

SOCIAL SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday, 27 May 2021
Report Subject	North Wales Adoption Service Update
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Social Services
Report Author	Chief Officer Social Services
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the work of the North Wales Adoption Service (NWAS) for the period April 2020 – March 2021. This will look at all aspects of adoption from recruitment, assessment, matching of children with adopters, post adoption support and intermediary work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	The members are made aware of the activities and work of the NWAS.
2	That those impacted by adoption receive safe, timely and appropriate interventions.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE NORTH WALES ADOPTION SERVICE
1.01	<p>This report notes the activities of the N.W.A.S for the period 2020/2021 and seeks to update this Scrutiny Committee on the developments of the N.W.A.S during the year 2020 – 2021.</p> <p>The impact and effect of COVID19 cannot be diminished but this report sets the positive activities which have been undertaken and the introduction of new services which have been established during this period.</p>

1.02	<p><u>MARKET & RECRUITMENT</u></p> <p>The N.W.A.S has worked in corporation with the National Adoption Service (N.A.S) and a nationally recognised P.R and communication agency “Cowshed” to promote and advertise via television adverts, social media and local authority communication teams. Cowshed are also completing a series of podcasts during this period and a new N.W.A.S “website” is expected to go live imminently.</p> <p>More conventional activities including attendance at local Food Festivals, the Eisteddfod or local agricultural shows have been postponed due to current circumstances.</p>
1.03	<p><u>TRAINING</u></p> <p>During COVID19 much of the traditional training arrangements have been adjusted to use IT platforms to deliver more training. Extensive training from child sexual exploitation to pre-adoption training has demonstrated a high degree of flexibility and a recognition that learning opportunities are essential to adopters.</p>
1.04	<p><u>PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS IN ASSESSMENT</u></p> <p>As of March 2021 there were 36 active prospective adopters, of which 10 were Partner of Parent Assessments. As a result of the COVID19 impact the original target has been downgraded from 40 to 32 for 2021/2022.</p> <p>A new method of assessment has been introduced (known as Stage 1 & 2) which seeks to speed up the process and at the same prevent unnecessary applications proceeding.</p>
1.05	<p><u>MEDICAL HEALTH REPORTS OF PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS</u></p> <p>A number of medical practices had been unable to complete medical reports which is a mandatory part of the process during COVID19. As of May 2021 it is pleasing to note that no further episodes have been recorded.</p>
1.06	<p><u>CHILDREN OPEN FOR ADOPTION</u></p> <p>This section records the number of children who are open to the service and there status in terms of their adoption plans.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. There are 37 children (of which there are six siblings groups of children). ii. Seventeen of these children have been linked with potential carers. iii. Six of these are moving towards being placed with adopters. iv. Five children are/have moved into the care of their new families. v. Nine children are still subject to legal and associated matters. <p>The average length of time a child will be waiting for an adoption placement is between 6 – 9 months.</p>
1.07	<p><u>FCC/WXCBC – ADOPTION PANEL</u></p> <p>Due to the impact of COVID19 the Panel have adjusted using IT platforms. The feedback from the Chair of the Panel describes excellent adjustment by Panel members and a continuation of productive outcomes.</p>

	<p><u>STAFFING OF THE SERVICE</u> The service is almost fully staffed with vacancies for a Therapeutic Family Support Worker and a Connect Coordinator at 18.5 hours.</p>
1.08	<p><u>POST ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES</u> This has been a significant development with its introduction at the start of COVID19. The service seeks to provide a diverse range of work with families ranging from those experiencing difficulties and requiring expert counselling, to those who need practical assistance in terms of social, leisure and support.</p> <p>I have enclosed a recently published National Evaluation Appendix (b.) which sets out the first comprehensive review of PASS in a Welsh context, some of the main findings are:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • considerable progress across the sector at implementing the Adoption Support Framework • better and more innovative programmes of support • better evidence of earlier intervention • there are however inconsistencies in terms of the time/type of support • notable gaps for older children with more complex needs <p>The evaluation identified the main recommendations as being:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better support with education settings • consistency of support • greater access to targeted and specialist support <p>These represent encouraging a response but with the caveat that more is needed.</p>
1.09	<p><u>Life Journey Working (Please see appendix “Life Story Journey News Letter)</u> A new life journey social worker commenced in January 2021. The essence of the working is to provide high quality life story books and a later life letter. The national adoption service have introduced two new measures to capture the completion of work in-line with national targets. It is often said that we are the custodians of a child’s memory and imagination and citing the poem of Lemm Sissary (who was a child looked after) “Memories in care are slippery because no one to recall them as the years pass.”</p>
1.10	<p><u>Intermediary Service</u> This aspect of the work is often seen in the public domain via such T.V programmes as “Long lost families” in effect we are searching and hopefully finding immediate or extended family members to those who have been adopted.</p> <p>A recent example saw a 78 year old be reunited with their 74 year old brother and on further search, their 102 year old mother was alive and living in North Wales.</p> <p>A very good example of the work under taken!</p>

1.11	<p><u>Service Assurance</u></p> <p>In 2020 Social Services asked Internal Audit to review the NWS Service to determine if Flintshire County Council is receiving value for money and service provision from the partnership agreement in place with North Wales Adoption Service (NWS). The audit sought to provide assurance around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The terms and conditions of the partnership agreement including any performance indicators or benchmarks. ii) Adherence to any statutory or best practice targets. iii) NWS ability to recruit a sufficient supply of adopters to meet the placement requirements for Flintshire children. iv) NWS ability to improve placements, including reducing waiting times and meeting targets. v) Current and projected performance of Life Journey Framework in Flintshire. vi) Progression of post-adoption services for Flintshire families.
1.12	<p><u>Work undertaken during the Internal Audit review confirmed:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Annual review of quality of service undertaken in accordance with the Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations. ii) There is challenge and active dialogue around adopter recruitment and 'children waiting' this is demonstrated through quarterly Partnership Board meetings. Flintshire representation on Partnership Board meetings ensures appropriate oversight of governance and work undertaken by NWS. iii) Appropriate management information is provided before Partnership Board meetings. iv) The Quality of Care Report which is produced annually by NWS specifically gives key measures by which performance is tracked and monitored in line with the National Adoption Service (NAS) performance framework. Both adopter recruitment and children waiting measures are reported on. v) Funding provided by Welsh Government for development of in-house adoption support services has been used to fund NWS posts and the NWS Adoption Support Service is now operational.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>Flintshire's annual financial contribution towards the cost of the North Wales Adoption Service is £116,444. In addition to the financial contribution Flintshire, in line with all other North Wales authorities, continues to meet the costs of our social workers working within the Service.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	<p>It is imperative that the Service meets statutory obligations and the ability to meet Welsh Government and National Adoption guidelines and benchmarks. Failure to ensure we have an effective services that recruits</p>

	and supports suitable adopters would result in children unnecessarily remaining within the looked after care system. The Review by Internal Audit has provided assurance in relation to key risks and service delivery. N.W.A.S has been through a phase of remodelling and consolidation to deliver consistency alongside meeting the challenges of adoption.
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4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	This report is based upon key information obtained from the N.W.A.S

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Life Journey Work Newsletter (January 2021)
5.02	National Adoption Service for Wales – Evaluation of the Adoption Support Framework, Final Report, February 2011 (Oxford Brooks University)

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Neil Ayling Telephone: 01352 704511 E-mail: neil.ayling@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p><u>NORTH WALES ADOPTION SERVICE</u> This is a service composed of the six North Wales Local Authority operating out of Wrexham. It has been established since 2010.</p> <p><u>ADOPTION</u> To take on the legal parental responsibilities as parent of a child who is not ones biological child.</p> <p><u>RECRUITMENT & ASSESSMENT OF ADOPTERS</u> This is the process of encouraging potential adopters (via recruitment activities) then the subject of an assessment which leads to the determination of suitability to become a potential adopter.</p> <p><u>MATCHING</u> This is the process where a child and adopters are formally joined or matched as a family.</p>

THE ADOPTION SUPPORT FRAMEWORK & POST ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

This was introduced in 2017 in recognition that adopted children and adoptive families in Wales should receive support across a spectrum of need levels from universal through to more targeted and specialist support. The key message was it is “ok to need and ask for help”.

INTERMEDIARY SERVICES

This helps to reunite people who were separated by adoption. The service will help search for relatives and by getting in touch with Them. Support is provided to build contacts and relationships.

LIFE JOURNEY WORK

This is a way of working that can help children separated from their birth families maintain a good sense of their life journey and identity. A wide range of people can contribute including teachers, foster carers and birth families.

National Adoption Service for Wales

This is the national body which sets out national targets, performance and standards.