

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Gwaith dilynol ar Ymchwiliad y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i Wasanaethau Mabwysiadu yng Nghymru | Follow-up to Children, Young People and Education Committee's Inquiry into Adoption Services in Wales

AS 09

Ymateb gan : Gwasanaeth Diogelu Plant, Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru

Response from : Safeguarding Children Service, Public Health Wales

Overview Question

What are your views in the Welsh Government's progress in respect of the 16 recommendations and the 25 'detailed actions' set out on pages 5-11 of the [Committee's report](#).

The National Adoption Service for Wales has been established. It was launched on November 5th 2014 and becoming fully operational in January 2015.

The National Adoption Service is delivered locally, regionally and nationally. The 22 local authorities remain responsible for care planning for children. The 5 Regional collaboratives provide adoption services.

The aims of the national Adoption Service is set out in the Directions Powers and specify the following:

- the consistent delivery of high quality adoption services throughout Wales;
- keeping delay to a minimum in the placement of children for adoption;
- ensuring the widest choice possible of placements for adoption for children;
- ensuring that high quality and timely training and assessment for prospective adopters is consistently available;
- improving the process of matching children with prospective adopters;
- the streamlining of adoption processes and ensuring improved liaison between social workers involved in adoption cases;
- keeping adoption breakdown to a minimum by the provision of comprehensive adoption support services according to assessed need; and
- collaborative working between local authorities, registered adoption societies, NHS Trusts and education services.

Strong links have been developed with health services in Wales through the Designated Doctor for Safeguarding/Looked after Children, Public Health Wales. Information about

the National Adoption service and the implications for the role of the Medical Adviser in adoption has been cascaded to the Health Boards through their Medical Directors and Nurse Directors. Workshops with Medical Advisers in Wales have been facilitated and professionally agreed quality standards and process pathways have been developed to ensure consistency and good practice. This work is ongoing.

Question 1

What are your views on the recruitment, assessment and preparation of adopter parents?

The development of the National Adoption Service has led to improvements in consistency and a more equitable service as recruitment, assessment and preparation of adoptive parents is undertaken by one of the five regional adoption collaborative or two Voluntary Adoption Agencies that now operate in Wales.

Adopter training is now delivered collaboratively. Adopters can access the National adoption Service website for advice and information and this links to the relevant regional or voluntary adoption service should they be interested and wish to enquire further. The website has information and video clips of adopters.

Medical Advisers in Adoption in Wales have developed professionally agreed quality standards around processes and advice given to Adoption collaboratives and Voluntary Adoption agencies regarding the health of prospective adoptive parents.

How could this be improved?

By the development of a strategy targeting recruitment of adopters for harder to place children, particularly sibling groups and older children. This will need additionally resources to be effective.

Question 2

What is your experience of and view of the matching process and support for the transition?

The local authority retains responsibility for identifying and meeting the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan while the responsibility for finding an adoptive family falls within the remit of the regional adoption services.

The Designated Doctor for Safeguarding Children/ LAC from the Safeguarding Children Service, Public Health Wales is a member of the National Adoption service Advisory Group and leads on continued engagement with Medical Advisers in Adoption across Wales.

It is important for effective family finding that comprehensive health information on the child and birth family are available. Early referral to the Medical Adviser in Adoption of children for whom adoption is the plan is essential to allow sufficient time to collate all available health information. Medical Advisers in Wales have been involved in National discussions and work with Regional Adoption Collaboratives around processes and pathways.

Counselling of birth parents provides the best opportunity for the social worker to assist birth parents in completing a health report. Sufficient resources need to be made available for this to happen, particularly with the tighter timescales around care proceedings. The Medical Adviser's interpretation of this information is essential for appropriate matching for the child.

The Wales Adoption Register ensures that placement options within Wales are considered in a timely way before pursuing options in other areas. However access to adopters further afield should be available to prevent delays in placing children if a match is not readily available through the Wales Adoption Register.

Transition into the adoptive home requires joint working between children's social workers and adoption agencies particularly through the placement and settling in period. Continued involvement with the Medical Adviser in Adoption who can review the child's health following placement and before adoption order will ensure the child's health needs are addressed and met and therefore aid transition. This is an essential part of adoption support.

Unfortunately, existing Regulations mean these children are no longer Looked after and there is no requirement for a health review. Medical Advisers in Wales have introduced a quality standard to address this. It would be helpful if the Regulations and Code of Practice in relation to Part 6 of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act and accompanying guidance address this omission as per consultation feed back and adoption research.

How could this be improved?

Clarify/ amend Regulations as above. Consider evidence from research in further service developments. Ensure processes are developed with health partners.

Question 3

Do you think there is sufficient information and support for children and young people including access to quality life-story work?

Improvement is needed in relation to life journey materials and the National Adoption Service is currently undertaking further analysis of this.

How could this be improved?

By listening to adopted children and young people to better develop services for them.

Question 4

What post-adoption support for children, young people and families (including from social services, education, health and mental health services) is available and what more could be done in this area?

Adoption support for all those involved – adopted people, adoptive parents and birth parents has always been inconsistent. Lack of resources in this area needs addressing.

Developing adoption support services is a challenge and the development of the National Adoption Service is an important step in beginning to address this challenge.

The National Adoption Service has developed a strategy which provides a framework for the development of a three tier service to adopters across Wales, consisting of universal services, targeted services and specialist services.

Many children placed for adoption have been exposed to substances and/or have had damaging early life experiences. They are therefore likely to need specialist services in the future.

Raising awareness of adoption, the backgrounds of the children and the lifelong implications is essential within the health and education sectors so that services can be developed and accessed, and these families needs can be addressed.

How could this be improved?

Quality services responding to attachment issues, neurological impairment and emotional difficulties need to be available to all to all looked after children, including those placed for adoption.

The views and experiences of adopted children and adults, adoptive parents and birth parents should inform service developments.

Health information can often be lost following adoption, An important advance would be retention of the NHS number post adoption.

Question 5

Are there any other issues you wish to draw to the Committee's attention?

The development of the National Adoption Service through multi agency collaboration has resulted in considerable change, development and improvement over the last few years.

A significant amount of work has been done across all areas with full multi-agency engagement. This is continuing with the professional guidance from the NAS Advisory Group. Health is represented on this Group by the Designated Doctor for Safeguarding / Looked after Children, Safeguarding Children Service, Public Health Wales. There is also representation from Medical Advisers in adoption.