

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

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Ymateb gan : Adoption UK Cymru

Response from : Adoption UK 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](#).

Good progress been made and the National Adoption Service has been established and is beginning to perform as planned. This has been an enormous piece of work for all concerned and the achievement merits recognition. Whilst it was not done in the way the committee originally recommended, there has been considerable effort made to ensure the governance arrangements of the new service are fit for purpose and that they support the desire of Welsh Government to ensure that both the statutory sector and voluntary sector are integrated into the new arrangements. The Directions Powers were drafted in such a way that there was plenty of opportunity for the voluntary sector to be fully engaged which was very helpful. The voluntary sector has been fully engaged and involved in the development of policy and practice throughout. The sector has welcomed and contributed fully to that work, even though there has been little or no funding to support the time given.

The roles of Director of Operations and Independent Chair of the Advisory Group have been very effective in ensuring the oversight and direction of the NAS as a whole. The joint working and ongoing discussions between all the stakeholders including social services, education, health, academics and the voluntary sector has resulted in a much more shared understanding of the challenges faced by adoptive families when they take on the rewarding but far from easy task of parenting children who have experienced abuse, loss and grief.

The strength and effectiveness of the new arrangement was fully tested in August when it was announced that BAAF Cymru was going into administration and the National Adoption Service was able to take over the Wales Adoption Register in a very short time frame and help support St.David's to take over the other BAAF functions.

Despite this positive progress in developing the structure of the new NAS there has been slow progress in the areas of Adoption Support, recruitment of parents for older children and sibling groups and service user engagement. The main reason for this slow progress has been the very limited capacity of the central team and the reluctance of regions to pool their individual resources to strengthen the work of the national team.

What seems to be happening instead is that each region is using their local resources to develop local models and policies for adoption support, recruitment and marketing in the hope that they will fit within a national picture rather than starting with the national framework and then adapting where necessary to fit local differences. A recent development grant from Welsh Government for development work in this financial year is helping to address this difficulty.

## Question 1

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

There have been a number of improvements in the recruitment, assessment and preparation of adoptive parents as a result of the National Adoption Service. The regionalisation of services has improved the availability of adopter training and preparation and there has been some reduction in the timescale from enquiry to approval and increased consistency in service during this period. There are signs that we are now moving into a situation where more prospective adopters are recruited who are willing to take a single young child, than there are children waiting who match that description.

How could this be improved?

A National Marketing Strategy which is currently being prepared will help in the recruitment of parents who can take the harder to place children and sibling groups currently waiting in the system. However improved marketing will not, on its own, achieve this and adopters will need to be confident that adequate support is available if they are going to commit to these challenges in the numbers needed to meet the needs of the children who are waiting.

## Question 2

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

The National Adoption Service has taken some steps to develop a best practice model for 'family finding'. This has happened along side changes in the family finding systems available (the loss of BAAF and the start of Adoption Link) but it has been very helpful to have some capacity to provide a national overview. This is still a work in progress.

The support for transition from foster care to adoption has not yet been the focus of the NAS and is an area where there still needs to be improvement and a best practice model developed.

How could this be improved?

The lessons which are currently being learnt through the Adoption Cohort Study undertaken by Cardiff University will be very helpful in informing this work on transitions, but it is hard to see how the very small national team will have the capacity to take the information gathered and progress it to the point where practice is changed unless additional resources are available to them in the future.

## Question 3

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

It is clear that access to good quality life story work is very poor at the moment, although there are one or two areas of good practice across Wales. There is still much to be done to ensure that meaningful life story information is passed on to adopters in a timely fashion and indeed to agree what 'a timely fashion' means!

Support for adopted children and young people is also very poor with only TALK Adoption run by After Adoption and funded only by small short term grants.

How could this be improved?

Without a secure source of funding to progress these services at an all Wales level it is hard to see how things can be improved.

## 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?

Adoptive parents tell us that there has been little progress in this area. Parents look at the Adoption Support Fund and Pupil Premium Plus investment in England and question why similar provision is not available to their families in Wales. Many families continue to struggle to cope with very, very difficult situations and receive assessments of need carried out by social services intake teams who do not have specialist knowledge of adoption and often do not provide appropriate support. In some cases this assessment route makes things worse for the families instead of helping them.

Having said that, there has been progress in a number of areas:

- All new adoptive parents in Wales will receive free membership of Adoption UK for the first year of their adoptive journey this year.
- There is now a calendar of support groups and family days visible to all on the NAS website.
- Adoption UK is currently being funded by Welsh Government to deliver workshops across Wales to raise awareness about Child to Parent aggression.
- The Pupil Deprivation Grant is now available to support both LAC and adopted children in school and Adoption UK has been involved in raising awareness of the support adopted children may need to access education.
- Work is underway to develop an adopter data base which will allow ongoing communication with adopters after the adoption order is granted.
- Adoptive parents and adopted children and young people are being consulted more frequently and plans are being developed to engage them more fully in the service going forwards.
- Other developments such as the development of a model of best practice in

adoption support, a review into the use of financial allowances for adoption and a consideration of best practice model for the assessment of need when historic adoption support cases present, are underway and will help to achieve more consistency in adoption support across Wales.

How could this be improved?

The new arrangements regarding assessment under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act have yet to be tested in regard to adoption support.

Adoption UK remains of the view that some mechanism is needed to ring fence some funding for adoption support on a pan Wales basis. This would allow the establishment of, multi disciplinary centre(s) of excellence in adoption support which could be used to support families where ever they are. It could be a wider service which addresses the needs of all children who have experienced early trauma, grief and loss since their needs in family support, education and health will be similar.

## Question 5

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

We believe that whilst there is still a long way to go, the last three years since the committee undertook its first inquiry have seen some really positive developments in the adoption system in Wales. We commend the vision of the Welsh Government in starting this work and their ongoing commitment to continuing the work. We know that austerity in public services will continue to challenge the ability of services to change and develop but we are committed to doing all we can to ensure that adoptive families are able to guide and contribute to the solutions.