- Over these past few years BAAF have consistently reported that somewhere between 25% & 35% of children (in England & Wales) with

an adoption plan will not be placed primarily due to the lack of an available adoptive family resource.

The financial and emotional costs of keeping children in long-term care are immense:

Beyond Care Matters (Narey, 2007): Estimates that the average annual cost of a looked after child in 2005/6 was £33,000 but rises to £50,000 for children with emotional and behavioural problems. For children with complex needs the estimated annual cost is £95,000.”

- The adoption budget is of significant importance to the reduction of long term costs, particularly fostering costs. (*We need to take greater cognisance of ever increasing foster fees, residential fees, reoccurring legal challenges, district social work and management time, governance time, medical reviews, IRO, GAL, reviews, staff offices & overheads, etc*).
- All agencies need a greater understanding of the true costs of adoption related activity. The Hadley Centre (*A study of the financial costs of 9 local authority adoption agencies Sept 2009*), evidenced that the cost to a local authority of placing a child internally was £36,000 per child. Loughborough University Sept 2009 estimated the same as £44,000 per child. Greater financial clarity is required on the full unit costs of running an adoption service.

The Adoption Act, the Children Act and the Human Rights Act all support the fundamental principle that every child had the right to family life. The legal status of so many looked after children has seen this most basic right diminished. The National Adoption Agency has the potential to champion this right. The creation of a National Adoption Agency would be a great legacy for some of our most vulnerable looked after children in Wales.

Gerry Cooney
St. David's Children Society
March 2011.

Children and Young People Committee

CYP(4)-15-12 Paper 1a

St David's Children Society – supplementary evidence on the establishment of a National Adoption Service

Consultation Questions

88): Do you agree the functions that a National Adoption Service will be responsible for, as set out in paragraph bb?

St. David's fully supports the proposals for a 'national adoption body' as set out in the consultation document.

89): Do you suggest any additional functions that should be included?

We believe that a 'Welsh Placement Strategy' with a robust determination to place Welsh children in Wales should be a core principle of the 'national adoption body.' We recognise that there might be occasions where this may not be achievable; however, a driving commitment to place Welsh children in Wales should be a crucial consideration in the mission of a 'national adoption body.'

St. David's would support the concept of an 'Adoption Register' for Wales. The 'Adoption Register for England and Wales' has a referral and matching mechanism for all children / prospective adopters waiting for placements. The effectiveness of such a register would be greatly enhanced if it had the capacity to collate information from the Independent Reviewing Officers. This data would provide an early warning system on the numbers and particular needs of children who were likely to require future adoption placements. An early flagging system would help direct the adoptive parent recruitment strategy of the 'national adoption body.'

90): Are there any other barriers to the current arrangements that should be considered in the development of the Social Services (Wales) Bill?

Within some agencies, poor understanding of the full costs of providing adoption services is a barrier to supporting change. Exploration of the financial arrangements underpinning adoption services, savings to fostering and other budgets while evidencing improved outcomes for children will help remove this resistance.

91): Do you have any other comments that you wish to make about our proposals for a National Adoption Service?

Research clearly evidences that the most successful outcomes achieved for children are in those agencies where there are seamless,

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St David's Children Society - supplementary evidence on the establishment of a National Adoption Service

high quality services, where each element of the service shapes and informs the next stage or need.

The development of a national adoption service enshrines in a practical and achievable manner the Welsh nation's commitment to all of its children irrespective of where they live in Wales. It will be an exemplar of effective collaboration producing the best outcome for our most disadvantaged children.

**Credwch
mewn plant
Believe in
children**



**Barnardo's
Cymru**

**WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO ADOPTION IN WALES**

SUBMITTED BY:

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BARNARDO'S CYMRU EVIDENCE TO INQUIRY ON ADOPTION IN WALES

INTRODUCTION

1. Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's charities working in the country. We currently run 88 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with 20 of the 22 local authorities. Last year, we supported approximately 8,000 children, young people and families in Wales.
2. Barnardo's Cymru services in Wales include: care leavers and youth homelessness projects, young carers' schemes, specialist fostering and adoption schemes, family centres and family support, parenting support, community development projects, short breaks and inclusive services for disabled children and young people, assessment and treatment for young people who exhibit sexually harmful or concerning behaviour and specialist services for children and young people at risk of, or abused through, child sexual exploitation.
3. Every Barnardo's Cymru service is different but each believes that every child and young person deserves the best start in life, no matter who they are, what they have done or what they have been through. We use the knowledge gained from our direct work with children to campaign for better childcare policy and to champion the rights of every child. We believe that with the right help, committed support and a little belief, even the most vulnerable children can turn their lives around.

BARNARDO'S AND ADOPTION

4. Barnardo's has been a registered Adoption Agency since 1947. Our main office for Adoption Agency Registration is in Newcastle and it supports branches across England and Wales. Barnardo's also provides adoption services in Scotland. Barnardo's Cymru currently has two main service bases for its adoption and fostering work in Wales – one in North Wales (Caernarfon) and one in South Wales (Cardiff).
5. The Barnardo's Cymru Adoption Service has been operational in Wales since 1980 and we are currently one of only two voluntary organisations, based in Wales, providing adoption services.
6. The service recruits and assesses prospective adopters and then links with local authorities which need adoptive placements for children who are 'Looked After'. Service managers are actively involved in both the South Wales Adoption Agencies Consortium (SWAAC) and the North Wales Adoption Service (NWAS). We are keen to work as closely as

possible with local authorities to support the best possible match between adoptive families and children needing stable families. In addition, we work closely with BAAF and Adoption UK in Wales and have jointly presented our work at the National Assembly.

7. We work to influence good practice in adoption services and, on occasions, we have seconded staff into a local authority Adoption Service to provide specialist support and advice. Our Adoption Service aims, objectives and service provision can be provided on request.

EVIDENCE TO INQUIRY

8. Barnardo's Cymru welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Committee's Inquiry into Adoption in Wales and we would also be keen to provide oral evidence, if required.

9. We have framed our evidence within the questions set in the Committee letter of 9 December 2011, which invited evidence to the Inquiry. Our responses are informed by our extensive practice experience in adoption across both Wales and the rest of the UK.

Question one: How effectively are prospective parents supported throughout the adoption process, particularly through the assessment and approval process?

10. From the first point of contact with the Barnardo's Cymru Adoption Services, prospective adopters are given positive and accurate information about the service, the assessment process and the expected timescales involved.

11. If the decision is made to invite an application, the support will continue, whereby a social worker is allocated to undertake the assessment through to approval. The social worker is the main point of contact but we provide a 'whole team' approach too, so that office staff and all team members are able to provide back up and support in the context of their particular role.

12. If a decision has to be made to not continue with the assessment (or where approval is turned down), we provide applicants with counselling and support (including honest and accurate information) to help them come to terms with why such a decision has been reached. We are aware of the importance of ensuring that those who may be able to offer an adoptive family are not deterred by an unwelcoming or protracted response. Barnardo's is currently represented on the Ministerial Advisory Group in England where there is particular attention being paid to improving the recruitment and experience of prospective adopters. We were also actively involved in the consultation on the

revisions to the adoption law in Scotland and the subsequent training of staff. Barnardo's is committed to an involvement in evidence from Barnardo's Cymru contribute to policy initiatives that will improve the opportunities for more Looked After Children to achieve stability and positive outcomes.

Question two: What action is needed to encourage prospective parents to pursue adoption as a route?

13. In our view, more people possess the qualities for adopting children than are currently coming forward. Given the number of children who could be adopted, we therefore see it as our duty to cherish prospective adopters and we need to ensure that the system is open and flexible so that a wide range of people feel able to come forward to adopt.

14. We face a shortage in the availability of adopters at a time when the numbers of children needing placements in Wales is on the increase. In particular, we feel there should be a renewed focus on recruiting adopters willing to take older children, sibling groups, BME children and children with behavioural problems.

15. In Wales, we are currently planning a targeted recruitment campaign to raise the profile of adoption in Wales and, more specifically, our Barnardo's Cymru Adoption Service. The issue of delays in the adoption process has plagued the work for far too long and is now embedded in the public consciousness. We have to counter this negativity by promoting the fantastic differences and improvements adoption can make to children's lives – and how adoption can transform children's life chances.

16. We provide prospective adopters with accurate information throughout the assessment process, along with detailed information on the nature of the needs of children and young people who are likely to need adoptive families. We feel it is important to explain to prospective adopters what 'complex needs' may mean in respect of some children and what support we can provide them with in their new parental role. We also use 'real' case studies to enable us to explore issues further and we always accentuate the many positives that stable and secure placements can provide for a child.

17. In our view, making adoptive placements is made difficult by the financial pressures on both statutory and voluntary agencies alike. Barnardo's Cymru believes we need a system which allows for investment to recruit more families and provides options to make them available across Wales without financial constraints.

18. It is important that there is a clearer recognition in local authorities of the true cost of recruiting and placing children for adoption. There is

also increasing research which illustrates the significant social return on investing in the early placement of children for adoption. Evidence from Barnardo's Cymru

Question three: In terms of the support provided for adoptive families, what has been most important in helping to secure the permanence of adoptions and to help ensure the success of the placement?

19. It is the view of Barnardo's Cymru that there should be a much greater emphasis on adoption support. Adoption should not be seen simply as a 'happy ever after' option as, in reality, it is a lifelong process which requires comprehensive and continued support for it to work effectively.

20. The complex needs of many children who are adopted mean that continuing support for the family and child during and after adoption can be vital in keeping the placement going, including therapeutic multi agency services. Children who are adopted have often spent a significant amount of their lives in the care system and will have had the structure of support and monitoring around them that the Looked After Children (LAC) system provides. Their needs still remain high once they are placed in an adoptive family and, sometimes, the adopters can fear that the support levels will drop significantly after the Adoption Order is made – in stark comparison to the support within the LAC system – and that this is detrimental to the child. A further complication is also added when negotiations about post adoption support can then delay the adoption application.

21. In our experience, elements of support which contribute to more secure and successful placements include:

- High quality assessments which include detailed information to make sure that the best possible match is made.
- Access to training and support for adoptive parents.
- A flexible and responsible adoption service which is able to provide quick and meaningful support when required: this support to be ongoing as the child grows up.
- Established links between adoptive families and generic support services (eg health, education, leisure, etc) and with specialist support services (eg CAMHS, post abuse therapeutic services, etc).

Question four: What improvements could be made to the support given to adoptive parents?

22. In our view, local authorities must match the resources available for the child pre adoption to those provided post adoption if, and when, required. Placing a child in an adoptive family should not automatically

be assumed to be a cheaper option than keeping the child in the care system. The assumption, particularly for older children from Barnardo's care, the adopters and child may require ongoing support, training and specialist advice for years after the adoption and that these resources should, therefore, be available throughout the child's life, through to adulthood.

23. It is vital that the ongoing needs of both the child and the adoptive parents are regularly assessed so that they can be met in the most appropriate way. In our experience, there is great variation across Wales in post adoption support in particular, but it cannot be right that the offer of support be determined by a 'postcode lottery', or as a result of 'who shouts the loudest'. We need to provide a greater and more consistent level of support to adoptive families both pre and post adoption.

24. There should be a greater and more coherent level of support provided by specialist services, such as CAMHS, when required, so that the specific needs of adopters and adoptees can be met. More resources are needed for this. In our view, it is no good driving up numbers of adoptions if there is no consistent and appropriate support available when it is needed. Inadequate support can often leave adoptive parents feeling isolated and vulnerable – and this, in turn, can lead to placements breaking down.

Question five: Do the current arrangements for adoption adequately reflect the rights of the child?

25. Barnardo's is of the unequivocal view that the rights of the child should be the primary consideration in any adoption process/proceedings. It follows, therefore, that we see adoption as one part of an overall child protection and care system which needs to be more focussed on the needs of the child and more flexible to work in children's best interests. In our view, only by focussing on children's long term needs and taking a whole system approach will the adoption process improve and for more children.

26. There needs to be a seamless planning process for children's long term permanency which starts at the earliest opportunity – from supporting families to stay together (care may be part of this process) to swift removal of children when it is clear they cannot be adequately cared for.

27. There are undoubtedly times in the adoption process where the rights of birth parents can conflict with the rights of the child – and this most often arises within the court/legal arena. Although the 1989 Children Act states that 'the court shall have regard to the general principle that any delay in determining the question is likely to prejudice

the welfare of the child', it is unfortunately fairly routine to have protracted court cases whereby lengthy delay periods are common. These delays are frequently, and obviously, not in the best interests of the child. Tackling delays in the court process would be a significant step in improving and speeding up the adoption process overall. In all cases, children's best interests must be at the heart of the process and urgent actions is therefore needed to address the causes of delay and ensure that cases are managed effectively. This planning process must be acutely conscious that delay is a safeguarding issue in terms of the developmental wellbeing of the child which has to be regarded as paramount.

28. There are recommendations in the Family Justice Review Final Report (November 2011) in relation to children's rights which Barnardo's Cymru strongly supports. They include:

- 'Children and young people should be given age appropriate information to explain what is happening when they are involved in public and private law cases'.
- 'Children and young people should, as early as possible in a case, be supported to be able to make their views known and older children should be offered a menu of options, to lay out the ways in which they could – if they wish – do this'.

Question six: How effective is the support given to adopted children post adoption, particularly for children who have complex needs?

29. We believe this to be an important area and, in our experience, both the quality and the amount of resources dedicated to post adoption support are extremely variable across Wales. Where the support is good, support is available and there is co-ordinated help from both generic and specialist services built in. All too often, however, resources for post adoption support are limited and the adoptive parents and adopted child are too frequently not getting the help and direction they need.

30. Because of the complex needs of many children who are being adopted and the therapeutic dimensions of the parenting needed to support them, the input and 'buy in' of both mainstream and specialist services is essential if the placement is to succeed. For example, schools need to have an improved understanding into the needs of children who may have experienced trauma/abuse and who have certainly experienced hugely difficult life changes, leading to loss and attachment difficulties. These experiences can have a huge impact on childhood development and academic performance in school.

31. As referred to earlier in this evidence, without post adoption support, there is a risk some adoptive parents are left to wonder when things get difficult. Without providing a reliable and consistent source of support for children with complex needs, we run the very real risk of placement breakdown which further damages the child's life prospects.

Question seven: What action is needed to ensure that delays in the adoption process can be kept to a minimum?

32. The uncertainty and instability caused by delay can have long term and irreversible consequences for a child's development by damaging the ability to form positive attachments. This often results in multiple problems in adolescence and later life. It is essential, therefore, that all agencies/services/courts involved in the adoption process work coherently to keep delays to the absolute minimum.

33. Unfortunately, in our experience, there is considerable local variation impacting upon delays which is why, we believe, a 'whole system' approach needs to be developed. In any given area, a number of factors can lead to delay including:

- Poor decision making which affects the complexities and issues children have when they are identified for adoption, eg delay in removing children from a neglectful environment influences the level of need/support; difficulties placing children with prospective adopters; level of support needed and stability of the adoption.
- Adoption teams becoming involved often only after poor planning and delay has already occurred.
- Demographics (ie size of Looked After Children population in a given area).
- Processes and decision making on adoption panels.
- Processes and decision making in the Family Justice System (see reference to the Family Justice Review below).
- Adoption medicals.
- Duplication of care planning decisions (adoption panels and courts).

34. The final report of the Family Justice Review was issued in November 2011 and Barnardo's supports a number of its recommendations which are designed to tackle delay. These include:

- The proposed time limit of six months for completion of care proceedings. This is a welcome step to address the wholly unacceptable level of delays in the court system which affects the outcomes for vulnerable children. The report states:
'Cases take far too long. With care and supervision cases now taking on average 56 weeks the life chances of already damaged

children are further undermined by the very system that is supposed to protect them’.

Evidence from Barnardo's Cymru

- That ‘Judges must set firm timetables for cases. Timetabling and case management decisions must be child focussed and made with explicit reference to the child’s needs and timescales’.
- The avoidance of duplicated effort regarding scrutiny of permanence plans by both adoption panels and the court. The Review proposes that to avoid delay caused by this duplication ‘the requirements that local authority adoption panels should consider the suitability for adoption of a child whose case is before the court should be removed’. We agree with the Review that ‘The court’s detailed scrutiny of these cases should be sufficient’.
- That delays caused by the calling of expert witnesses be addressed. We agree with the Review that ‘in commissioning an expert’s report, regard must be had to the impact of delay on the welfare of the child’ and that ‘expert testimony should be commissioned only where necessary to resolve the case’. We also agree that ‘the court should seek material from an expert witness only when that information is not available, and cannot properly be made available, from parties already involved in proceedings.

35. In our view, permanency planning systems within local authorities must be robust to ensure that permanence plans are in place at the second review. If the plan involves adoption, then referrals to the adoption service have to be timely at that point. In England, we are currently funded by the DFE to work with a number of local authorities in a diagnostic analysis of their permanency planning and to work with them on a strategy to decrease the delay and increase the percentage of Looked After Children adopted.

36. As some authorities experience significant increases in the numbers of children they are working with, access to adoption medical appointments are becoming harder and waiting lists are in place. Late referrals to the Adoption Agency can often mean that the adoption medical is delayed even further – which, in turn, delays the adoption decision because it cannot be made until a full medical has been undertaken.

37. Barnardo’s Cymru supports the approach of ‘Concurrent Planning’ as a potential means of reducing delay should a child not be able to stay with its birth family. However, we believe there should be clearer definition and guidance on Concurrent Planning which would need to explain the difference between parallel/twin tracking and concurrent placements. Evaluation of Concurrent Planning services has found that there is confusion amongst social workers about what Concurrent Planning means and how it operates. We would, therefore, like to see strong leadership and commitment in local authority senior management to promoting the

use of Concurrent Planning and a greater understanding of the process within social work teams, local authority legal departments, Barnardo's and the courts. In England, we are currently developing a concurrent placement service in one of our adoption branches and are working closely with Coram, the voluntary agency, with 15 years' experience of such placements. We then intend to share the learning from this development across all our UK Adoption Services.

Question eight: What action is needed to increase the number of successful outcomes once children are considered for adoption?

38. A combination of all of the factors we have already referenced earlier. We would repeat our view that a whole system approach is needed to improve the adoption process which includes early and clear decision making on the need to remove children from their birth parents and be placed for adoption; the need to apply Concurrent Planning to reduce delay; the need for efficient adoption panels; the need to reduce delays in the family justice system and the need to provide consistent and comprehensive support to adoptive families and adopted children both during and after the adoption process.

39. In particular, Barnardo's Cymru is aware of the evidence that early adoption provides the best possible outcomes for children and, for very young children, it should be identified early and decisive action should be taken. We acknowledge that there are clearly resource implications when increasing the rate of adoptions (particularly with regards to levels of support). However, we believe attention should be given to the potential cost benefit of increasing adoptions. Early adoption is a cost effective option compared to frequent and unstable placements and demand on other services during a lifetime in care.

40. Barnardo's Cymru offers adoption placements for those children and young people who are considered 'difficult to place'. We would like to see greater joint working between local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies so that we can be consulted early in the adoption process to help advise on the likelihood of placing a child with us and on agreeing timescales, etc. We would also be keen to be involved at an early stage in child specific recruitment and family preparation.

Question nine: How effective has the Welsh Government been at monitoring adoptions and tracking the progress for the child and parents?

41. In our view, there is a danger that monitoring is based around numbers and statistics and that these do not take into account the 'real life' outcomes for adoption. Adoption is a lifelong process and does not end once a child is adopted. More qualitative measures should therefore

be developed to accurately reflect the adoptive experience for both adoptive parents and adopted children.

42. We also believe there should be greater analysis and scrutiny of the number and nature of adoption breakdowns in Wales – why they happen and how they could be prevented. If we do not learn from these, then we run the risk of increased numbers of breakdowns as the numbers of adoptions increase.

Question ten: Do you have any specific examples of good practice in the delivery of adoption services, and/or examples of where action is needed to remove barriers to adoption?

43. Barnardo's Cymru's Adoption Service has a successful record in undertaking specific recruitment of adopters for Muslim children, adoptions of children with same sex couples and adoption with single applicants. We can provide further written information (or provide examples via oral evidence) if required by the Committee.

44. In addition to the above, our Adoption Service:

- Can offer prospective applicants information and assessments through the medium of Welsh.
- Provides excellent support to our carers (as confirmed in our CSSIW inspection reports).
- Provides excellent post adoption support to families and children (including life-story work and providing information on the Barnardo's ESCAPE programme which supports parents of teenagers).
- Provides an 'open-door' policy which adopters tell us they really value.

The creation of a National Adoption Agency for Wales

45. Barnardo's Cymru cautiously welcomes the Welsh Government's National Adoption Agency for Wales, but obviously we await the detail with interest. We would particularly want this new approach to be mindful of the importance of not losing the expertise and experience that exists across the voluntary sector. We would see the potential positives as including:

- An opportunity to harmonise practice across Wales and ensure that services for adopters are available no matter where they live. (At the moment access to CAMHS, etc, can depend very much on where you live – but one agency should be able to ensure that all adopters in Wales have the same access to the same level of services and support).

- An improved process which would enable children to be matched with the best possible adoptive families. Evidence from Barnado's Cymru
- A better co-ordinated approach to the provision of post adoptive support (both in range and availability).
- An increased level of resourcing to provide the necessary support and status to this vital area of social work.
- An opportunity to provide more consistent processes and improved standards of practice across Wales.

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**SUPPLEMENTARY EVIDENCE TO THE CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE'S INQUIRY
INTO ADOPTION IN WALES**

**THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A
NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE**

SUBMITTED BY:

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Introduction

Barnardo's Cymru broadly welcomes the Welsh Government's proposal to establish a National Adoption Service for Wales. We recognise that there are clearly elements of the current adoption system which need substantial improvement and that, when these are considered alongside the findings of the Family Justice Review, there is now a compelling case for change. We, therefore, support the Welsh Government's view that the proposed changes and the introduction of a Welsh Adoption Service would lead to improved outcomes for adopted children and young people.

However, whilst supporting much of the Government's proposal, as a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) we are concerned about the lack of recognition and value given in the Social Services Bill to the voluntary sector's long-standing experience and expertise in providing and supporting successful adoptions in Wales. Barnardo's Cymru has been providing adoptions in Wales for over thirty years and, as outlined in the body of our main submission to the Committee, we have expertise which brings clear added value to such areas as adoption placements for children with complex needs, for children from specific religious and ethnic backgrounds and post adoption support.

Although we acknowledge that the great bulk of adoption work in Wales is undertaken by local authorities, we believe that VAAs, such as Barnardo's, offer a range of additional services which contribute important components to the overall adoption picture in Wales and we would, therefore, hope to see a much greater acknowledgement of the role and value of agencies, such as ours, incorporated into the more detailed drafting of the Bill in the autumn and via any subsequent regulations.

Responses to specific points in Section 6.1 of the Bill

- **6.1.2:** We would see VAAs, such as Barnardo's Cymru Adoption Service, as being very much a part of the proposed arrangement for a collaboration of services in a wider 'National Adoption body'.
- **6.1.3:** Like the Welsh Government, we are also looking to 'act sooner, more efficiently and effectively to find permanency' and, to this end, we have established a 'family finding' service that covers the whole of Wales and which has resulted in improved target times for linking and matching placements. We would be keen to further develop these links with local authorities to support this process in any new Wales-wide adoption arrangements.

- **6.1.4:** We would be fully supportive of the 'legislative changes arising from the Family Justice Review' which will seek to introduce 'specific timetables for cases and the removal of some panels'.
- **6.1.5:** Bucking the trend alluded to in this section, we have seen an actual increase in the number of enquiries we have had from prospective adopters over the last six months. This may be a reflection of some applicants preferring to work with a voluntary as opposed to a statutory adoption agency. We often have our history and reputation quoted to us as a factor in prospective adopters choosing to come to us.
- We agree with the Government's view that post adoption services 'are patchy throughout Wales' and we are pleased that this area of service deficit has been acknowledged. This has been a concern of ours for some time as, for a number of years, we have found it extremely difficult to access local authority funding for post adoption support – despite the obvious correlation between such support and placement stability. Barnardo's Cymru would be keen, therefore, to work in partnership with other agencies to pool resources so as to improve the post adoption support made available to families. The recently BAAF formed Wales Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership (of which we are a member VAA) will be a vehicle for promoting the profile of VAAs in Wales and should also provide opportunities for cross agency working in the future.
- **6.1.6:** The Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership will be well placed to offer a wide range of adoption services in a coordinated way to contribute to the meeting of the responsibilities of the National Adoption Service proposed in this section.
- **6.1.7:** We agree with the Welsh Government's proposal that each local authority would continue to be an adoption agency etc, in the new arrangements.
- **6.1.8:** We would hope to see greater recognition of VAAs in the detail of regulations and a clear role we can play in contributing to the new arrangements.
- **6.1.9:** Again, we would wish to see explicit reference to the role and function of VAAs under the National Adoption Service.
- **6.1.10:** We have very experienced adoption staff within the Barnardo's Cymru Adoption Service and we welcome the view that experienced practitioners 'will be the backbone of the new service', as this applies equally to our staff as it does to those of local authorities.

- **6.1.12:** We very much welcome the reference in this section to 'third sector agencies' having a 'key role in supporting the national aim through improved partnership with local government in the delivery of adoption and adoption support services'. We would also hope that what we can offer as a collective of VAAs would merit us having a strategic position within the National Adoption Service and not just be kept on the periphery waiting for our services to be commissioned. We believe our experience and expertise warrants this.
- **6.1.13:** Our view is that the voluntary sector brings particular experience in areas such as marketing, family finding, lifelong support, etc, which will only serve to increase the overall robustness of placements and subsequently positive outcomes for children. These are examples of the added value VAAs bring to adoption.

Responses to consultation questions

88. Do you agree the functions that a National Adoption Service will be responsible for, as set out in paragraph bb?

Yes, we agree with these functions but, again, we would like to see much greater recognition of the role played and the expertise provided by the voluntary sector via the Voluntary Adoption Agencies in Wales. In our view, the VAAs can make a significant contribution to ensuring the new arrangements are a success but we need to be involved throughout in the more detailed planning for the National Adoption Service.

In addition to bringing considerable experience in the field of adoption, the Barnardo's Cymru Adoption Service is also independent of placing authorities and this is often seen as a positive by potential adopters. We are told by adoptive parents that they find it easy to engage with us and that our services are accessible and welcoming. Because of the extensive range and number of Barnardo's Cymru services operating in many communities across Wales (currently 90+ services in total), we are very well placed to provide an easy-to-find 'front door' for both recruitment and adoption support. We are also very experienced at working across geographical and professional boundaries – and our expertise in family support is both respected and well regarded.

Therefore, given the contribution Barnardo's Cymru (and other VAAs) currently make to the adoption system in Wales, we would hope to be involved and included in any future strategic planning for the National Adoption Service so that we can play our part in delivering better outcomes for the children and young people who need to be placed with adoptive families.

89. Do you suggest any additional functions that should be included?

If the new arrangements lead to the development of a National Adoption Register for Wales, consideration would then need to be given to what would be the most appropriate and effective mechanisms to make it work. A number of areas would need to be addressed, for example:

- How would such a register operate across the current consortia arrangements we have in Wales?
- What systems would need to be developed to ensure the best matching and linking of children and young people to adoptive families?
- How would we ensure that adoption agencies (both local authority and VAA) do not just place with their own carers but, instead, ensure that the best possible match is pursued?
- How will adoption fees be set and paid?

Whilst we do not see these as insurmountable problems, we do believe careful thought and consideration needs to be given to them if we are to make sure that the changes we make, to what is a complex system, will result in the improvements we all seek.

90. Are there any other barriers to the current arrangements that should be considered in the development of the Social Services (Wales) Bill?

Again, as alluded to earlier in this response, we would like to see a much greater recognition of the role, strength and range of functions already provided by current VAAs in Wales and a clear acknowledgement of the role organisations, such as Barnardo's Cymru, can play in the developments and delivery of a National Adoption Agency.

91. Do you have any other comments that you wish to make about our proposals for a National Adoption Service?

In addition to our comments above, we would also propose that consideration is given to the provision of support to birth relatives and adopted adults, along with reunion and intermediary work.

Conclusion

- Barnardo's Cymru acknowledges the need and momentum for change in the delivery of adoption and supports the Welsh Government's proposal for a National Adoption Service. As outlined in our evidence to the Children and Young People Committee, we believe this has the potential to lead to:

- a harmonisation of adoption practice across Wales
 - an improved process which will enable children and young people to be matched with the best possible adoptive families
 - an improved and coordinated approach to the provision of post adoptive support (both in range and availability)
 - an increased level of resourcing to provide the necessary support and status to this vital area of social work
 - more consistent processes and improved standards of practice across Wales.
- We believe adoption reform should progress in tandem with the implementation of the Family Justice Review's recommendations.
 - Reform of the adoption process in Wales should take into account the role currently played by VAAs and the 'additionality' voluntary organisations, such as Barnardo's Cymru, bring to the delivery of adoption services. To ensure our adoption expertise is acknowledged and built upon, we believe VAAs should be offered a strategic position within any reform planning processes.

Andy James
Assistant Director, Policy
Barnardo's Cymru
8 May 2012

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**Children and Young People Committee
Inquiry into Adoption in Wales**

**Additional information requested of
Barnardo's Cymru following
oral evidence session of
23rd May 2012**

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A. ADOPTION BREAKDOWN

1. You both say that we need better monitoring of the rates of adoption breakdown. How can we better record and share information on the causes?

In our view, it is essential that any data that is collected via improved monitoring is accurate and consistent and that all agencies involved need to be clear in what they are recording and why. It is not just the recording of breakdown numbers that are important but we need to have a clear record as to the reasons for the breakdown, as this is how we learn what works and what doesn't (eg was adoption the right placement choice for the child?) To improve our understanding of placement breakdowns, factors which could be monitored/recorded could include age at time of placement; pre-placement history (ie previous number of moves/breakdowns); length of time waiting for placement; level of support available and utilised during placement etc. It would also be important to record whether the placement was within the agency or inter agency.

2. Should the Welsh Government commission research on adoption disruption rates in Wales?

Yes. Barnardo's Cymru would support such a proposal if this is designed to usefully inform us about disruption/breakdown characteristics from which policy and practice can be improved. The research would, therefore, need to look beyond just the adoption disruption rates and focus on the reasons for, and causes of, placement breakdowns.

It may be of interest to the Committee that renowned adoption expert, Dr Julie Selwyn (Director of the Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies at Bristol University) is currently conducting a large scale piece of retrospective research on placement disruption. When she completes the work, it is likely that many of her findings will be transferable to the Welsh context.

B. WELSH GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS FOR A NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE

1. What are your main concerns, if any, about the Welsh Government proposals for a National Adoption Service?

Please see our written submission for more detailed information on our view of a National Adoption Service (NAS) for Wales.

We are generally supportive of the proposal but our overriding concern is that Voluntary Adoption Agencies, such as Barnardo's Cymru, could be marginalised under any new arrangements and that the valuable role we play in providing quality adoption placements could be minimised or sidetracked into peripheral areas.

Barnardo's Cymru is an agency with a wealth of adoption experience and we currently provide the full range of services offered by local authorities apart from having responsibility for pre-placements for the looked after child. Although, as we are also a fostering agency, we are able to offer this and are very keen to develop concurrent planning and placement work, building on our expertise in independent assessment work with families and in foster care. We want to continue to offer our services, as we feel we add to the range of choice in placements and thereby add to the diverse pool of adopters who want to offer adoptive placements for those children in Wales who need them.

We are very happy to work in partnership with Welsh Local Authorities (we already do this successfully via 88 projects in our overall portfolio of children's services across Wales) as long as we feel there is a 'level playing field' (ie if we recruit and assess adopters, we would want to ensure that their skills and strengths are the basis of a successful match to meet the needs of any child or sibling group rather than there being the possibility of local authorities preferring in-house or inter-local authority placements because they are perceived to be cheaper or 'home-grown').

Selwyn and Sempik ('Recruiting Adoptive Families: the cost of family finding and the failure of the inter agency fee', British Journal of Social Work, June 2010) found that one possible factor in the decline in adoption numbers in England was the reluctance of local authorities to use adopters approved by Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) and this may have led to children not being placed.

'There is a perception that VAA adopters are expensive because a high inter agency fee is charged. Meanwhile many VAA adopters are waiting for a placement'.

The aim of the study was to consider whether the inter agency fee was a good reflection of the expenditure incurred by local authorities and VAAs and Selwyn and Sempik examined the adoption team accounts of ten local authorities and 17 VAAs. They found that average expenditure was similar, as were overhead rates. However, this expenditure was 'substantially more than the inter agency fee', thereby evidencing that the fee had 'failed in its

purpose to encourage inter agency co-operation and provide full cost recovery’.

We are continuing to strengthen our relationships with local authority adoption services in Wales and would, therefore, welcome the opportunity to work even more closely with them in helping to deliver a NAS. We would wish to contribute to any system that improves the quality of the adoption experience for both prospective adopters and the children and young people themselves.

2. What implications will the creation of a National Adoption Service have for your organisation?

Please see our written submission for our views on the proposed NAS. Please also see above response to Question 1.

We would wish to reiterate that, in our view, the NAS has the potential to significantly improve the adoption process in Wales. This would include improved timeliness, planning and permanency in addition to more co-ordinated placement provision. We would, therefore, see the setting up of a NAS for Wales as a positive move.

As outlined above, we would wish to be part of any improved adoption service in Wales but we would also want to ensure that our extensive adoption experience is not lost within any new arrangements and that the status of Barnardo’s Cymru as an Adoption Agency is fully recognised and accommodated within the new NAS.

3. St David’s say that the creation of a National Adoption Service will lead to a ‘marked increase in the number of children being referred’. What evidence is there to support this view?

We feel this question has probably arisen from the written evidence provided by St David’s and we are unsure as to what evidence (if any) there is for a projected increase. This question, therefore, is probably better for St David’s to respond to rather than us.

The important element would be a requirement for local authorities to refer all children needing placement in a timely way and for all agencies to make families available. Under the current system, children may remain waiting ‘in house’ while a voluntary agency may have a potentially suitable family.

C. CONCURRENT PLANNING

We have been requested to provide the Committee with some information about concurrent planning.

Concurrent planning is a well established process which can help provide early stability for children who may be adopted. Where local authorities use this approach, prospective adopters who are also approved foster carers, care for the child from soon after the child enters care, and work with the local authority to see if a child can return home, assessing the birth parents' capacity to care for the child and maintaining contact. Concurrent planning has been introduced in several London authorities including Harrow, Islington and Camden in partnership with Coram. Almost all concurrent planning placements have resulted in the baby being adopted by the carers with whom they have lived, in most cases, from just a few weeks old. Concurrent planning means that children get a stable loving home as early as possible and that the risks of disruption are taken by adults rather than children.

We would like the principles behind concurrent planning to be used more widely and for children as well as infants. Whilst there can be no question of pre-empting a court decision, we would like to see local authorities working with family finding teams as early as possible to find potential permanent carers for children, and children with families who may, if the court agrees, go on to adopt them.

Please see Appendix 1 for an outline of a potential model for a Barnardo's Cymru concurrent planning service.

Please see the attachment with this document for an information leaflet for a concurrent planning service run by Barnardo's in the North East of England.

BARNARDO'S CYMRU ADOPTION AND FOSTERING SERVICE

Concurrent planning – potential models of service

The UK Government has highlighted the need for tackling delay for children within the care system who need adoptive placements and is encouraging local authorities to increase the use of concurrent planning either in-house or commissioned from an adoption agency. This service could be provided at a realistic cost to the local authority.

Barnardo's, as a national adoption agency delivering local services across the UK, is committed more than ever to work with local authorities to address the issue of delay. The importance of placing children at the earliest opportunity is well researched if children are to have a chance of forming secure relationships and attachments. Concurrent planning can clearly meet the needs of very young children, but can also be developed to offer similar positive opportunities to older children and disabled children.

Such is our commitment to working with local authorities to address the issue of delay, we would be very interested to work in partnership with local authorities in providing a range of services which will assist in progressing the plans for children. We believe this can be achieved through concurrent planning.

This is a new opportunity for us in Wales that enables us to draw on the learning and experience of Coram, which currently operates a concurrent planning project, and our Barnardo's colleagues in the North East of England who are also setting up such a service. By working in partnership with local authorities and pooling our collective experience, we believe we can achieve a range of streamlined services, which will help avoid delay and provide the best outcomes for the child.

The core model can operate with individual local authorities under the auspices of the proposed new structure for a Welsh National Adoption Service. It can also be adapted to meet changing local need.

Barnardo's Cymru - Potential concurrent planning project

We could offer three elements to reduce delay that can be developed in partnership with local authorities in Wales:

- 1. Provision of concurrent carers:** Carers are trained, assessed and supported by Barnardo's Cymru during the placement. This will continue should the child be rehabilitated with birth parents or proceed to adoption.
- 2. Parenting assessment:** We will provide qualified and experienced workers to undertake an assessment of the parents placed with concurrent carers, which will be used to progress the plan for the child through court. This could be independent of the local authority.
- 3. Facilitate contact:** Contact will be undertaken at an appropriate venue, facilitated and supervised by contact workers. Observations will be recorded to inform the assessment and the assessor undertaking the parenting work will attend as appropriate.

Outcomes and Benefits

- Looked after children will be afforded the best possible chance to form settled and secure relationships and not experience sequential placements.
- Local authorities will be able to address the issue of delay in a cost effective way.
- Local authorities will be working in partnership with a credible and highly regarded children's charity which has a strong campaigning and influencing reputation.

Challenges

- There would be a number of challenges to overcome to establish an effective service but these could be overcome by joint planning and interagency co-operation.



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Children and Young People Committee

CYP(4)-15-12 Paper 3

Mike Davies

Re: Invitation to give evidence to the Children and Young People Committee

Introduction

The basis for this short paper is my experience of working with adoption agencies and families in a post-adoption context and as an independent expert in legal proceedings during the last 10 years. In that time I have seen many families across South, Mid and West Wales where the age of the adopted child ranges from infancy to 17 years of age. My involvement ranges from providing consultation to agencies, and or families; training on attachment to professionals and carers; or direct work with children and families. Because I am independent and therefore incur cost I am often referred to as a last resort. I therefore see the cases that often have greater complexity where child and family difficulties have been compounded by:

- An inability on the part of professionals to understand the nature of attachment problems of maltreated children and the consequences for the child and adoptive family
- Limited or sometimes very poor post-adoption support
- No meaningful therapeutic support

Adoptive parents I see are often exasperated with the lack of timely support and intervention and desperate to understand their circumstances, especially their child.

Provision of specialist (post-adoptive) CAMHS and specialist therapeutic services

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CAMHS varies across Wales in terms of resources and provision but to my knowledge there is no special post-adoptive service. Moreover, where referrals are made they have very little priority and spend long periods on waiting lists. Arguably there is little interest in this work or attachment -based difficulties generally due to the predominant medical model adhered too in most CAMHS. Increasingly, from my experience, because CAMHS is occupied with other client groups, it does not necessarily have the expertise (let alone the inclination or resources) to provide the quality of assessment and intervention required especially in the more complex cases.

Outside of CAMHS there are some independent practitioners such as myself who may be accessible but this naturally involves cost to the local authority or families themselves. At present there is little to no opportunity for adoptive families to access timely consultation, assessment and or intervention for their child and family across Wales. Sometimes at a very much later stage some families access some help serendipitously while there are many examples tragically - of adoption breakdown. I have been involved in several cases where the adoption has broken down in weeks or months because the adopters are completely unable to cope because of the child's severe attachment problems.

We need specialist services for the whole range of adopters some of which will have relatively mild problems of adjustment, then across the continuum to those children with severe attachment problems. Some families will require just advice or relatively low level support. Others will need to access more expertise and consultative services that enable them to understand the nature of the child's (attachment) problems and how best to adjust to meet their needs.

Some families at the more extreme end, that have a child who perhaps should not have been placed for adoption in the first place, need a combination of interventions and high levels of expertise: Including consultation, assessment, as well as therapeutic support.

Range of attachment difficulties

Attachment problems in 'looked after children' are often a result of poor nurturing, abuse and neglect and other forms of maltreatment during early years. The nature, severity and extent of the problems relate to the child's formative experiences and how well its needs are met once it is made safe with alternative carers. There appears to be an assumption in social work agencies that younger children i.e. babies, infants, toddlers and even young children - who have suffered considerable adversity, can by virtue of the fact that they are still very young, have their needs best met in an adoptive family. I challenge this view and am very concerned about the lack of screening of the child's potential (attachment) problems prior to deciding its future placement. Most adopters have very limited experience of caring for ordinary children never mind children with severe attachment problems who will challenge the skills and expertise of the most experienced foster carers.

Attachment problems range from mild anxiety and separation problems to severe challenging behaviours, as well as an absence of empathy and severe temper outbursts. Some children will be unable to be close and relational in the usual way preferring to be 'avoidant'- almost as if they are a lodger. Others will be very attention seeking (ambivalent) oscillating between closeness and distance in a way that is very demanding and wearing on the relationship between the child and parent. Some children will be controlling and coercive in their social behaviour and only able to relate with peers who are much younger than themselves.

The more severely affected child has significant innate developmental damage (disorganised attachment) as a result of severe early life adversity. Arguable some of these children, as a result of neuro-developmental problems - originating in the first 2 years of life, will have additional significant difficulties with their psychological functioning in the long term. Of concern here is the child's potential to develop empathy and be relational in the usual way. Some of these children can appear superficially to be fine but in the context of their day to day care the experience for their families is very different; the worst of attachment behaviour is manifested in their routine care and with whom the child is closest. As the child grows and matures there are frequently difficulties in school with their ability to concentrate, learn, behave and relate to peers.

Summary

During the last decade or so many children who may have previously remained in foster care, have been placed for adoption. Many agencies will see this as a success as it aims to reduce its' 'looked after child' population and associated costs. Unfortunately much of the burden of caring for some of these children has fallen on adoptive families who have not been provided with the consultation, assessment and therapeutic support they have often required. This has resulted in a great deal of stress and unhappiness for many of these families as well as inevitable placement breakdowns.

I hope an outcome of this inquiry will be the provision of resources so that specialist services can be developed. I would be very concerned at this stage about locating these services in CAMHS unless there was some autonomy for the new service and ring-fencing of resources. The prevailing medical model and lack of current expertise in this area in CAMHS will prevent the families getting the best out of any resources that may be allocated. In fact there is a real danger any new resources may be swallowed up in developing CAMHS rather than benefitting families. If new resources are allocated I strongly recommend that attention is paid to the development of expertise on attachment issues amongst the professional community as well as therapeutic practice in this highly neglected area of work.



Dr Mike Davies
Consultant Psychotherapist

Short Biography: *Dr Mike Davies, Consultant Psychotherapist and Trainer.*

Mike is a registered UKCP Psychotherapist who for the last 11 years has worked as an Independent Consultant and Trainer specializing in child mental health and Child Care matters. He worked in CAMHS for more than twenty five years as a clinician and Operational Manager where he was instrumental in setting up specialist services for abused children and refugee families. He has published articles on subjects such as child abuse, refugee mental health, and 'looked after children,' and has contributed to numerous conferences and training initiatives. He has been producing independent assessments and 'expert opinion' for Courts for nearly 20 years and in over 400 cases. He is consultant to several fostering and adoption agencies where he runs surgeries for carers as well as providing assessments and direct work in a post-adoption context. His predominant clinical interest is in the use of attachment in therapeutic work with maltreated and or traumatized children and their families/carers. He is currently developing a new counselling service for the University of Wales in Newport where he is the clinical lead.

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Response to the Children and Young People Committee: Inquiry into Adoption and CAMHS

The term Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is taken to mean all of the services provided by all sectors that impinge on the mental well-being, mental health, mental health problems and mental disorders of children and young people including Local Authority, Education, Health and the Voluntary Sector. Commonly, the term CAMHS is taken more narrowly to imply those specialist services provided, mainly but by no means exclusively, by the NHS. The term '**Specialist CAMHS**' as shorthand to depict those services that have a particular role and expertise relating to child and adolescent mental health.

Looked after and adopted children have the same access to Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) as any other child who presents with a disorder that falls under the remit of a CAMH service.

In the context of the assessment and treatment of psychiatric and neuro-developmental disorder, the Royal College of Psychiatrists identify the following as being the remit of specialist tier 2/3/4 CAMHS:

- psychosis
- depressive disorders
- attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- autistic-spectrum disorders
- Tourette's syndrome and complex tic disorders.
- self-harm and suicide attempts
- eating disorders
- obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- phobias and anxiety disorders
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- mental health problems secondary to abusive experiences
- mental health problems associated with physical health problems and
- somatoform disorders
- behavioural challenges associated with a learning disability

In addition to this, Primary Mental Health Workers can be contacted by professionals from any agency/background who have a concern about a child's emotional, behavioural or mental health issue. Parents/carers who have a concern can also contact the service for brief advice/consultation.

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The value base of Specialist CAMHS is family oriented: this enables families and carers to be partners in the treatment and care of their children and young people. In addition to providing treatment and care directly to the children and young people, a key objective of the service is to help parents/carers better understand, manage and care for children when they have mental health or psychological problems.

The ethos of such a family oriented service should be based upon a commitment to achieve good working relationships with all relevant individuals and agencies involved in the in the care and treatment of an individual.

There is an acknowledgement that the Specialist CAMH services are not uniform across Wales. In particular, the input into the CAMHS teams provided by social services has gradually been withdrawn over the past 5 years. This has left a gap for the NHS that has affected the dedicated provision to adopted and looked after children.

Some Children & Young People Partnership plans have developed dedicated posts to meet the attachment needs of children under the care of the local authority to try and bridge this gap. They have not chosen to widen the remit to include adopted children at this moment although the individuals are sometimes included in training and preparation for prospective adopters.

In response to the statement that: *'some parents have also suggested that some CAMHS staff are not 'adoption aware' - and have a limited understanding of the behavioural difficulties and conduct disorders associated with the early experiences of children who later go on to be adopted.'* All senior staff in a specialist CAMH service are highly trained professionals who are experienced in dealing with children and young people who are both adopted or looked after. Competency in such is required by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Each service employs Child psychotherapists within the CAMHS teams who provide therapy around attachment disorder, a long term therapy. However the evidence base for effectiveness is mixed.

Specialist NHS CAMH services assess each child on their need and try and ensure equity of access for all including children in special circumstances such as those in those in the youth justice system, looked after and adopted children, learning disabled and those whose parents have mental health problems.