



HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE & WELL-BEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 9TH FEBRUARY 2016

SUBJECT: SOUTH EAST WALES ADOPTION SERVICE – SEWAS (FOR INFORMATION)

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the progress and positive performance of the South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) since it was established as part of the National Adoption Service in April 2014.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Adoption plays a critical role in the broader context of planning placements and permanence for children and as part of an integrated system of services for meeting their needs and promoting their well-being. Adoption Services as a whole are complex, provided to a wide range of service users from very young children who are being placed for adoption to older adults who are seeking to be re-united with their birth families.
- 2.2 There is a clear requirement that children in care must have plans for permanence in place which consider the full range of permanence options and which are put into effect with appropriate urgency.
- 2.3 Members are fully aware that the development of a National Adoption Service underpinned by regional service delivery is a key policy strand contained within the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act.
- 2.4 Members will also be aware that the South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) covering the five Gwent Local Authorities of Blaenau-Gwent, Monmouthshire, Newport, Torfaen and Caerphilly was established and became fully operational on 1st April 2014. The service is managed by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and is located in Mamhilad.

3. THE REPORT

3.1 National Adoption Service

- 3.1.1 As a reminder for Members, the National Adoption Service is hosted by Cardiff City Council and is responsible for:

- Establishment of a National Board.
- Monitoring the delivery of services in accordance with the national performance framework.
- Producing an Annual Report and action plan.

- Developing a national marketing and awareness raising strategy.
- Providing a single point of contact for anyone seeking information about adoption.
- Providing a database of information.
- Developing and maintaining a National Adoption Register.
- Co-ordination of Adoption Panels, Panel Members, Pre-Approval Training, Post Adoption Support Services and provision of the Independent Review Determination Service.
- Acting as a Centre of Excellence for Adoption in Wales.

3.2 Regional Adoption Service – SEWAS

3.2.1 SEWAS is responsible for the delivery of the following functions:

- Ensuring compliance with legislation, regulation and the performance management framework.
- Recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters.
- Ensuring appropriate matching of children.
- Provision of the whole range of support services including birth parent counselling, step parent adoptions, intermediary services and letterbox contact.
- Ensuring effective links are maintained with local authorities Children’s Social Services.

3.3 Performance

3.3.1 The National Adoption Service developed a Performance Framework which SEWAS reports into on a quarterly basis. This is the first time Adoption information has been collated and reported nationally and allows comparisons to be made across the regions in order to improve performance.

3.3.2 To assist Members, it is helpful to describe the key stages in the process of how children move from being Looked After to becoming adopted:

- All Looked After Children require a plan for permanence within 4 months of becoming Looked After. In the majority of cases the plan for permanence is for the child to return home to parents or to extended family carers. However, in a small number of cases it is clear that a child cannot be returned home and the local authority decides that the child should be placed for adoption. This is known as the “**should be placed decision**”.
- The Local Authority then applies to the Court for a Placement Order allowing the child to be “**placed for adoption**” with approved adopters who are matched with the child.
- Once the child has been placed and has settled with the approved adopters the Court is asked to make the **Adoption Order**.

3.3.3 These key stages form the basis of the National Performance Framework.

3.3.4 During 2014/15 whilst the number of children with “should be placed decisions” in Wales decreased from 372 to 316, the number of children actually “placed for adoption” increased from 366 to 386. The position in Caerphilly was an increase in should be placed decisions from 10 in 2014 to 16 in 2015. All these children have been matched and placed for adoption. 11 children are currently awaiting their Adoption Orders to be granted.

3.3.5 The average length of time from the child becoming Looked After to the Adoption Order being granted also improved from 26 months reported in 2013/14 to 16.5 months in 2014/15.

3.3.6 Enquiry rates from potential adopters have continued to increase since 2012 with 1,161 enquiries being received in 2014/15, an increase of 27%. The National target is to reply to these enquiries within 5 working days and SEWAS achieved this target in 90% of cases. The Welsh average being 94%.

3.3.7 The number of approved adopters across Wales has also improved from 236 in 2013/14 to 297 in 2014/15. Most approved adopters want to adopt just one child and want the child to be under the age of eight years with the majority stating they would prefer the child to be under the age of four years. As a result there are not enough adopters available to adopt older children, over the age of four years and too few willing to adopt sibling groups.

3.3.8 The National Adoption Service has set the following priorities in their three year plan 2015-18:

- Recruit more adopters
- Improve how children and families are matched
- Learn lessons from research

4. LINKS TO STRATEGY

4.1 Social Services and Well Being [Wales] Act.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Adoption services are governed by a number of detailed Statutory Regulations and it is acknowledged that changes to these Regulations will be ongoing in light of implementation of the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

6.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required because the issues covered are for information purposes only, therefore the Council's EIA process does not need to be applied.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The total cost of the regional service is £1,372,851. Based on an agreed funding formula Caerphilly's contribution is £331,731.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Staff from Caerphilly's Adoption Service were successfully transferred to Blaenau Gwent under TUPE transfer arrangements. There are no outstanding personnel or HR issues.

9. CONSULTATIONS

9.1 The views of those consulted have been incorporated into the report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That Members note the contents of this report and the progress made by SEWAS.

10.2 That Members receive an annual report from SEWAS for 2015//16 in due course.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 To ensure Members are fully appraised of the regional Adoption Service.

12. STATUTORY POWER

- 12.1 To ensure that the Council's statutory functions in relation to providing an Adoption Service are fully met, in accordance with legislation and guidance.

Author: Gareth Jenkins, Assistant Director
Consultees: Cabinet Member for Social Services
Social Services SMT
Children's Services DMT