



CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMITTEE SUMMONS

C.Hanagan
Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
The Pavilions
Cambrian Park
Clydach Vale CF40 2XX

Meeting Contact: Claire Hendy - Senior Democratic Services Officer (01443 424081)

YOU ARE SUMMONED to a meeting of **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** to be held **Virtually** on **WEDNESDAY, 13TH JANUARY, 2021** at **5.00 PM**.

Non Committee Members and Members of the public may request the facility to address the Committee at their meetings on the business listed although facilitation of this request is at the discretion of the Chair. It is kindly asked that such notification is made to Democratic Services by Monday, 11 January 2021 on the contact details listed above, including stipulating whether the address will be in Welsh or English.

AGENDA

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1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

To receive disclosures of personal interest from Members in accordance with the Code of Conduct

Note:

1. Members are requested to identify the item number and subject matter that their interest relates to and signify the nature of the personal interest: and
2. Where Members withdraw from a meeting as a consequence of the disclosure of a prejudicial interest they must notify the Chairman when they leave.

REPORTS OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATIONS

2. CONSULTATION LINKS

Information is provided in respect of relevant [consultations](#) for consideration by the Committee.

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

3. VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE 2019/20

To receive an update in respect of the progress made by the Regional Adoption Collaborative.

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4. CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT

To receive the Corporate Parenting Annual Report.

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5. KINSHIP CARE (N.O.M)

To receive a report in respect of the Notice of Motion regarding Kinship Care and consider how to proceed

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6. CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

To reflect on the meeting and actions to be taken forward.

7. URGENT BUSINESS

To consider any items, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, is of the opinion should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency

Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

Circulation:-

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee (County Borough Councillor S. Rees-Owen and County Borough Councillor J Edwards respectively)

County Borough Councillors:

Councillor S Evans, Councillor J Brencher, Councillor H Fychan, Councillor A Calvert, Councillor S Powell, Councillor M Powell, Councillor M Griffiths,

Councillor D Owen-Jones, Councillor S Morgans, Councillor G Stacey,
Councillor L De Vet and Councillor L Walker

Co-Opted Members:-

Mr M Cleverley

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Ms A Jones, Representing UNITE

Mr C Jones, Representing GMB

Mrs C Jones, Representing the National Union of Teachers and Teachers' Panel

Mr D Price, Representing UNISON

Mr A Rickett, Voting Diocesan Authorities' Representative

Mrs R Nicholls, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Mr L Patterson, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 13.01.21

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR OF
COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

***Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional Adoption Collaborative
Annual Report 2019/20***

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee with an update against progress of the Regional Adoption Collaborative.
- 1.2 The report is required to be brought before Scrutiny as part of the governance arrangements outlined in Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007 and section 15(c) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Regulations) (Wales) Directions 2015.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- (i) Consider the contents of the annual report.
- (ii) Scrutinise and comment on the information contained within the report.
- (iii) Receive a further report at future meetings

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1** The Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) is the largest of the five regional collaboratives which form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS). It provides a regional adoption service to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council. The service is hosted by the Vale of Glamorgan Council.
- 3.2** This is VVC's fifth annual report and covers the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. The Collaborative is required to review the service it provides by regulation, and as part of the reporting requirements set out in the legal agreement underpinning the operation of the collaborative. The Report seeks to combine the various reporting requirements in one report.
- 3.3** The report is attached at Appendix 1 with data appendices 2- 5 also included as follows:
- Appendix 1 Annual report
 - Appendix 2 Family Finding Data
 - Appendix 3 Recruitment and Assessment Data
 - Appendix 4 Adoption Support Data
 - Appendix 5 Adoption Panel Data
- 3.5** Angela Harris, Regional Adoption Manager, Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Collaboration will be in attendance to deliver the report and respond to Members' questions.



VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE (VVC)

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1st APRIL 2019 TO 31 MARCH 2020

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) as part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS), provides a regional adoption service to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council.

1.2. This is VVC's fifth annual report and covers the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. This report seeks to combine the reporting requirements set out in regulation and the governance arrangements for the region in one report.

1.3. The report has the following Appendices:

Appendix 1 sets out key performance data in respect of children by quarter and local authority.

Appendix 2 provides information in respect of adopter enquiries and recruitment of adopters.

Appendix 3 provides information in respect of Adoption Support.

Appendix 4 provides information in respect of Adoption Panel activity.

2. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

2.1 The organisational and managerial structure of the service has remained the same during this period with service delivery structured around three functional teams. A managerial vacancy within the service was filled in September 2019 by the appointment of a new Adoption Support Manager. The existing postholder transferred to manage the Family Finding Team.



- 2.2** In April 2019, as part of the Welsh Government award of £2.3M to improve adoption services in Wales, the region received a substantial investment of new monies which has enabled a number of new posts to be recruited across the service. The grant was allocated to national and regional services to support key priorities for improvement which were utilised by VVC Management Board in determining the distribution of the grant. As a result of these monies, VVC has been able to recruit two full time Social Workers to specialise in Transitions and Life Journey Work and a part time Social Worker to support birth parents. These posts were recruited from experienced staff within the service. VVC was however able to successfully recruit to the vacancies created by these appointments enabling the service to be fully staffed by the end of the reporting period.
- 2.3** The service has also recruited two new unqualified posts, a Children and Young People Co-ordinator to support adopted children and young people and a TESSA (Therapeutic Education Support Service in Adoption) Co-ordinator to support adoptive families. Both posts are linked to the national programmes being delivered by Adoption UK; the Connected service which supports young adoptees and the TESSA programme which supports adoptive families.
- 2.4** In addition to the posts located within the Collaborative, 10.5 practitioner posts have been created from the grant to support the provision of life journey work for children with a plan of adoption. These posts are distributed across the four partner authorities and link to the Life Journey Co-ordinator within VVC. All these posts had been successfully recruited to at year end with the exception of one authority. Contingency arrangements were however put in place within that authority to cover the work, pending the appointments being made.
- 2.5** As part of the deployment of the grant an Implementation Plan was developed by Welsh Government requiring reports to be submitted monitoring spend against the grant and the areas of improvement in service delivery as a result of the investment. The Regional Adoption Manager co-ordinated the response on behalf of the region and submitted monitoring reports to Welsh Government in October, December 2019 and at year end to secure continuation of the funding. The National Adoption Service (NAS) will, on behalf of regions, prepare the bid for the grant in



2020-1 and take over the monitoring function in conjunction with Welsh Government requiring regions to report upon progress to NAS. All posts created as part of the grant within the region are permanent positions.

- 2.6** Temporary arrangements have been put in place to cover a vacancy within our Business Support Team created during the first quarter of the year. This will enable a review of the structure of team roles to be undertaken to ensure that the service can continue to adapt to business need. VVC's office within the Dock Offices underwent refurbishment in the Autumn of 2019 to create some individual and meeting room space.
- 2.7** Following the revisions to the Legal Agreement agreed in April 2019, VVC's Management Board has continued to meet on a quarterly basis. The composition of the Board has remained the same although a new Medical Adviser was appointed following the retirement of the other representative. The Board has continued to be chaired by the Director of Social Services for Cardiff Council. The Vale of Glamorgan Director will take up this post in October 2020. This is in advance of the planned rotational change due to the departure of the current Director in Cardiff. In order to improve business continuity, the four partner authorities have agreed to change the rotation of the chair from an annual basis to a three-yearly cycle with the transfer taking effect at the end of the first quarter of the fourth year.
- 2.8** The overall remit and accountability of the Management Board is prescribed within regulation and the Legal Agreement underpinning the Collaborative. VVC's Management Board continues to play a key role in monitoring the performance and business plan of the regional service highlighting areas for improvement.
- 2.9** The second tier of governance within the Collaborative is via the Operational Group which comprises of senior managers from each of the four local authorities and regional managers from VVC. This group meets on a quarterly basis with meetings being scheduled a couple of weeks following Management Board to enable any matters remitted by Management Board to be considered. The Operational Group



provides a further mechanism for monitoring the performance of the region and is a vehicle for raising standards and improving practice consistency across the region. The Operational Group in conjunction with Independent Reviewing Officers across the region have developed a revised format and process for conducting reviews of adoption placements which is being piloted across the region.

- 2.10** The overall governance of the region remains via a Joint Committee which meets twice a year. Meetings were held in July and December 2019 as per requirements to approve the annual accounts, the annual budget and annual plan for the Collaborative. This structure is unique in Wales for adoption services but has been supported by NAS as the preferred model for regional governance.
- 2.11** The budget for the Collaborative is managed by the Vale of Glamorgan and is monitored closely by the Management Board and Joint Committee. The end of year position reported an underspend in the budget for 2019 -20 partly created by grant slippage monies and staff vacancies. A proposal to retain the underspend within VVC has been agreed by Management Board and Joint Committee. These monies will be used to upgrade IT equipment for staff to enable more agile working across the region, improve support systems for adoptive families by facilitating specialist training and provide additional staff resource to undertake additional work as may be required due to COVID-19 .
- 2.12** VVC's financial and governance arrangements are subject to an annual audit by Bridgend and Vale Internal Audit Shared Service. This audit was conducted remotely at the end of the reporting period and concluded that the "effectiveness of the internal control environment within the service was sound and Substantial Assurance could be placed upon the management of risks".
- 2.14** VVC is required to report to the National Adoption Service on a range of performance measures which are collected on a quarterly and annual basis under the NAS Performance Framework. VVC has complied with all reporting requirements during the period and has continued to develop more comprehensive



mechanisms to capture the measures, which have increased each year. Data Cymru have been commissioned by NAS to develop the Framework and each region is required to upload data onto this new system each quarter enabling performance data against specific measures for each regional service to be visible across Wales.

- 2.15** The National Adoption Service provide the region with mid-year and end of year reports. The draft report for 2019-20 was delayed due to COVID restrictions and the meeting with the Director of Operations and VVC to discuss the report and our mid-year position had to be rescheduled to early November 2020.

3. SERVICE FUNCTIONS

- 3.1.** Performance against each of the service functions is outlined under the following sections of the report alongside areas of development.

4. FAMILY FINDING

- 4.1** Family Finding and its' associated activities remains a key area of activity for the region and the ability to place children effectively and promptly underpins all other activities. As the largest regional Collaborative, the level of demand placed upon this area and our ability to meet the needs identified remains challenging.
- 4.2** The number of children referred for adoption totalled **143** which marks a 34% decrease on the previous year. There has been a continued downward trend in referrals which has also been observed across Wales. The reasons for this are likely to be varied and will reflect the work being undertaken by local authorities with the Welsh Government to reduce numbers of children looked after in Wales.
- 4.3** A similar pattern of withdrawn referrals was seen with **41%** withdrawn within the period (compared with 43% in 2018-19). There remains a commitment to develop alternative permanency plans for children and positively **88%** of those children who were withdrawn from adoption had the option of either a positive parenting or



positive connected person's assessment. Just 12% of those referrals (7 children) had a change of care plan to long-term fostering based on an assessment of their individual needs or sibling attachment relationship. Withdrawn referrals in many instances do not equate to a decrease in workload for the service as a lot of work has been undertaken to progress the adoption plan prior to it being discontinued.

- 4.4** The number of 'Should be Adopted' decisions made in respect of children reduced in 2019-20 by **34%** from the previous year. This is to be expected as the number of SBA decisions made will reflect the referrals made during that year and the previous year, as the number of referrals declines so will the number of SBA decisions. All but 1 region within Wales also experienced a downturn in SBA decisions during 2019-20.
- 4.5** The region has recorded **71** Placement Orders being made within the year, a 30% reduction from the previous year and again can be viewed in the context of a reduction in referrals over the past couple of years.
- 4.6** VVC placed **101** children for adoption during the year, a 1% increase on the previous year. This is particularly pleasing when considering the reduction in the number of Placement Orders over recent years. Continuing to place a high number of children reflects our continued commitment to securing permanence for children through adoption where this is the best outcome for the child. This includes successfully identifying adopters for children who have been waiting for a considerable length of time. The number of children waiting less than 6 months between Placement Order and matching for adoption is **24%** in VVC compared with **36%** across Wales as a whole and we have seen the average waiting time in VVC increase by 1 month since the previous year to **11.9 months**. It is important to note that this *mean* average time includes some high outliers of children waiting a significantly higher period of time than others with some 8 children waiting between 6-15 months longer than any other child, somewhat skewing the picture. A *median* average instead shows closer to **9.8 months** waiting time.



- 4.7** It has been very positive to see the increase in the number of children being able to be placed within the region (**72%** up from 65% last year) and this is a clear benefit from the increased recruitment of adopters within VVC. There is also a slight increase in placements made elsewhere in Wales (**10%** up from 9%) and a reduction in the placements made outside of Wales (**18%** down from 26%).
- 4.8** At the end of the year there were **73** children on Placement Orders awaiting an adoptive placement which is a reduction of **22%** from the previous year. A further 13 children had a very strong link proceeding but not yet matched as at the end of March 2020 and another child was awaiting a Placement Order revocation and so the number actually waiting was **59**. Of these as may be expected a significant proportion (40%) have additional factors i.e. aged 4 plus, BME, complex needs or a part of a sibling group which makes being able to secure appropriate matches more challenging.
- 4.9** There were **82** Adoption Orders granted during the year which is on a par with the previous year (83).
- 4.10** The level of placement breakdown continues to be low with two placement disruptions during the year, one of a 5-year-old girl who was placed for 9 months and the adopters felt that they could not continue with the placement. The second breakdown was a sibling group of two girls (aged 4 and 6) where again adopters advised that they could not continue with the placement.
- 4.11** The number of birth parents referred to the service for counselling fell during the year to **139**. **63%** of parents took up the service from VVC during this year which is significantly higher than the Welsh average of **25%**. This reflects the work of the Family Finding Team in offering this service to parents of children referred to us.
- 4.12** Performance in relation to the provision of Life Journey Material for children being placed for adoption has improved considerably over this past year although remains short of the 100% target as is the case across Wales. **84%** of VVC children



(up from 44% in 2018-19) had life journey materials available at matching panel. This is the second highest in Wales and higher than the average of 59% across Wales. **60%** of VVC children (up from 46% in 2018-19) had finalised life journey materials available at the 2nd adoption review. This is the highest in Wales and higher than the average of 57% across Wales. There remain issues with ensuring that these figures are being accurately captured within the local authorities and we are seeking opportunities to work with them to ensure a robust system for data capture is in place. The increase in performance can clearly be linked to the additional Welsh Government funding which has enabled us to recruit a full time Life Journey Work Co-Ordinator from 1st October 2019 and the provision of life journey work practitioner posts within the local authorities which has been rolled out over 2019-20 and into 2020-21. As of September 2020, all practitioner posts have now been filled.

- 4.13** The Life Journey Work Co-ordinator offers regular support, advice and guidance to the life journey work practitioners and in addition has offered workshops/briefings to local authority teams and was integral in the recruitment panels for the practitioner posts. Further work is being undertaken to develop training opportunities within this role as well.
- 4.14** As previously outlined the additional investment from Welsh Government has enabled the creation of a Transitions Worker post within the Family Finding Team as of 1st October 2019. **31** children were referred to this service within the first 6 months of operation. For **22** of these children, direct work was provided to support their transition to an adoptive family, with an 'Understanding the Child' day being provided for several of these children to enable the adoptive parents to be provided with a detailed history of the child's early experiences. For **6** children these were younger children where work was being completed with the older children within the adoptive family to support the transition running smoothly and for a further **3** children work was being offered directly to the foster carer on a 1:1 basis to support them in their understanding of the child's needs. In addition, training has been developed for foster carers as well as ad hoc advice and support to other



practitioners. This role has been of incredible value to the region in terms of the service we are able to offer to children and to improve the overall transitions experience. There are many opportunities to further develop this role over the coming year.

- 4.15** VVC has continued to embrace the use of all available family finding methods over this year. The team liaises closely with the Adoption Register Wales (ARW)/LinkMaker team to ensure information is updated and monitored in a timely manner. We have also made use of the national Exchange Day event in October 2019 and the Welsh Adoption Activity Day in March 2020, each of which produced matches for children.
- 4.16** St David's Adoption Agency and Barnardo Cymru developed a new family finding service in 2018, Adopting Together. Adopting Together focuses upon the recruitment of adopters for children with additional needs who have been waiting for adoptive placements over six months. The scheme targets recruitment for specific children and provides ongoing specialist support to those children for a year following placement. The Vale of Glamorgan, as host authority has entered into a service level agreement with Adopting Together on behalf of our regional partners. As at March 2020, VVC has referred **27** children to the scheme since its' inception; **6** children were placed initially with a further **1** being placed last year. The Regional Adoption Manager and Family Finding Manager presented an overview of VVC's experience of working with the service at a national conference on Adopting Together held in March 2020. The Regional Adoption Manager is also a member of the Steering Group which oversees the development of the service.

5. RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT

- 5.1.** VVC's Marketing and Recruitment Strategy has been further developed during the year and much progress has been seen in furthering its goal of raising the profile of the Collaborative with the wider public and in doing so increasing the number of



enquiries received. The Recruitment and Marketing Officer's role has continued to prove crucial in creating the content and activity associated with the Strategy ensuring that this is co-ordinated with NAS' Marketing Strategy to increase the number of adoptive families. The Marketing Officer has closely liaised with 'Cowshed', the marketing company commissioned by NAS to undertake national campaigns and represents the region on a national workgroup to promote activity. Links have also been established with local Comms Departments across the region to ensure that adoption features as part of their local advertising features. The Marketing Officer's role was made permanent in December 2019.

- 5.2.** Whilst also benefitting from the NAS' co-ordinated marketing campaign, VVC has also focused efforts in connecting with members of the public in our local areas. This has involved having both a physical and online presence. During 2019/20 VVC attended a variety of community events including Cardiff Pride, Barry Pride, Vale of Glamorgan Agricultural Show, the Big Wedding Show , Vegan Winterfest, St Donat's Craft Fair as well as attending a variety of faith settings in order to discuss adoption. We have enjoyed positive engagement at these events which have all contributed to raising the profile of the service.
- 5.3.** VVC has also developed its' online marketing and it now has a well-established presence on two social media platforms – Facebook and Instagram. These profiles are coordinated and managed by the Marketing Officer and these tools are useful in order to target a wider yet purposeful audience. These platforms are also used to promote the post adoption support services. Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising has been used to promote adoption and raise the awareness of our information events. Whilst the cost implications for PPC are relatively small, the audience we are able to reach, and the data captured to inform future advertising is significant. The social media presence is beginning to show dividends in terms of actual enquiries as we specifically capture where an enquirer heard about us. A pleasing and growing number of people are referencing the fact that they saw our profile or advert online, and this led them to read more about our service and adoption more widely.



- 5.4.** The recruitment activity has had a specific goal to increase the number of enquiries the agency receives. 2019/20 saw a significant and sustained increase in the number of enquiries – **340** in total compared to **259** received during 2018/19. This is a pleasing outcome and our ability to provide a professional and structured approach to receiving, recording and tracking enquiries has led to this important increase in performance. The national marketing work in conjunction with regional input is also having a positive impact in providing a consistent and coherent message to the wider public.
- 5.5.** 2019/20 saw the Collaborative hosting six Information Evenings for prospective applicants. These events have always been well attended and feedback has continued to be positive.
- 5.6.** VVC's three day 'Preparation to Adopt' training course continues to be provided by an Independent Social Worker. Questionnaires have been developed by the Vale of Glamorgan's Participation Officer and are distributed at the end of training to gather views of the process from enquiry through to training. These questionnaires are collated and the feedback in respect of the training from participants is unanimous in its praise and appreciation for what they learn. In 2019/20 **six** courses were held. **51** households attended the course. Out of those **51** households **four** did not go onto submit applications to progress onwards to an assessment. These potential applicants have been followed up. Three households' feedback that they wished to take more time to consider their future plans and one household has not responded to follow up enquiries.
- 5.7.** During 2019/20 a total of **75** adopter approvals were presented to VVC's Adoption Panel and positive recommendations were made. **69** of these approvals were ratified within the reporting year. The approvals are broken down as follows: **RCT – 18, Cardiff – 29, Vale of Glamorgan – 14, Merthyr Tydfil – 1 and Other (Newport, Caerphilly and Kent) – 7**. This represented a pleasing increase of **35%** when compared to 2018/19's approval performance. In comparison to other Welsh



regions who reported experiencing increases ranging from **8%** to **44%**, meaning VVC was one of the higher performing services.

- 5.8.** A total of **5** assessments were commenced and concluded with the applicants withdrawing / being counselled out. The level of work involved even where assessments don't conclude is considerable. This is not reflected in the performance figures but evidences the robustness of the decision-making process which supports this work.
- 5.9.** Out of the **69** ratified approvals achieved in 2019/20, **5** were foster carers assessed to adopt a specific child, **8** were second time adopters and **56** were first time adopters.
- 5.10.** **3** approved adopters have since withdrawn following approval for family reasons.
- 5.11.** The majority of the applicants approved during 2019/20 have gone onto be matched with children from within VVC. One has had a child placed from outside of our region from SEWAS. A further two are in the matching process of adopting non VVC children (a second child from SEWAS and a child from Scotland).

6. ADOPTION SUPPORT

- 6.1.** Referrals into the service for adoption support services had remained at a consistent rate for the past couple of years. However, the increased funding and support injected into adoption support services at a national and local level has in turn created an increase of adopters coming forward earlier for services following the making of Adoption Order.
- 6.2.** VVC does not manage a budget for the provision of adoption support services although undertakes assessments of support needs which may recommend an adoption support package to the respective authority where the adoptive family resides. The budgets to support such provision is held in the respective local



authority. The total expenditure on adoption support services for the reporting year was **£207,470.6**. This is showing a rise in spending, however when this is consistent with the increase in the number of referrals into the service. The average spend per child is reduced and is only **£992.68** although this varies across LA the costs for services are higher in Cardiff and the Vale compared to providers in RCT and Merthyr. On average **40%** of children referred from the region go on to receive funding requests, meaning **60%** are managed with in-house support such as direct work, training, and TESSA support. The emphasis of the service has been to continue to develop the skills of practitioners within the Adoption Support Team to be able to manage families by way of inhouse support without the need to rely on external input. The provision of external funding is monitored via the Operational Group and individual decision making arrangements have been agreed between the respective Operational Manager and the Adoption Support Manager. Discussion has taken place to further progress joint working across the region with the development of a preferred provider list.

- 6.3.** The largest funding costs are for attachment-based therapeutic work, complex emotional and behavioural therapeutic work and therapeutic life story work. These are the most frequently commissioned service and are in line with the types of need children present with. We anticipate that although the need for therapeutic life story work remains high at present, over the coming years with the investment in life journey work across the region this demand will reduce as the quality of the support being provided at an earlier stage improves. The spend on Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) training has reduced as VVC are now able to offer this training in-house and an NVR was provided during the year. A Nurturing and Attachment course was also facilitated in-house reducing the reliance on an external service provider and significant costs.
- 6.4.** **54** referrals for Access to Birth Records for adopted adults were received during the reporting period showing a small increase. **36** referrals for Intermediary Services have been received which are comparable to the previous year. There are two part time Social Workers aligned to this work which is by its very nature time consuming



and requires dedication in being able to search and access information from historical records and a range of sources.

- 6.5.** Waiting lists for these services and allocation times have been managed so that applicants do not wait longer than two months for a service. The provision of an intermediary service is a power not a duty and therefore the service is not provided in all areas. It remains a significant strength of our service that intermediary requests are being supported and allows a natural follow on once the letterbox exchange ceases at the age of 18 and reaches out to support young adopted adults with understanding their identity post 18.
- 6.6.** The Birth Parent Advisor is a new role within the Adoption Support Team with the postholder taking up the position from November 2019. A referral process and information leaflet for Social Work colleagues across the region and an information leaflet for birth parents has been developed and disseminated. Nine referrals for individual birth parent support have been received and supported. The post is of benefit to parents post Adoption Order supporting them with a range of issues, contact matters and writing letterbox reports. It is hoped that some support to birth parents can be offered on a group basis going forward and that the role will continue to be promoted across the region.
- 6.7.** The TESSA Co-ordinator was also appointed in November 2019 shortly after the national launch of the service by Adoption UK. The aim of the service is to provide support services prior to adoptive families reaching crisis point. The Co-ordinator undertakes assessments of need and processes referrals of families who may be eligible. **17** referrals had been made to TESSA at year end by VVC.
- 6.8.** The Children and Young People Co-ordinator also took up post at the same time and since this time has been directly involved in running Connected groups on a Saturday once a month with staff from the Connected service. The service caters for children and young people 7 upwards and so the Saturday groups are into three groups according to age. During 2019-20 the service catered for 42 children from



VVC. The aim of the service is to reach more young people who might benefit from such support and so the Co-ordinator's role is key to promoting the service across the region. In addition the postholder has provided direct support sessions to 11 children from the region and has also supported a number of direct contact sessions for adopted children. Both Co-ordinators have taken over the running of the monthly toddler group for adoptive families which consistently supports eight families at a time.

- 6.9.** Evaluation forms have been developed within the team during the year to evaluate the service pre and post provision of therapeutic support and in terms of the new areas of service provision. The team also ask participants to evaluate the training which has been provided. The main objective is to ascertain the benefits of the service provided and to needs within families which may not have been addressed. It is however hoped going forward that the findings can be collated in a more systematic way to enable the feedback to be used constructively to improve service delivery.

7. ADOPTION PANEL

- 7.1.** The Collaborative has continued to operate a joint regional Panel from two sittings held on a fortnightly Monday and Wednesday basis. Work has continued in merging the central list to service both sittings and to spread Panel activity to enable the Panel to operate on a more equitable, unified basis.
- 7.2.** Panel business has remained at a high level during the year with 43 Panel meetings being held and 149 cases being heard. Two scheduled meetings were cancelled due to quoracy. Appendix 4 to the report provides a breakdown of the work of Panel.
- 7.3.** Maintenance of the central list of Panel members continues to pose challenges in terms of maintaining a sufficient number of Social Work members and a range of



independent members. Ten new Panel members have been successfully recruited during the period and one Panel member resigned due to personal reasons.

- 7.4. A programme of reviews of Panel members was developed at the beginning of 2020 and six reviews were conducted by the end of the reporting period.
- 7.5. Panel training was provided for Panel members in March 2020 focusing upon the role and function of Panel and the requirements of the new regulations governing the approval of adopters due to be implemented in April 2020.

8. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

- 8.1 VVC has received three complaints during the period. Each complaint has been investigated by the Regional Adoption Manager and two were resolved at Stage 1 of the Vale of Glamorgan Social Services Complaint process. The third complaint has been referred to Stage 2 of the process and a stage 2 investigation has been commissioned.

Regional staff have continued to receive positive feedback on the range of services they provide from a range of sources; service users, local authority colleagues, other agencies and the adoption Panel. Staff are encouraged to collate this information, share it for recording as part of the Collaborative's record, as contribution to their own personal development plans, and to promote the service more generally.

9.9. CONCLUSION AND 2020-21 PRIORITIES

- 9.1 The priorities for VVC, alongside other regional Collaboratives stem year on year from our core business. The need to continue to recruit more adoptive parents to meet the needs of children requiring placements will remain constant features of the service we provide. Considerable improvement in both these areas was achieved during the reporting period which hopefully can be built upon year on year.



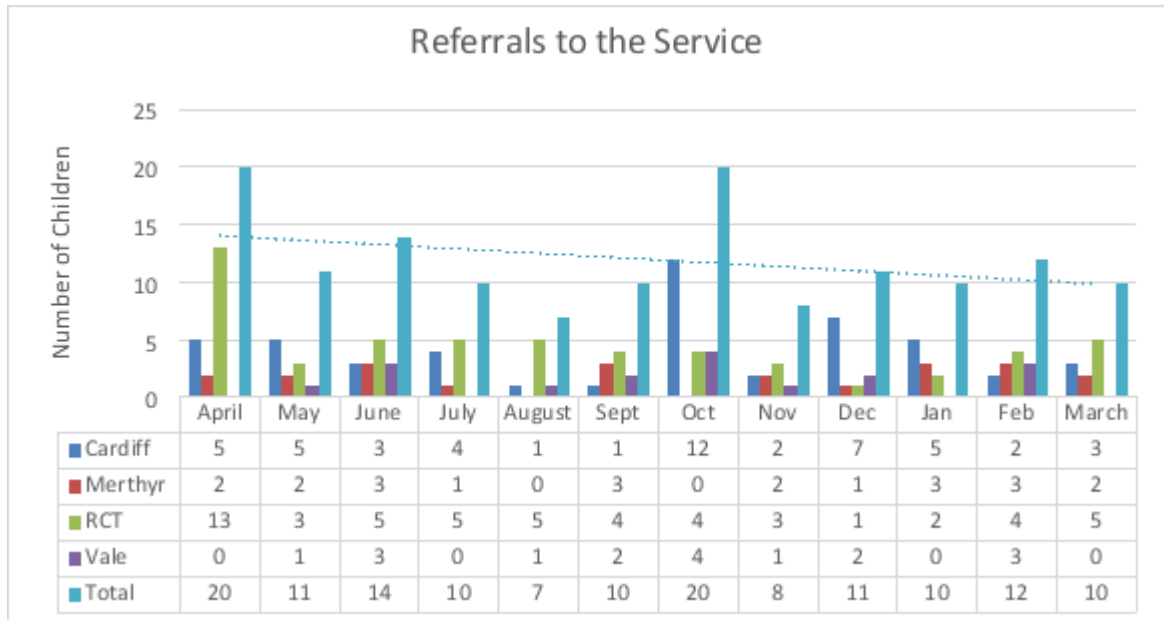
- 9.2** Significant progress has also been made in raising the profile of the region as a result of a consistent marketing strategy and this has produced results in attracting more enquiries from prospective adopters. The ongoing challenge for the service is being able to convert more of those enquiries into applications to ensure that we continue to build on our existing pool of adopters and to improve placement choice.
- 9.3** The other area where positive improvements have been seen is in the area of adoption support. The investment received from Welsh Government has been a significant, positive development for the service as a whole. VVC has during this time successfully recruited to all the specialist roles and there is already evidence of the benefits these posts have had on the service. These posts will continue to be evaluated in terms of service improvement and therefore will need to be further embedded across the region to ensure that performance targets are met. This is particularly important in respect of the provision of life journey work for the region due to the large amount of the investment secured for this work.
- 9.4** Just prior to the end of the reporting period the impact of the pandemic and national lockdown was beginning to take effect with staff working from home and key services temporarily halted. The service however adapted quickly to the challenges presented and has been able to deliver its core business partly on a virtual basis or via risk assessed face to face contact. This has enabled key functions to continue to be delivered although it is too early to assess the impact upon overall performance during this year. Going forward the service will need to continue to evaluate the effect upon services and develop plans to mitigate the overall impact upon service delivery.

Angela Harris
Regional Adoption Manager
October 2020

Appendix 2 – Family Finding

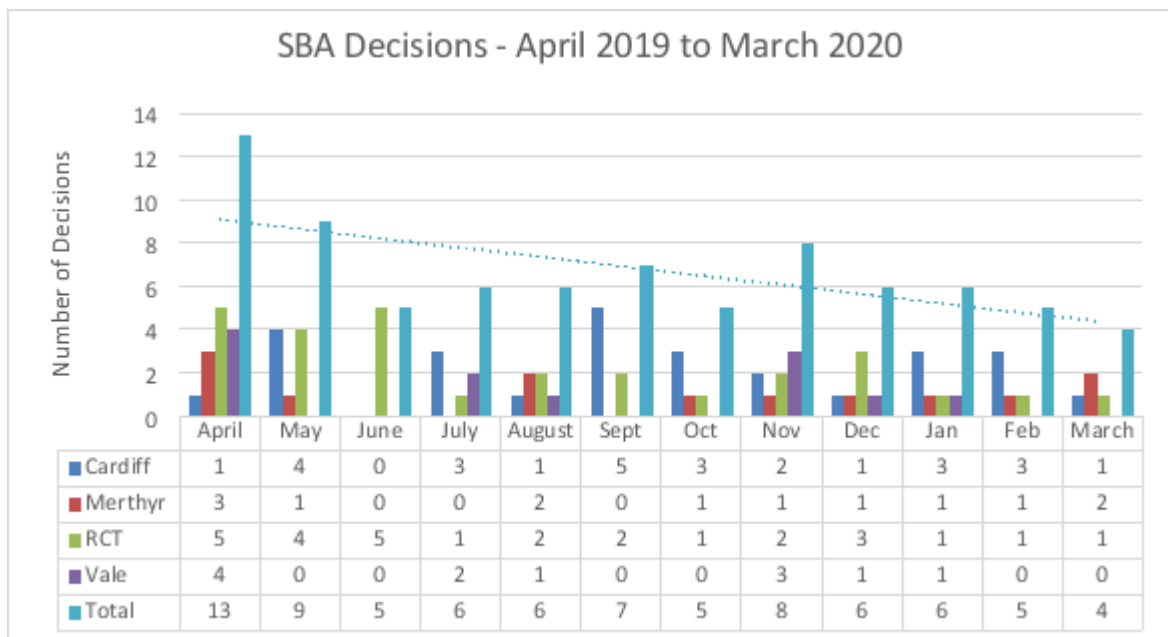
Children Referrals

143 children were referred to VVC during the reporting period. On average 12 referrals were received each month with 38% and 35% of referrals received from RCT and Cardiff respectively. 15% of referrals were received from Merthyr and 12% from the Vale.



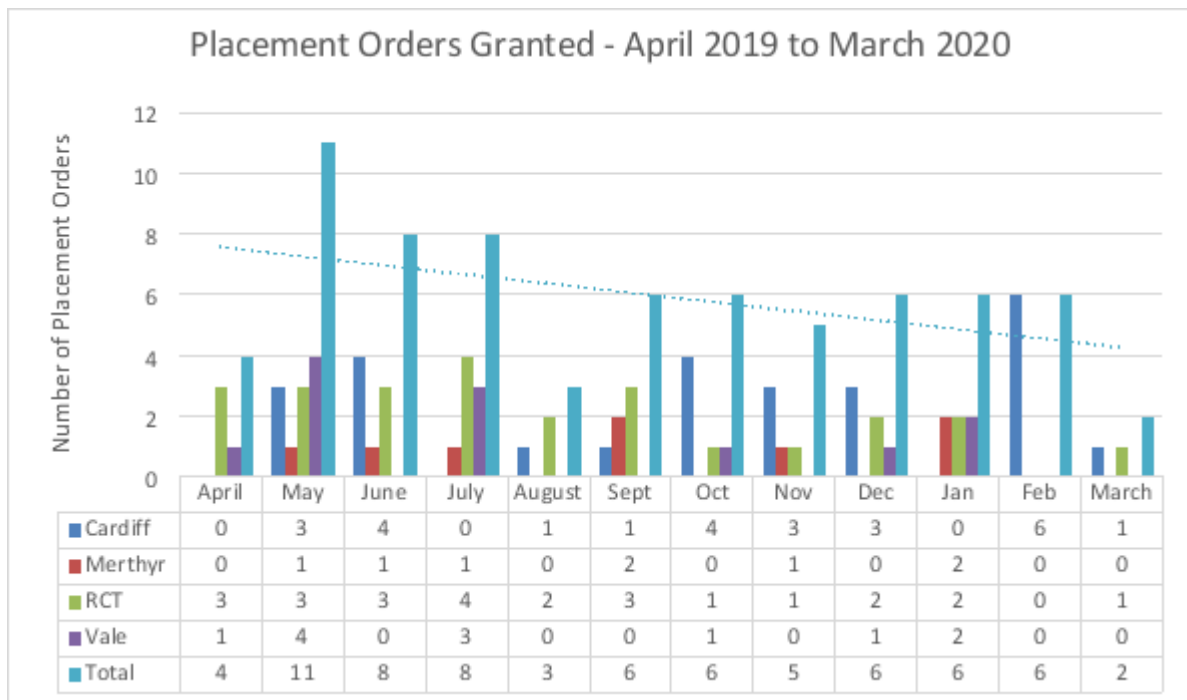
‘Should be placed for Adoption’ decisions

80 SBA decisions were made during the reporting period.



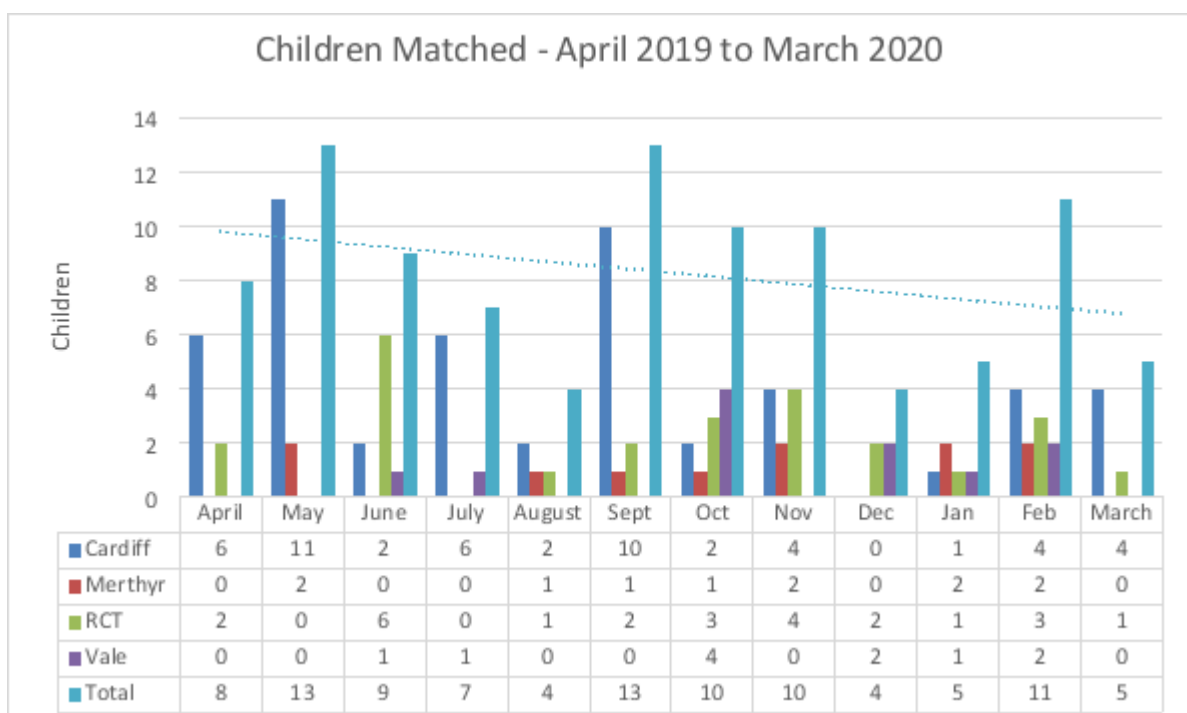
Placement Orders granted

71 Placement Orders were granted during the reporting period with an average of 6 Placement Orders granted each month.



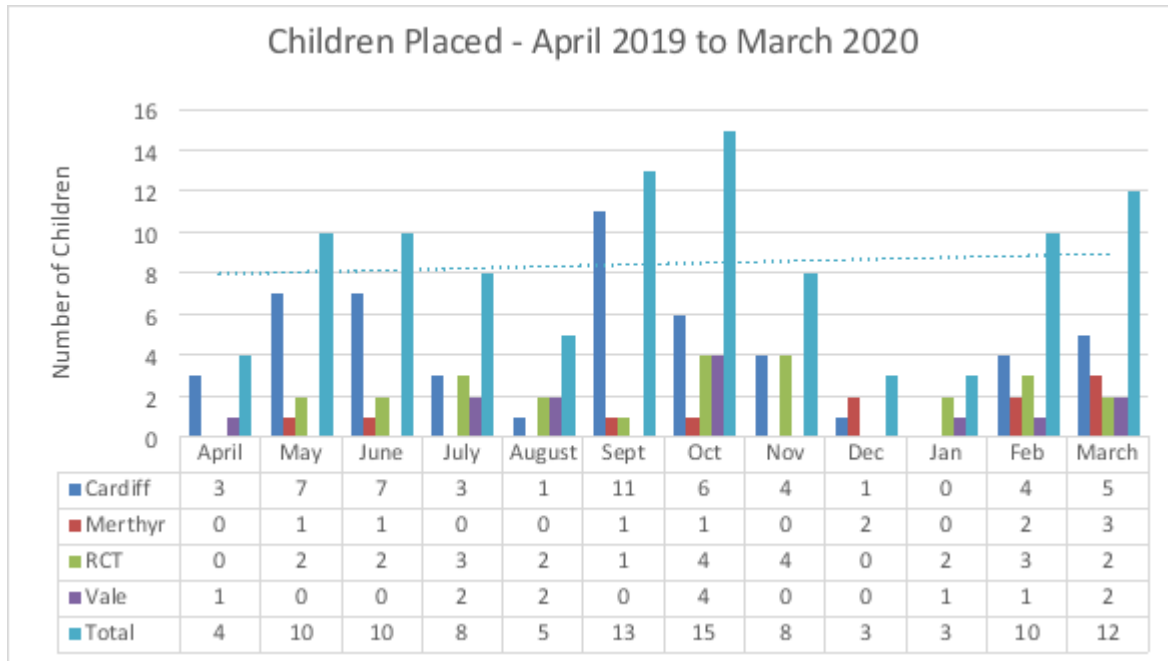
Children matched

98 children were matched with adopters during the period.



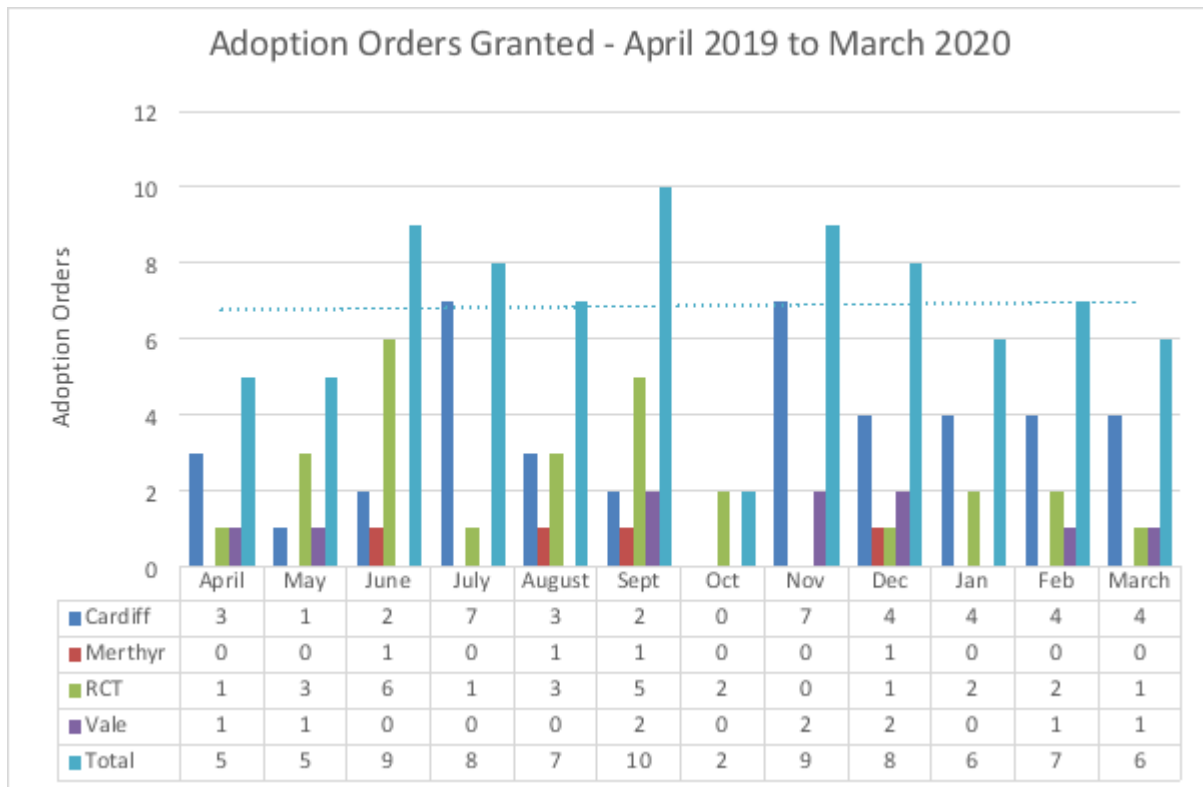
Children placed for Adoption

101 children were placed in adoption during the reporting period.



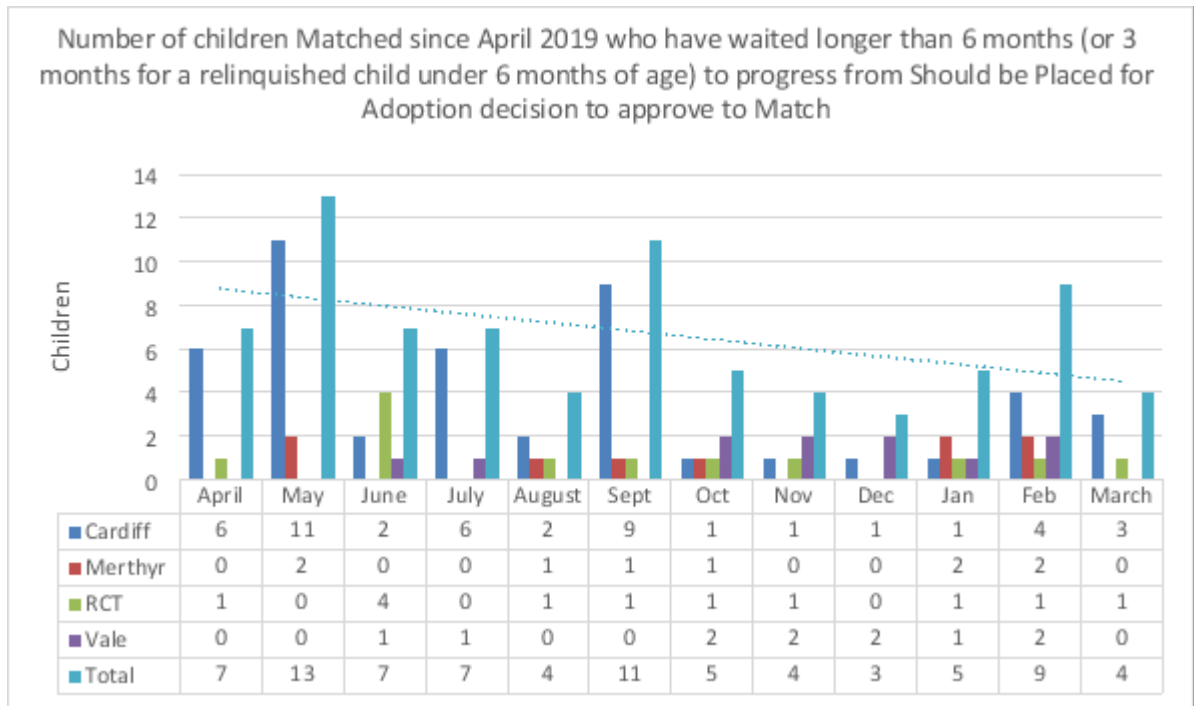
Adoption Orders

82 Adoption Orders were granted during the reporting period.

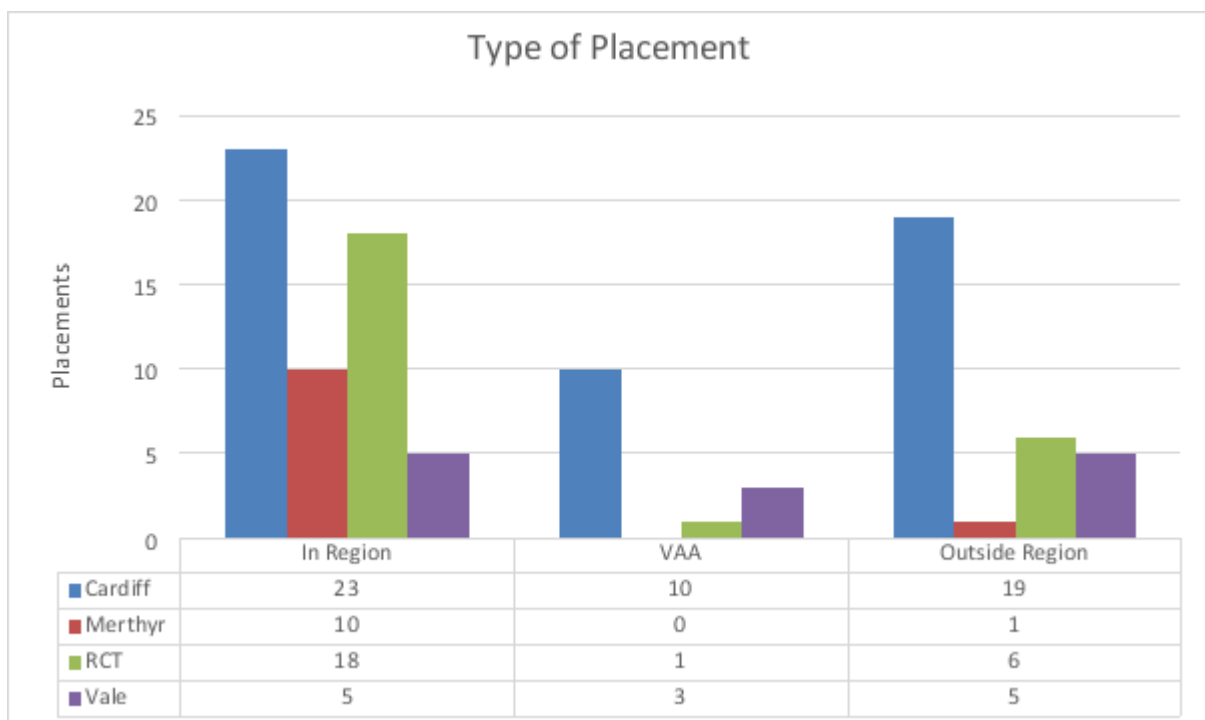


Number of children Matched since April 2019 who have waited longer than 6 months (or 3 months for a relinquished child under 6 months of age) to progress from Should be Placed for Adoption decision to approve to Match

79 of the 98 children matched had waited longer than 6 months to progress from a 'Should be placed for Adoption' decision to 'Approve to Match'.



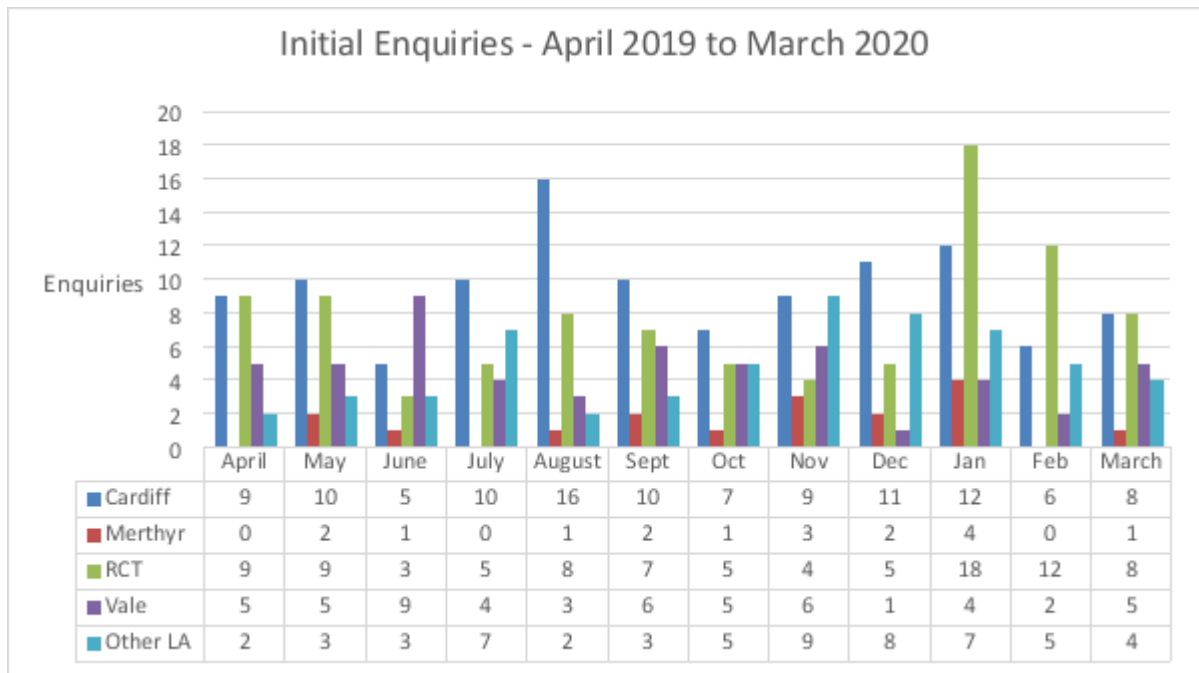
Type of Placement



Appendix 3 – Recruitment and Assessment

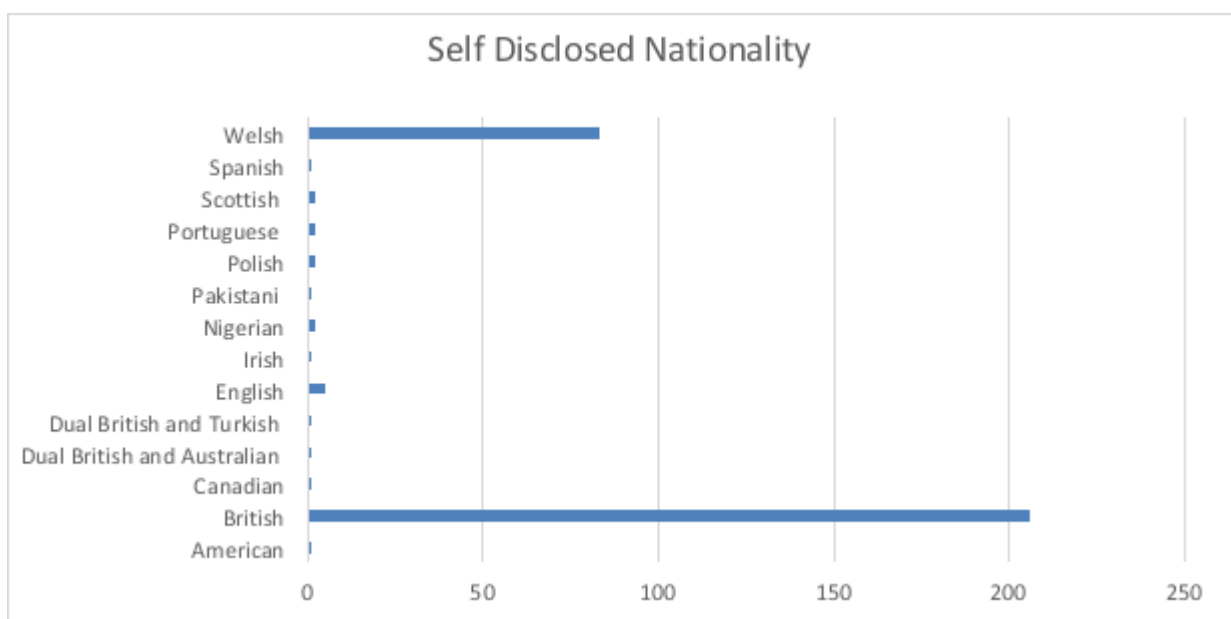
Initial Enquiries

278 enquiries were received from people living within our region. In addition, 58 enquiries were received from people living outside our area. There was a total of 336 enquiries.

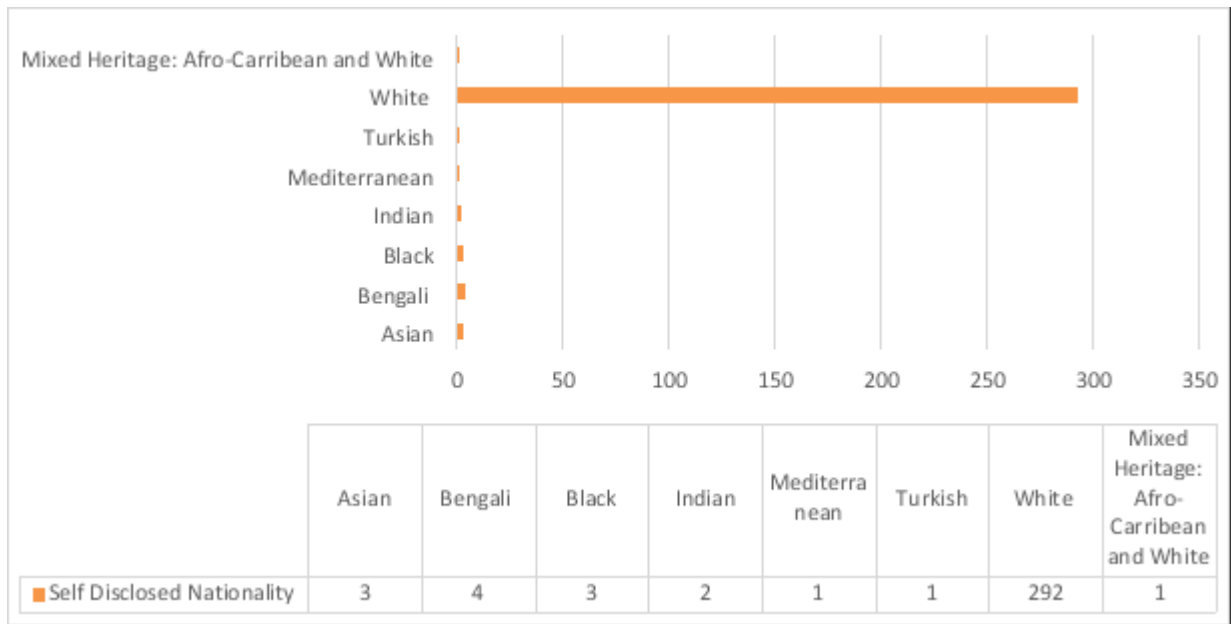


Demographics of Initial Enquiries

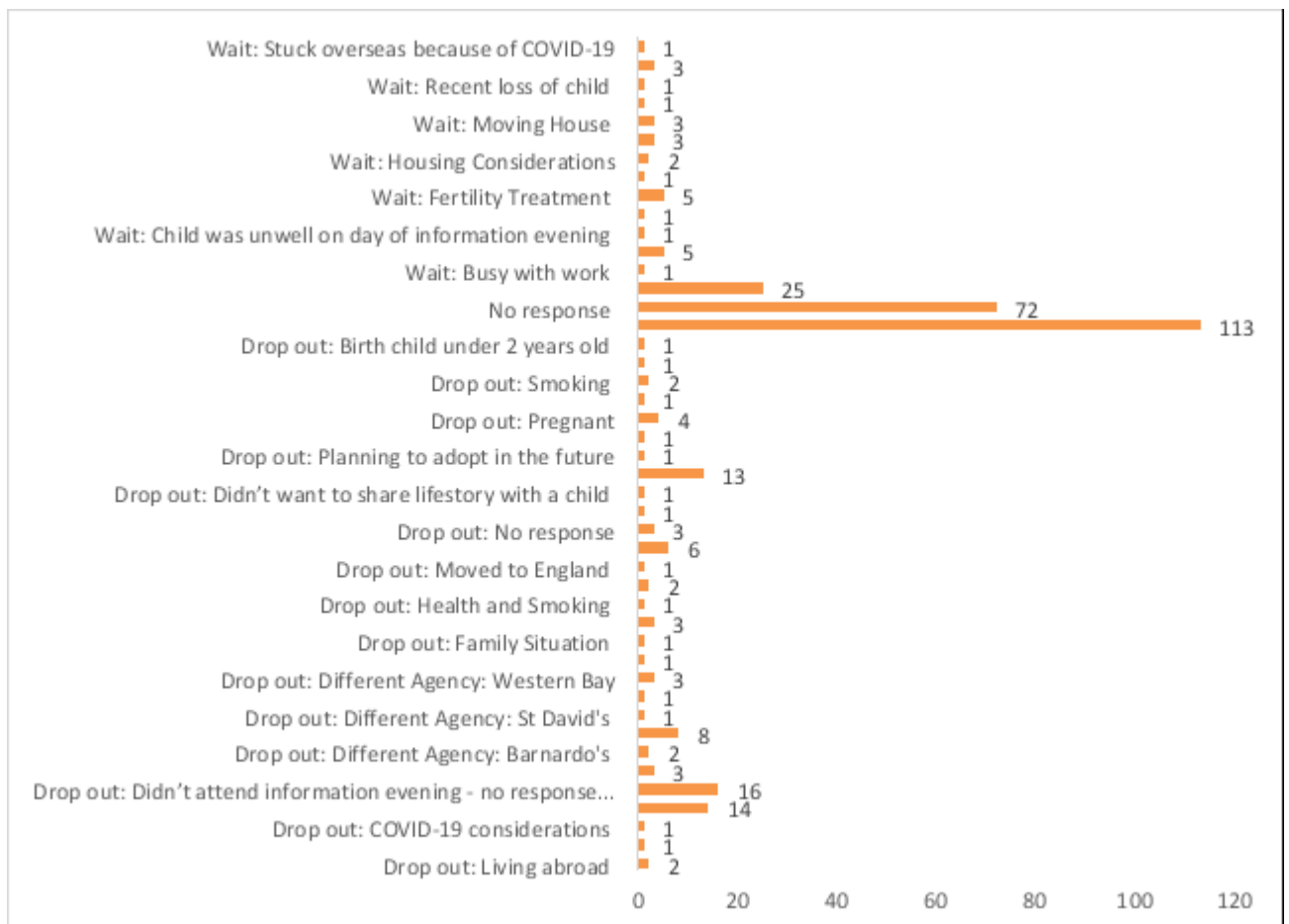
Self-disclosed Nationality



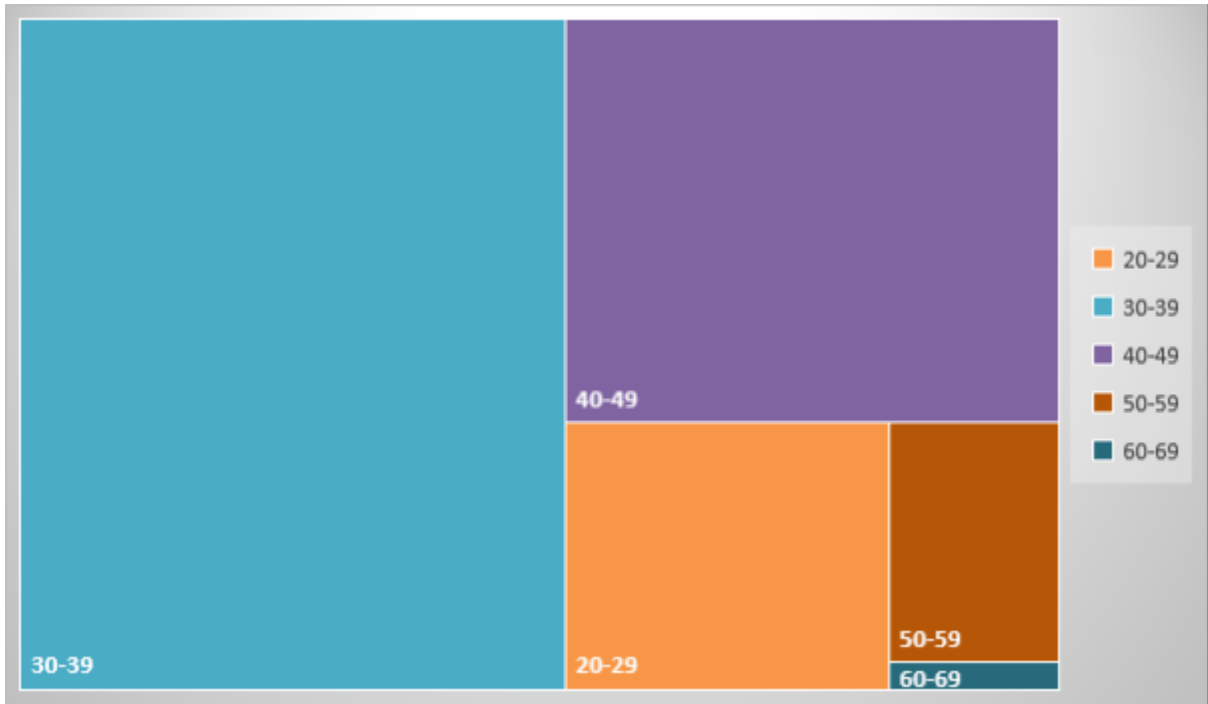
Self-disclosed ethnicity



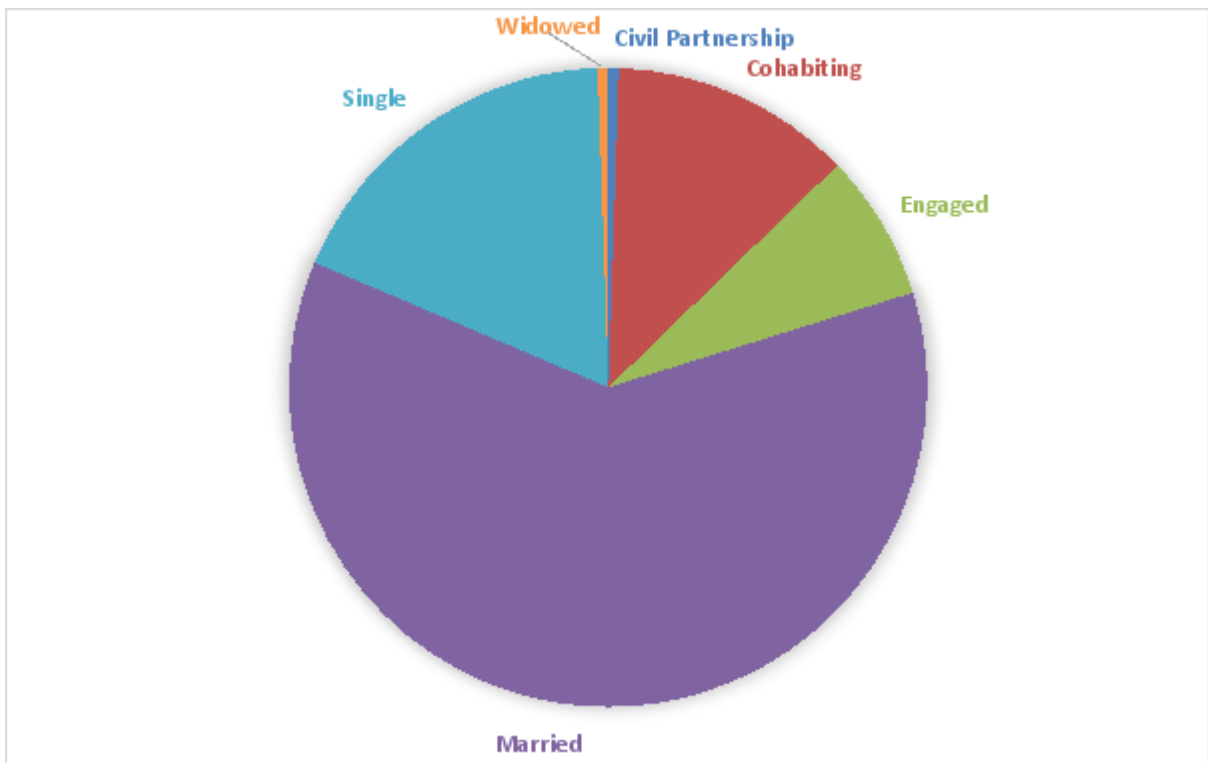
Self-disclosed Follow up - reasons for delay or withdrawal from adoption process before Information Evening



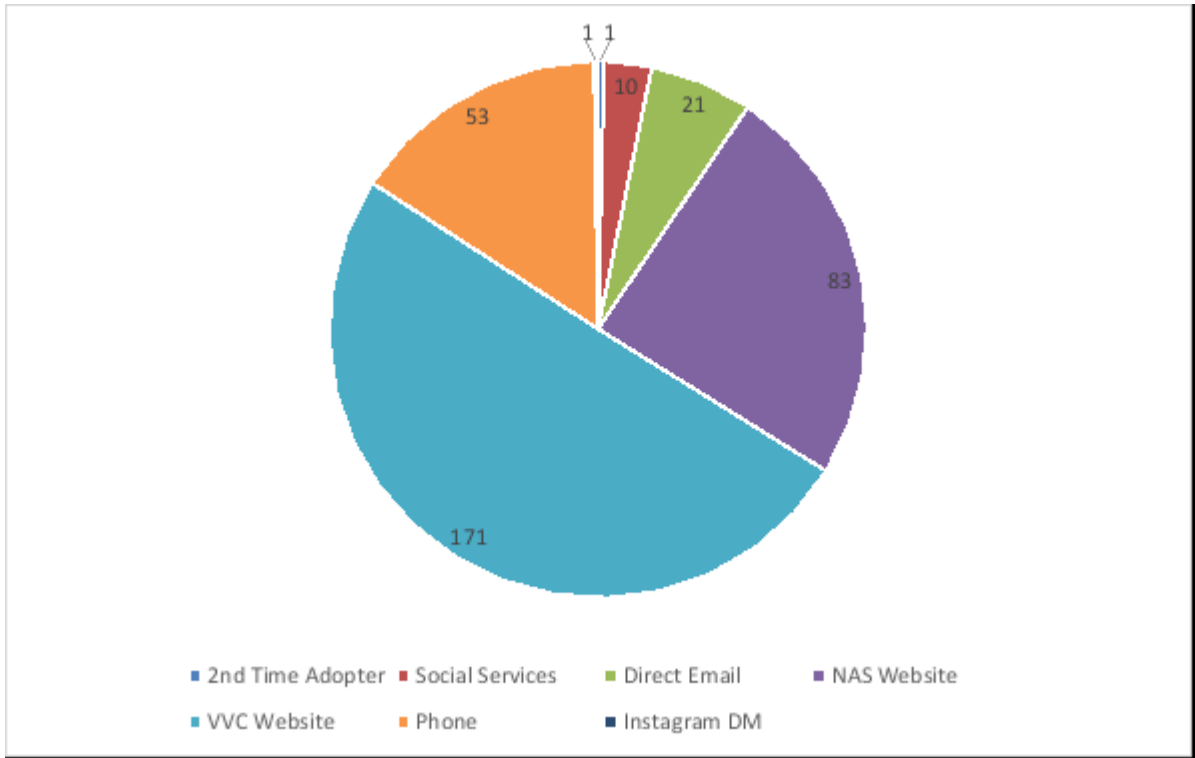
Age



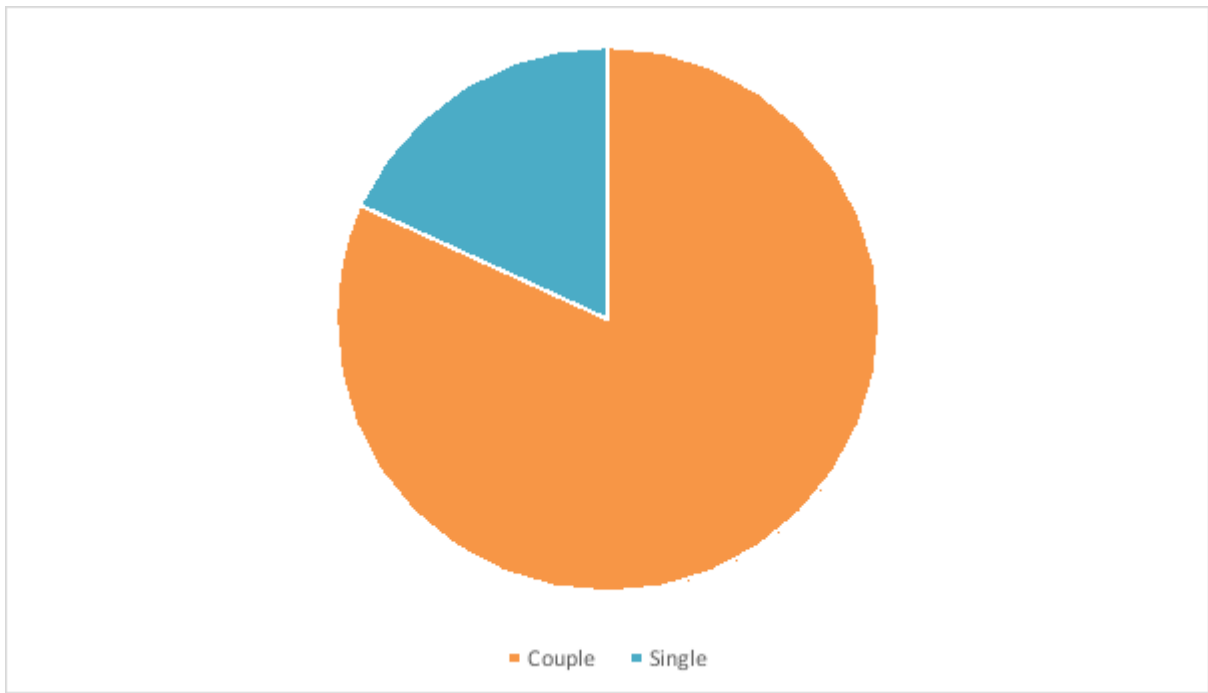
Relationship Status



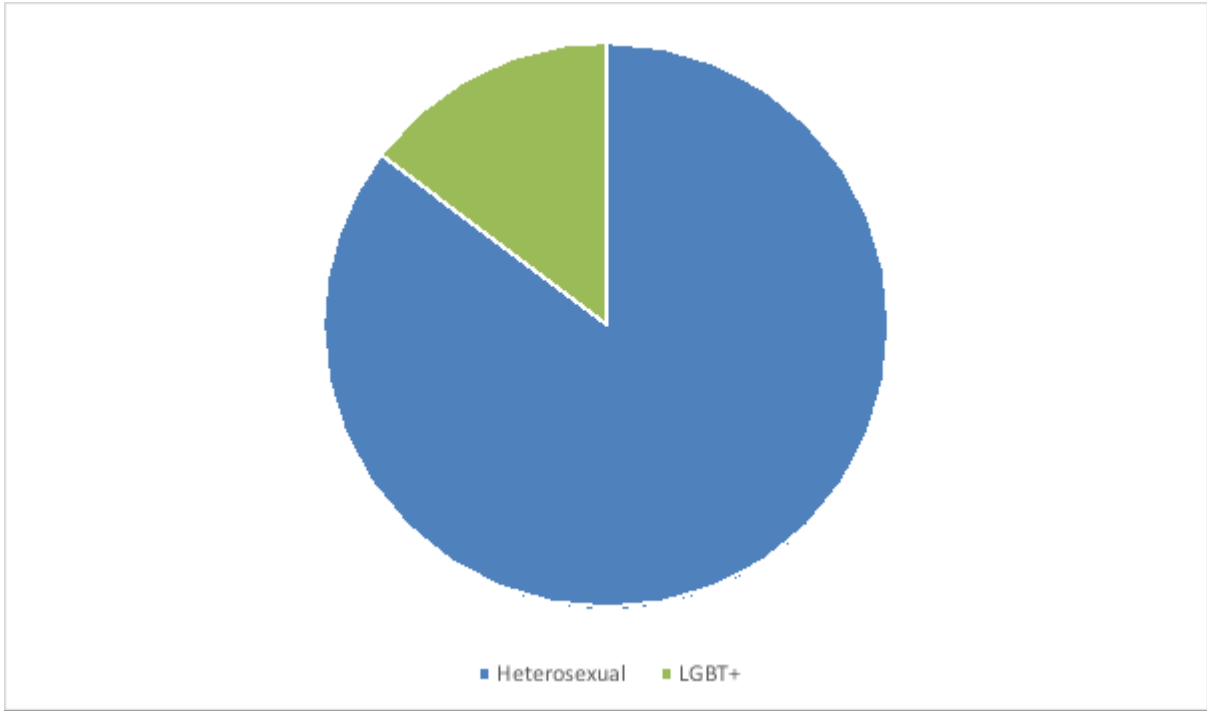
How they contacted us



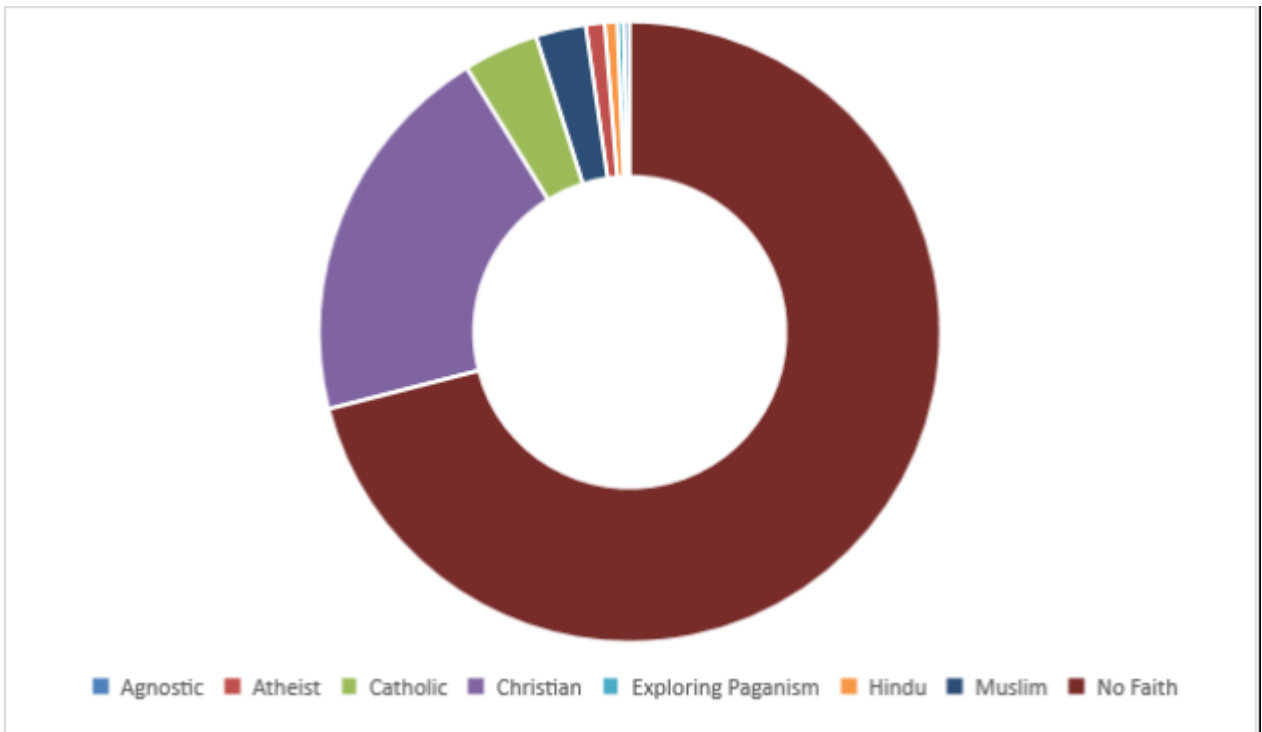
Couples and Singles



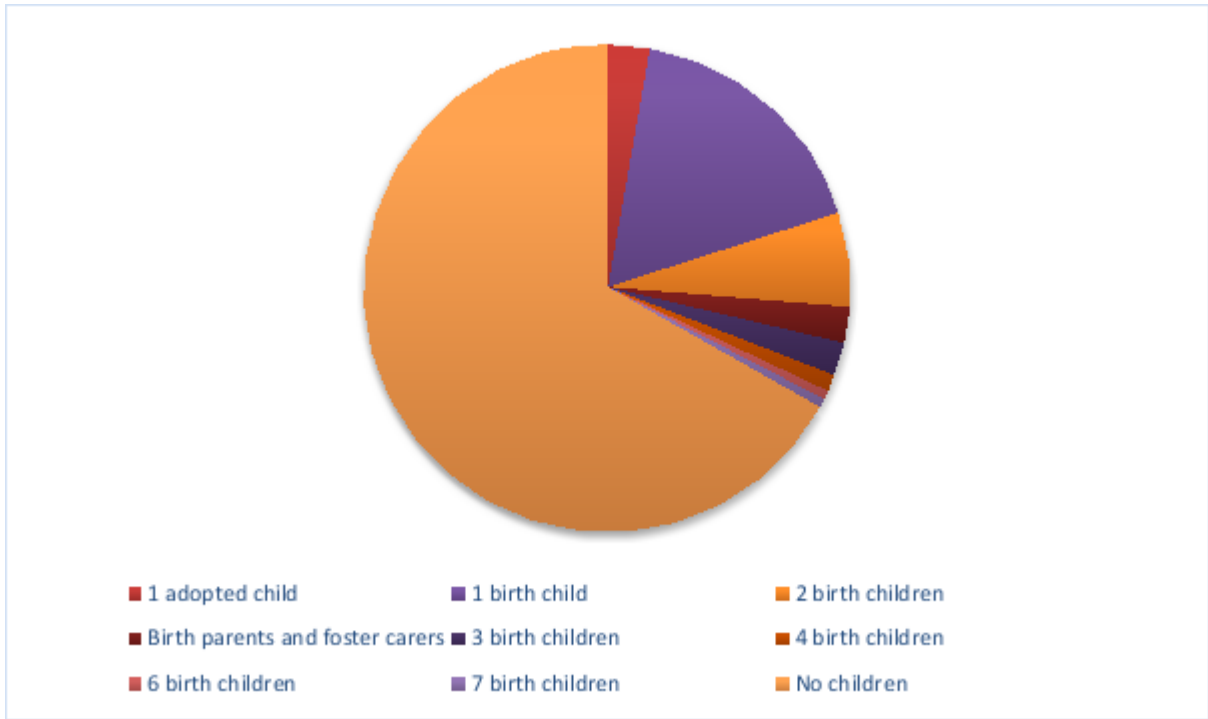
Couples: self-reported LGBT+ and Heterosexual



Self-reported Faith

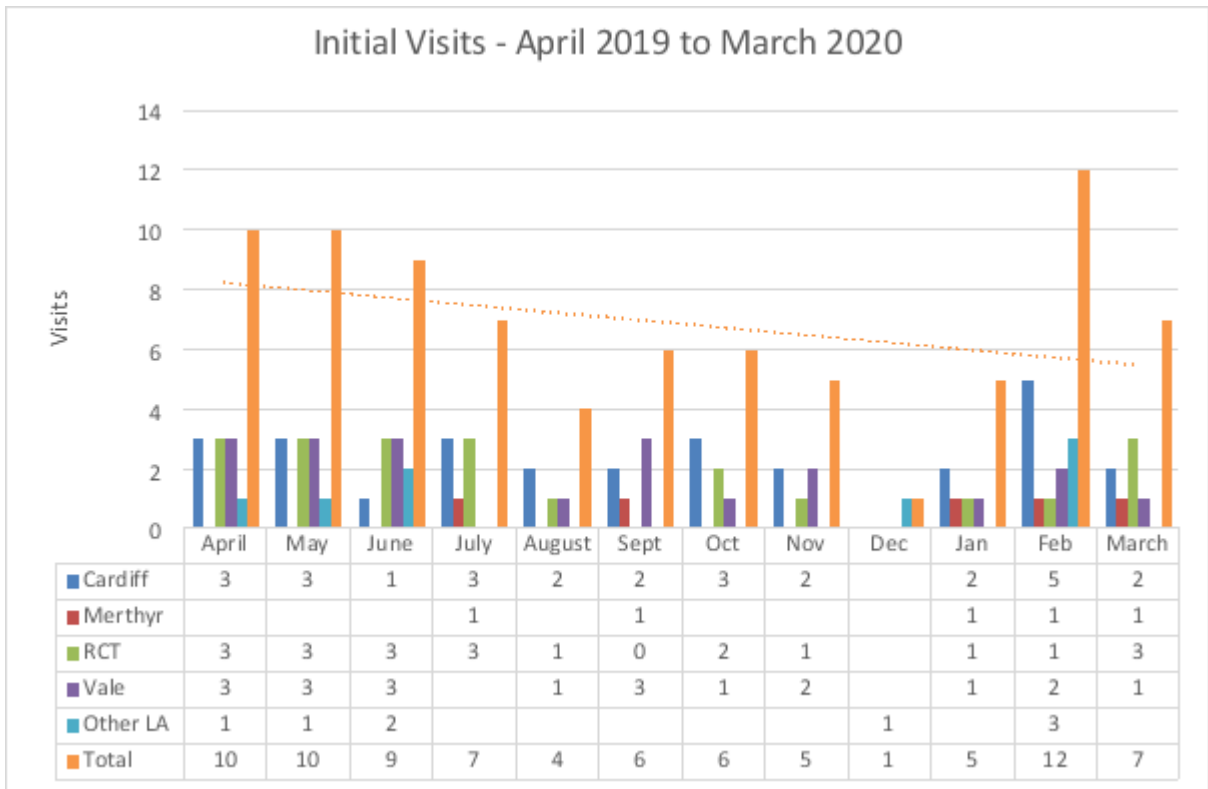


Adopting with children already in the household



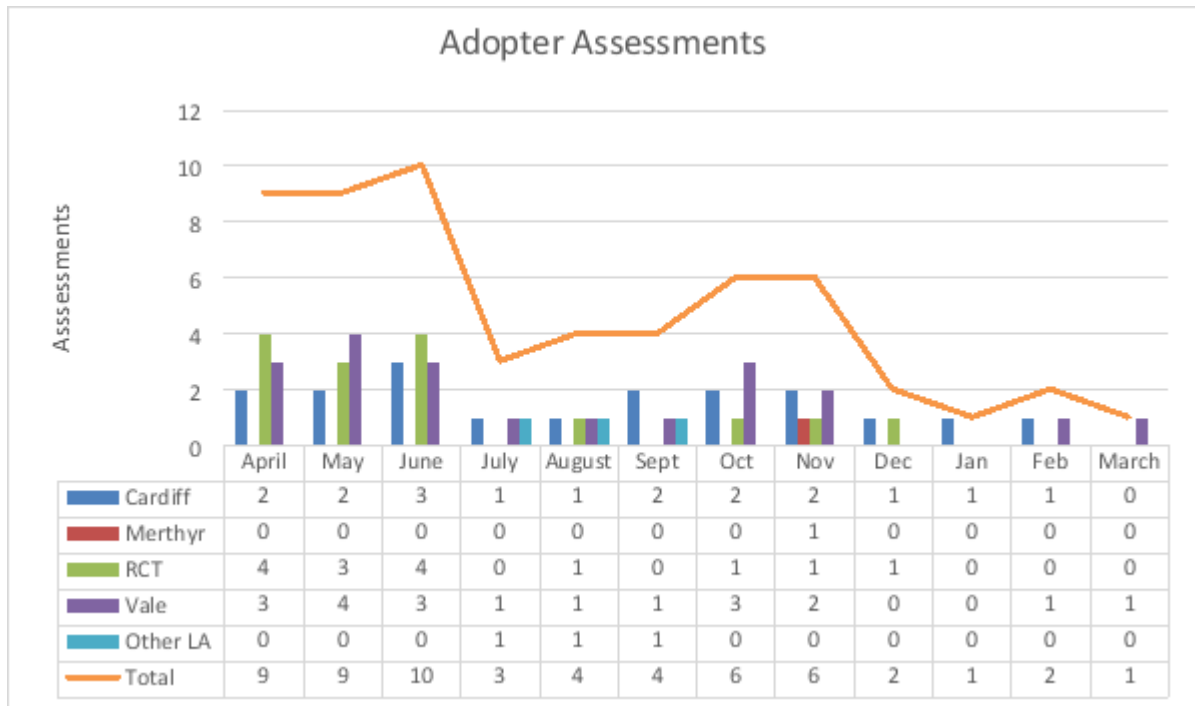
Initial Visits

82 initial enquiries took place during the reporting period.



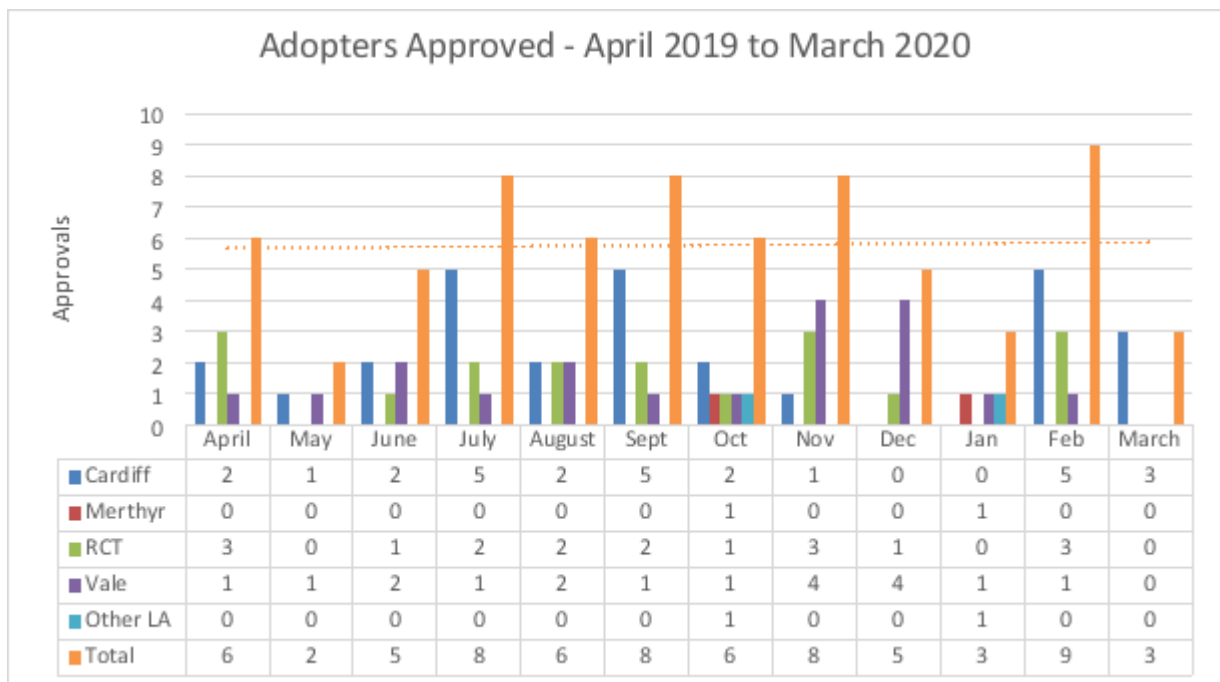
Adopter Assessments

57 adopter assessments were carried out during the reporting period



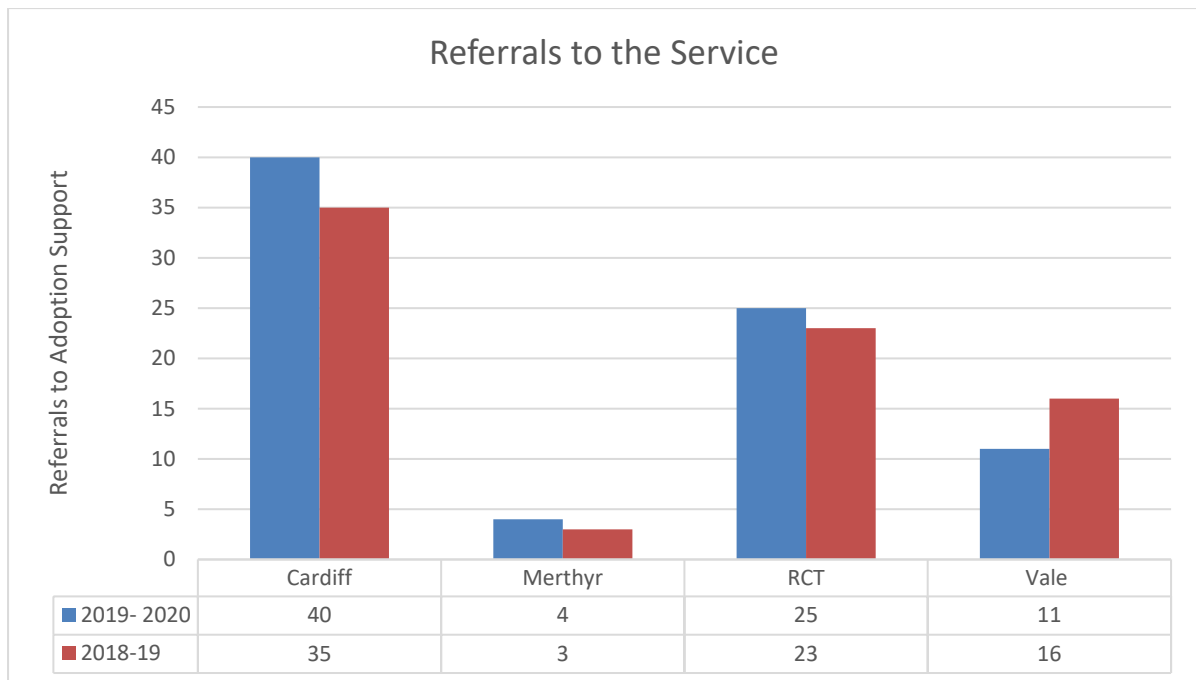
Adopter Approvals

75 adopter approvals were presented to the adoption panel, of these 69 adopter approvals were ratified during the reporting period.

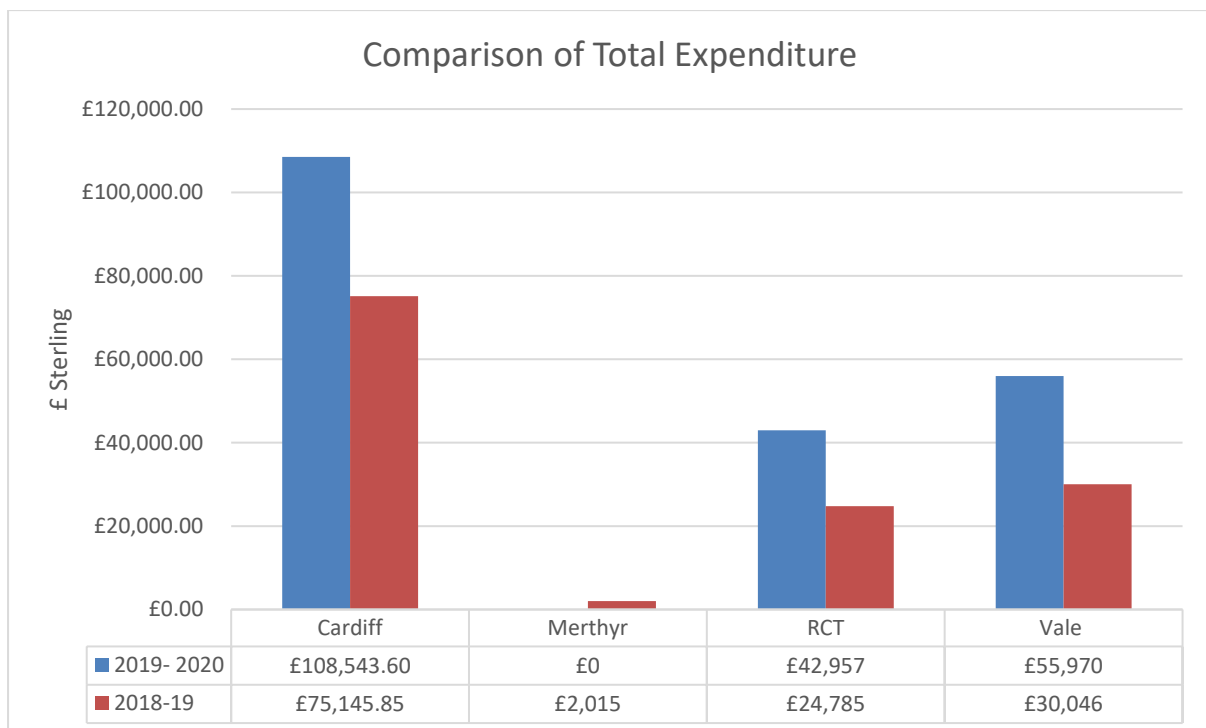


Appendix 4 – Adoption Support

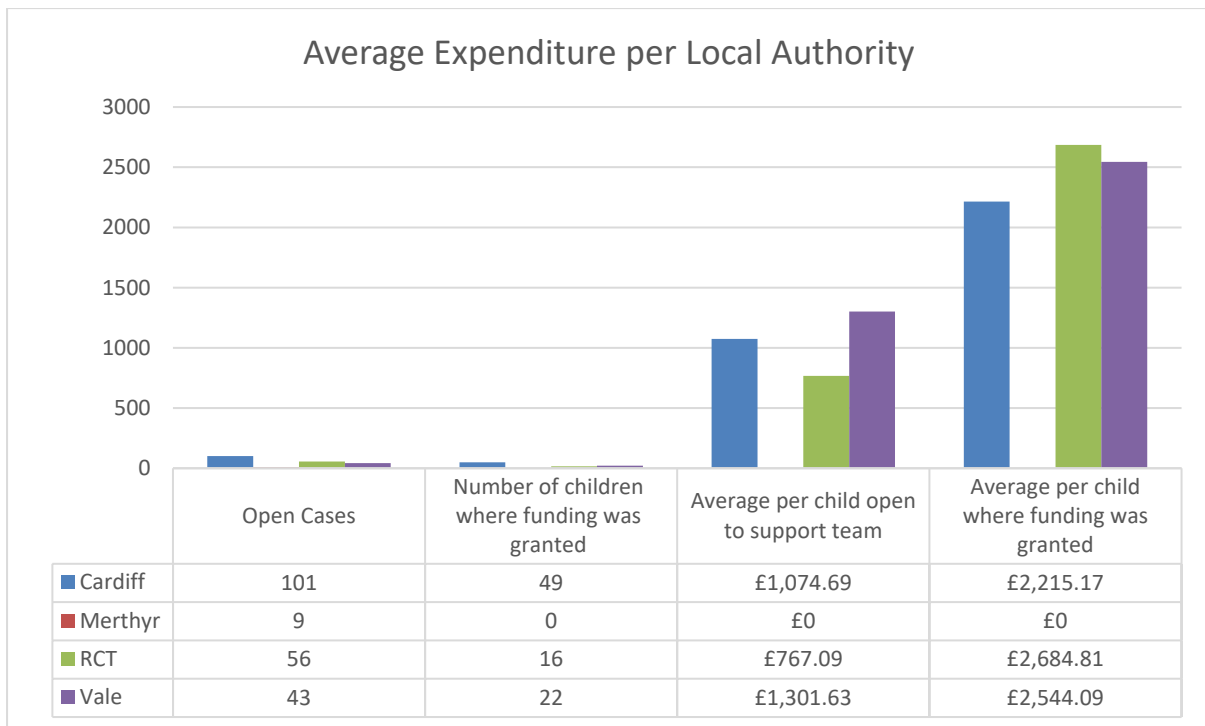
Referrals



Expenditure per Local Authority

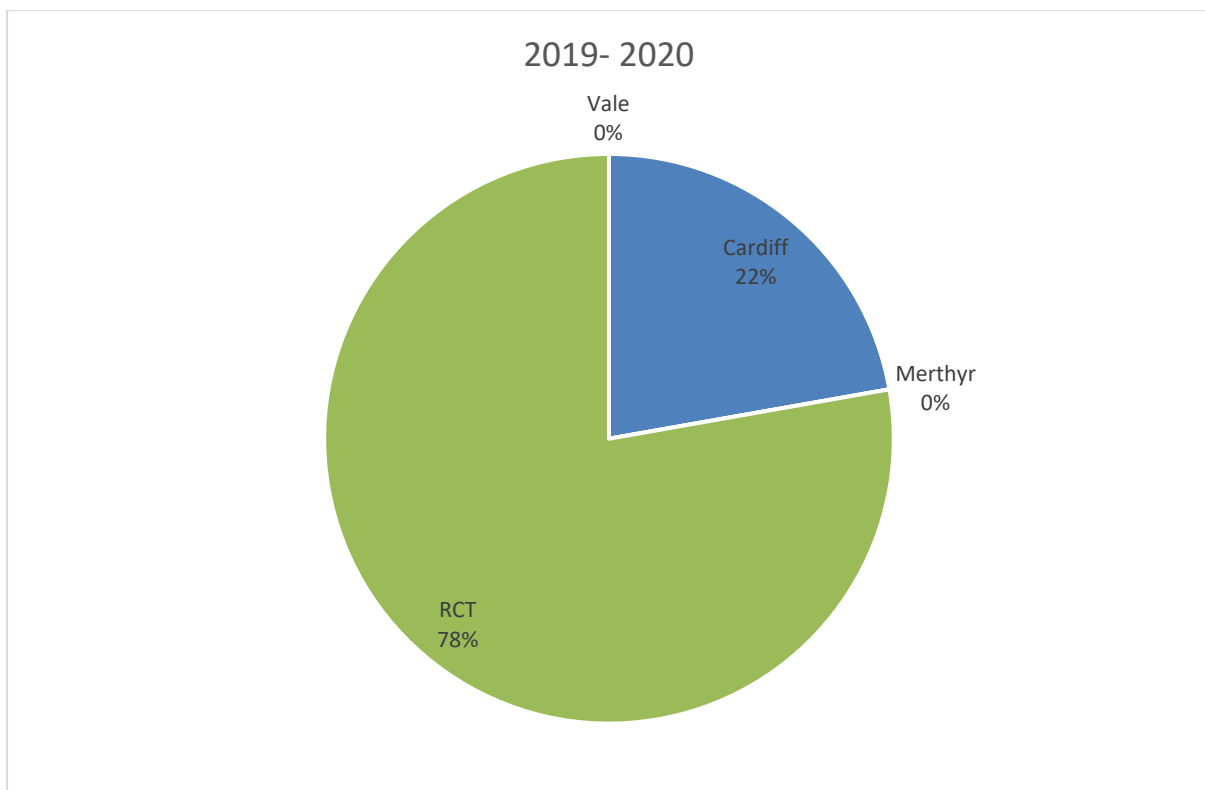


Average Expenditure per Local Authority

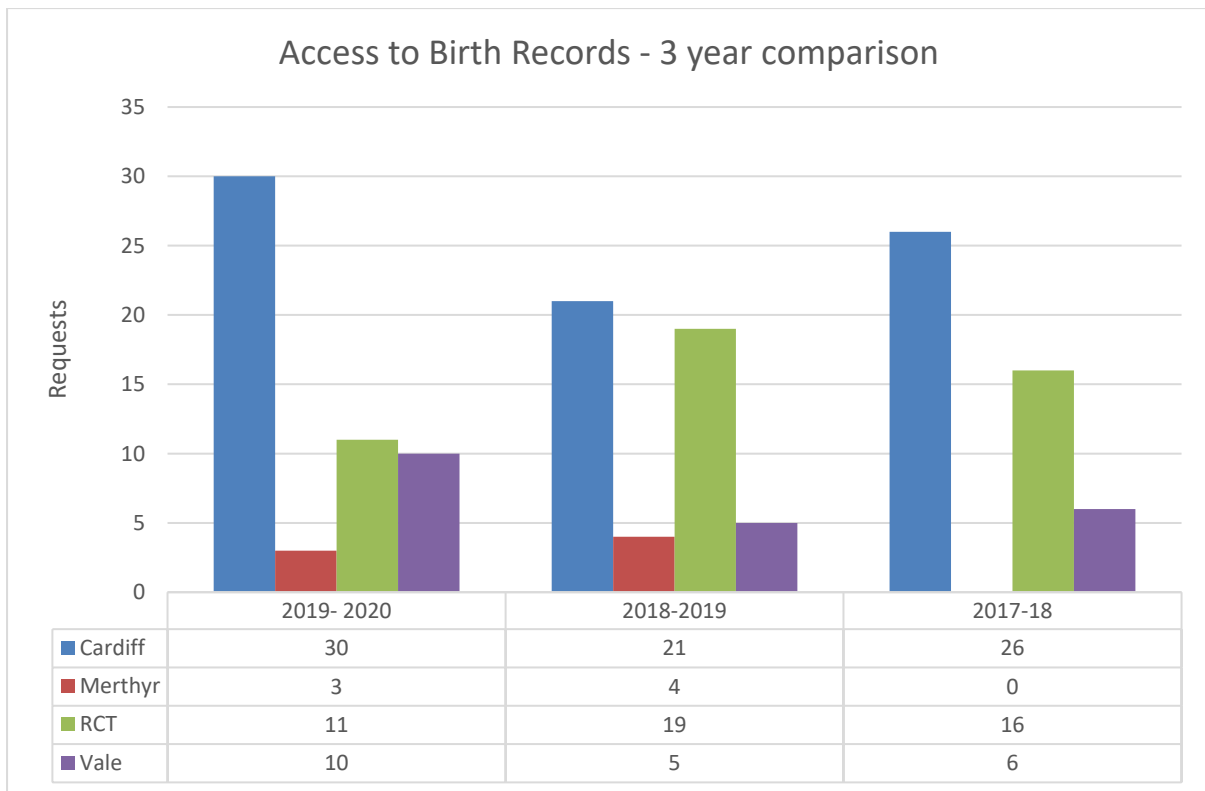


Other Services

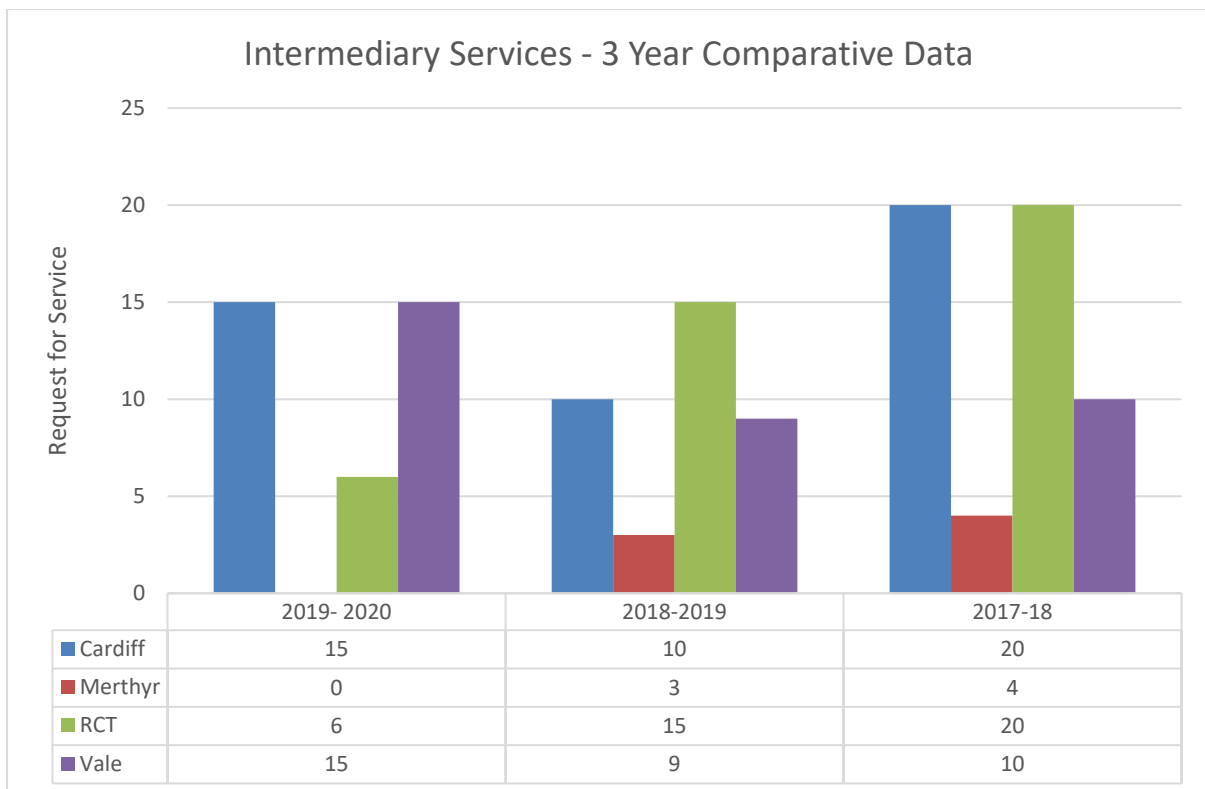
Birth Parent Support



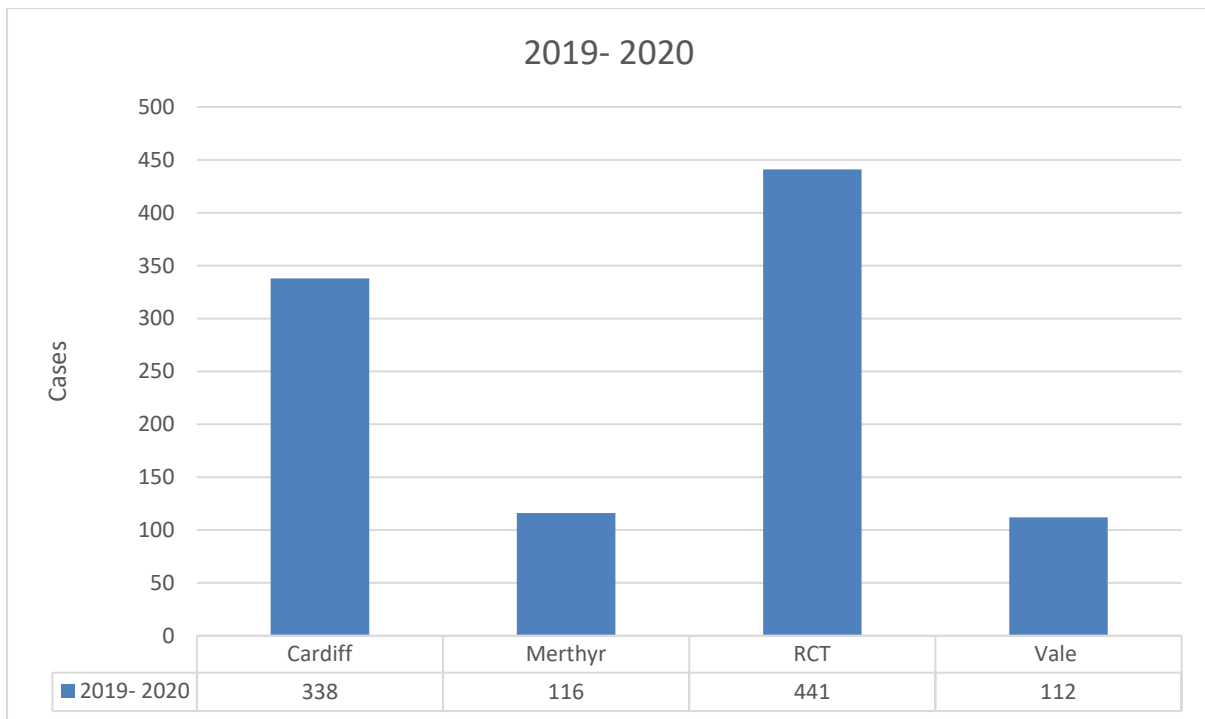
Access to Birth Records



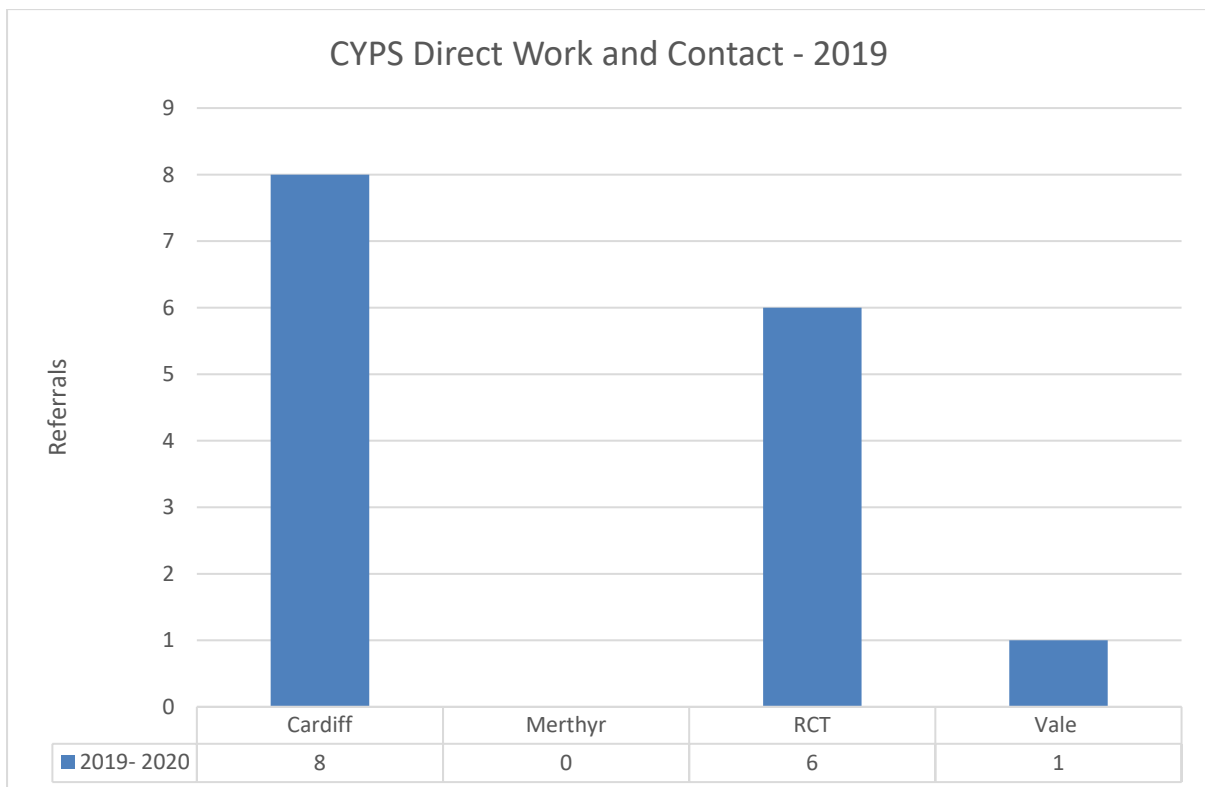
Intermediary Services



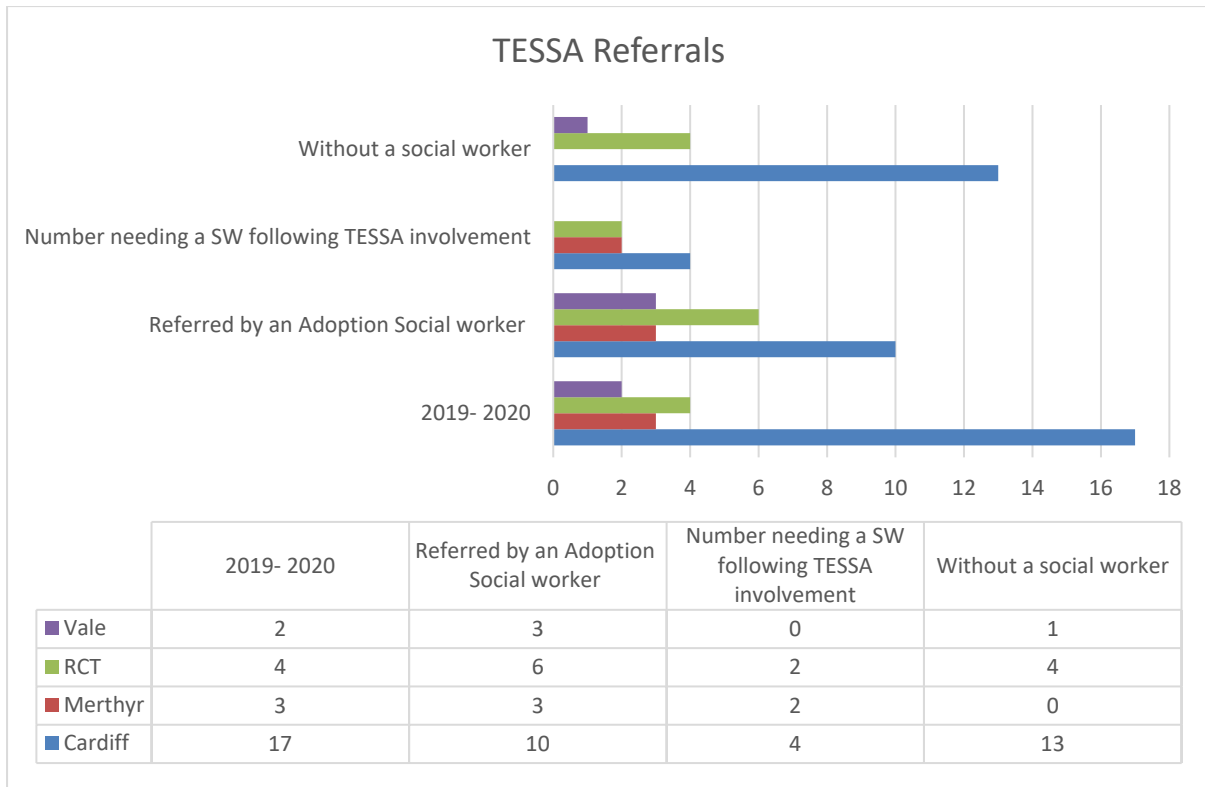
Letterbox



Children and Young People's Service



TESSA

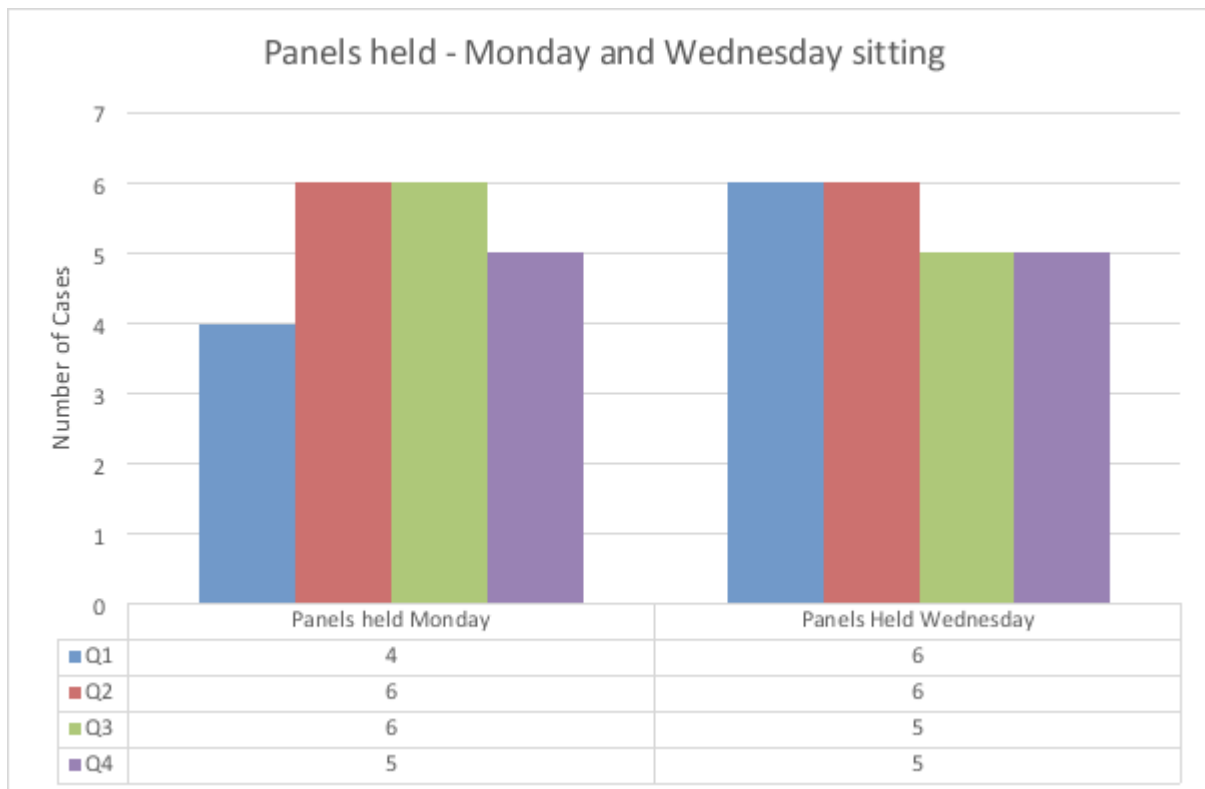


Training

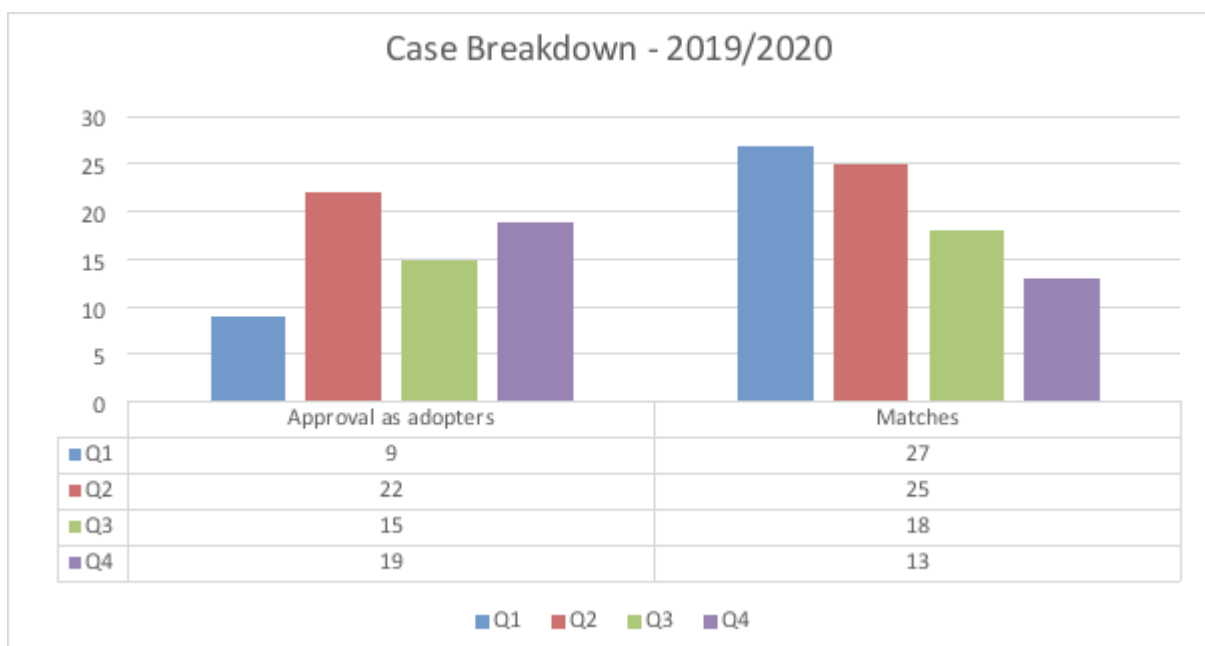


Appendix 5 – Adoption Panel

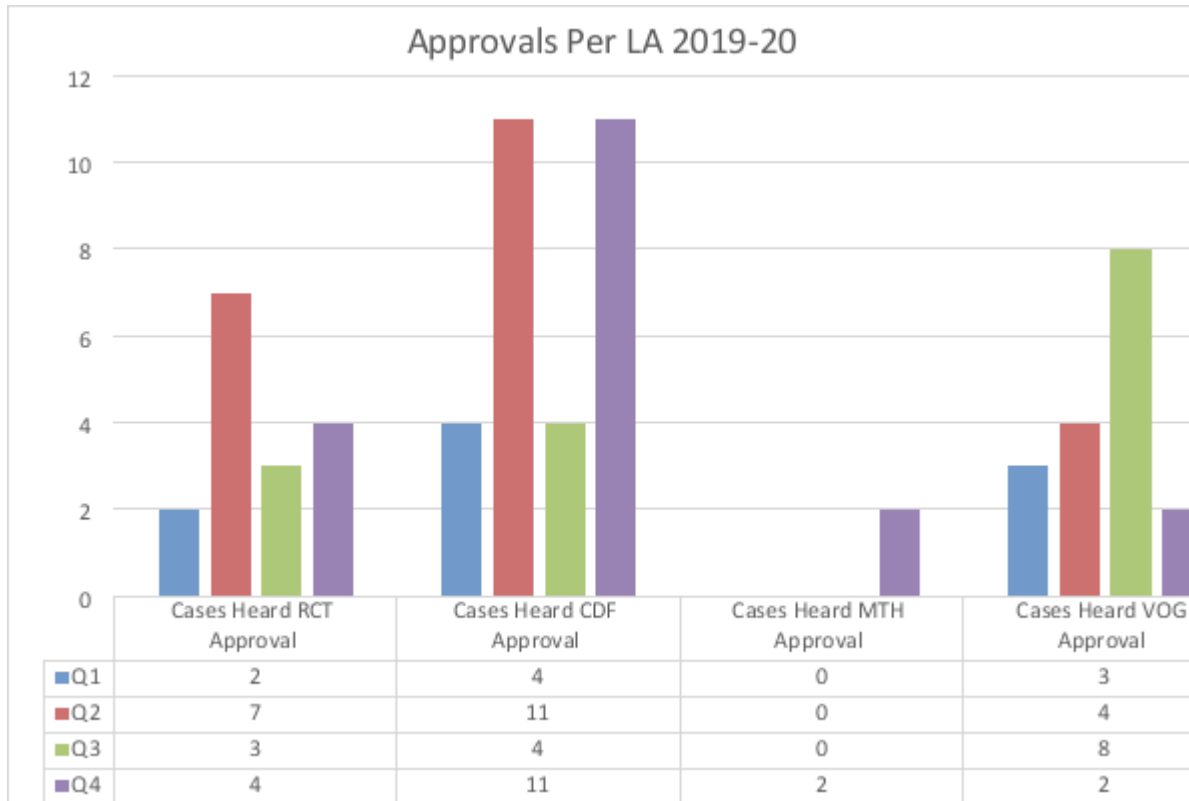
Panels convened



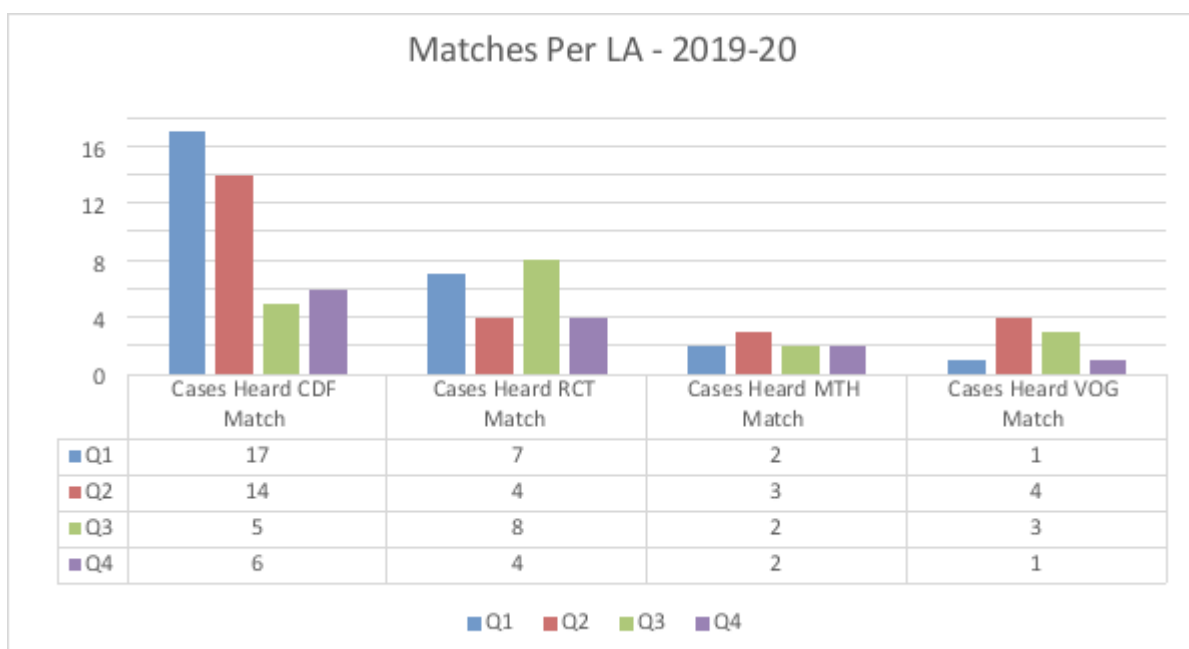
Case distribution



Approvals per Local Authority



Matches per Local Authority





RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13TH JANUARY 2020

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION

Author: Hannah Williams, Council Business Unit - 01443 424062

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with the Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board for the Municipal Year 2019/20.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Acknowledge the breadth of work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Board in the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Under the Leaders Scheme of Delegation (the 3A) the Corporate Parenting Board, comprising of a cross party membership was formed to take the lead in ensuring that the Council fulfils its responsibilities as corporate parent's to children who are looked after and formulate Council policy in respect of children who are looked after and children in need.
- 3.2 It is felt that it would be beneficial for the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to have sight of the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report, in order to further aid transparency and continue the good synergy between Scrutiny and the Board.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The first Annual Report for the Corporate Parenting Board was produced for the 2015/16 Municipal Year.

- 4.2 The content of the report acted as a useful basis for a number of upcoming topics, which the Members felt needed particular attention in the 2016/17 Municipal Year.
- 4.3 This is the fifth Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Board, which provides a summary of the role and work of the Board undertaken in the 2019/20 Municipal Year.
- 4.4 On 30th July, 2020, the Corporate Parenting Board approved the Annual Report for the 2019/20 Municipal Year and felt it would be beneficial for the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to have sight of its content.
- 4.5 As part of the Board's Terms of reference, the Board will report its work to Cabinet for consideration.

5. THE WORK OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD 2019-20

- 5.1 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of scheduled meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board were cancelled during the year and as such, a number of the reports detailed within the work programme were postponed to the following Municipal Year. Members recognise the importance of Children's Social Services and were assured that officers continued to carry out their roles effectively.
- 5.2 Despite the circumstances, the Corporate Parenting Board considered the following vast range of reports, which led to challenging discussions:
- Overview of the Community Wellbeing and Resilience Service
 - New Operating Model for Young Carers
 - Independent Reviewing Officer Report
 - CIW Inspection Update
 - Regional Fostering Update
 - Pupil Deprivation Grant Update
 - Cwm Taf Statement of Intent for Children and Young People: 'A Shared Regional Strategy for Supporting Children, Young People and Families'
 - 'Carn Ingli' New Residential House Update
 - Miskin Annual Report
 - Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Regional Adoption Annual Report
 - RCT Placement Commissioning Strategy
 - Implementation of the Bright Spots Survey Findings
- 5.3 The Corporate Parenting Board have developed a robust and varied [Work Programme](#) for the 2020-21 Municipal Year, to continue good

practice. Members will also have the opportunity to raise any matters that they would like to add to the programme during the year.

5.4 The following key elements of focus were agreed by the Corporate Parenting Board for the 2020-21 Municipal Year:

- To continually review the Regular Performance Data
- To further interact with young people
- To welcome further training opportunities
- To review the progress of the Two Sides website
- To strengthen the link with the Council's Scrutiny Committees

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

7. CONSULTATION

7.1 There is no consultation required for this report.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

8.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

9.1 The report has been prepared in accordance with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's constitution.

10. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

10.1 The work of the Corporate Parenting Board links directly to the Council's Corporate Plan priority – 'Rhondda Cynon Taf's Children will receive a great start in life...'

10.2 In respect of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, the work of the Corporate Parenting Board meets the Five Ways of Working:

1. Working together with other partners to deliver objectives

The Corporate Parenting Board considers reports and presentations from various service areas of the Council. Members are aware that a number of partners and areas must contribute to tackle the range of

different issues, which young people may experience, such as mental health, education and budgeting.

2. Involving those with an interest and seeking their views

The Corporate Parenting Board provide looked after young people and care leavers in RCT with the opportunity to attend meetings and have their voice heard. It allows them to promote their life experiences at a strategic, policy and legislative level and provides Members with the chance to hear first-hand experiences.

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 The Corporate Parenting Board Annual report outlines the work of the Board in the 2019/20 Municipal Year and features the priority areas the Board will consider in the future ensuring that the Council provides continuous improvement to the services that it delivers for its children and young people within the Looked After System.

RHONDDA CYNON TAF
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
ANNUAL REPORT
2019/20



RHONDDA CYNON TAF



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FOREWORD



Councillor Christina Leyshon
Cabinet Member for Children's Services
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board

The concept of Corporate Parenting was introduced in 1998 by the then Secretary of State for Health, Frank Dobson, who outlined the duties of members towards Children who are Looked After: *“For children who are looked after, your council has a legal and moral duty to try to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would give to their children...you should do your utmost to make sure that those children in public care get a good start in life...”*

It is with great pleasure, that I present to you the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report, which provides a summary of the role and work of the Board undertaken in the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

The Council as a whole shares the ‘Corporate Parenting’ responsibility and all Elected Members must be proactive within their own remit. The Corporate Parenting Board is the principle place within the Council for a select few cross-party Elected Members and officers to meet on a regular basis as critical friends, to support, challenge and strive for stronger collaborative working to ensure the best possible outcomes for the children and young people who are looked after in our communities. The environment in which the Corporate Parenting Board conducts its meetings, is non-judgemental and allows for both officers and Members to freely voice their opinions to ensure the correct decisions are made in relation to such a key service area.

It is essential that as Corporate Parents, we do not become complacent and continually strive to improve the services that we deliver. Through emotional and academic support, we will remain united to ensure that our children and young people

feel happy, safe and in control of their lives and are able to overcome the barriers they face.

During the 2019/2020 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board have considered a vast range of reports, which often resulted in challenging debates. However, along with the challenge, it is important to note that we have been overwhelmed by the positive outcomes and success stories of our children and young people, which is a credit to the staff who work tirelessly to continuously improve the services we provide.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the last two meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board were cancelled and as such, a number of the reports detailed on our work programme were postponed to the following Municipal Year. We all recognise the importance of Children's Social Services and are assured that our officers continue to carry out their roles effectively.

I will conclude by echoing our continued aspiration, which is to see the day that every child is treated with love and respect and where no child is taken into care. We are fully aware of the rising numbers of Children Looked After on both a National and Local level but our commitment as Corporate Parents is to ensure that the children and young people of Rhondda Cynon Taf are safe from harm and given the care and support that they deserve, regardless of numbers. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to all Members of the Corporate Parenting Board, both new and longstanding; and, of course, to the officers who continue to work hard and have been integral in stimulating robust discussion at our meetings.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Leysha', is centered on the page. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

WHAT IS THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD?

“As Councillors, you have a major role to play in ensuring that those children who are cared for by your council have the best care that they can possibly receive...the duty on you is to do all you can to ensure these children can be the best they can be.” Keith Towler, Children’s Commissioner for Wales, 2009.

The role of the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) is to ensure that the Council is fulfilling its corporate duties towards Children Looked After (CLA). The Board was established to monitor, challenge and develop areas within the Children’s Services to ensure the best outcomes for our children and young people.

Every child should be happy, healthy and safe; they should be provided with support for them to thrive and achieve their goals; and they should be open to developing emotionally and socially. It is our duty, as Corporate Parents, to ensure that the children and young people who enter our care system are given these opportunities.

Our vision will:

- Result in better outcomes and life experiences for children looked after
- Compensate for any disadvantage they experience
- Improve the Council’s performance
- Produce lower costs to the Council in caring for children

MEET THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD



Councillor C Leyshon
(Chair)



Councillor G Hopkins
(Vice Chair)



Councillor J Rosser



Councillor R Yeo



Councillor E Griffiths



Councillor S Rees-Owen



Councillor J James



Councillor S Rees

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- ✚ To take the lead in ensuring that the Council fulfils its responsibilities as corporate parent to children who are looked after and formulate Council policy in respect of children who are looked after and children in need.
- ✚ To ensure that all Groups and divisions within the Council work together in order to promote best outcomes for children who are looked after and children in need.
- ✚ To promote effective relationships with key partner agencies in the best interests of children who are looked after and children in need.
- ✚ To monitor the implementation of the Action Plan arising from the Best Value Review of Services to children looked after, in addition to monitoring outcomes for children looked after and children in need.
- ✚ To consider the outcomes and promote positive learning practices following consideration of Child Practice Reviews
- ✚ In accordance with HMIP to routinely review the offending rates of CLA by gender to ensure that the Corporate Parenting Board understand patterns of offending by girls and are able to take actions to address where necessary.
- ✚ To consider the impact of relevant other systems/agencies (e.g. health, courts, schools) and see how these could be improved.
- ✚ To seek the views of children looked after - the advocacy service will be asked to facilitate.
- ✚ To invite representatives from other agencies to attend as appropriate.
- ✚ To report directly to Cabinet through an Annual report of the Board.

CROSS PARTY MEMBERSHIP:

- Cabinet Member for Children's Services (Chair),
- Cabinet Member for Adult Community Services and the Welsh Language (Vice Chair)
- Cabinet Member for Education & Inclusion Services,
- The Chair of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee,
- One Member from the Largest Opposition Party,
- One Non Executive Member of the ruling group,
- One Member of the Council not from the ruling group or the majority opposition group.
- Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru is also invited to attend the meetings. This enables both TGP Cymru and Children Services to discuss issues that affect service delivery in the community on a strategic level and to work in partnership to provide improved and better outcomes.

THE OFFICERS WHO SUPPORT THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD ARE:

- Group Director, Community & Children's Services
- Service Director, Children's Services
- Head of Inclusion Services
- Head of Legal Services
- Head of Safeguarding and Support
- Head of Looked After
- Customer Feedback, Engagement and Complaints Manager
- Senior Executive & Regulatory Business Officer
- Other officers depending on the business of the meeting.

VISION

The role of the corporate parent is to seek for children in public care the outcomes every good parent would want for their own children. The local authority has a legal and moral duty to provide support to the children it is responsible for looking after.

All Elected Members must be confident that the children who are looked after within RCT:

- Are safe.
- Have good homes in a secure and caring environment.
- Are placed within the local authority area, close to their homes and communities, as far as is possible.
- Have decent schooling.
- Are not being drawn into antisocial behavior.
- Are healthy.
- Are developing socially and emotionally.
- Are provided with help to cope with the problems they have in growing up.
- Are prepared for their transition to adulthood.
- Have ambitions for themselves.
- Are helped to achieve to the maximum of their ability.
- Have high aspirations and are able to show pride in their achievements
- Are provided with support to cope with their failures.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

As at the 31st March 2020, there were a total of 717 children and young people within the Local Authority's care.

The reason children become looked after throughout the country, cannot be based solely on a singular reason. The reasons are complex and include a dynamic interaction of factors including neglect, abuse and childhood trauma, as well as factors connected to the way the local area organises and deploys its services to vulnerable children and families. Rhondda Cynon Taf has some of the most deprived communities in Wales and it is, therefore, impossible to determine an 'appropriate' number for the rate of children becoming looked after.

Age Band	Total
0-3	129
4-7	128
8-11	164
12-14	137
15	49
16	44
17	66
Total	717

Children Looked After remains a key priority and the Council continues to strive for a safe reduction in Children Looked After numbers and to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children and young people of our County.

March 2020 figures show that the largest number of children looked after within RCT were between the ages 8 and 11.

Gender	Total
Female	303
Male	414
Total	717

The Gender figures show that there were 111 more males than females within RCT care, which is consistent with the figures from March 2019, where there were 80 more males than females.

The below tables outline March 2020 Placement Type Data in comparison to the same data from March 2019:

Children Looked After by Placement Type

Placement Type	Total as at 31/03/2020	Total as at 31/03/2019
Independent Sector Foster Placement	161	158
RCT Foster Carers	161	171
RCT Relative Foster Carers	233	204
Placed For Adoption	22	24
Placed With Parents	70	60
Education Placement	1	1
Other Lodgings	6	10
Independent Sector Residential Sector	53	33
RCT Residential Care	10	12
Secure	0	1
Total	717	674

It is recognised that each young person placed within our care has a plethora of different needs and that although a specific placement work for one young person, it may not be suitable for another.

The 2020 and 2019 data evidence are largely similar and show that the majority of children and young people in Rhondda Cynon Taf are placed in foster placements, and in particular, with Relative Foster Carers.

Where safe and possible to do so, children and young people are placed with their parents. In 2020, placements with parents totalled 70 in comparison to the 60 in 2019.

WORK OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Among other updates, the Corporate Parenting Board remain committed to the work programme, which consists of regular visits and updates in respect of certain aspects of the Children’s service area. These regular updates allow us to continually review data, progress and outcomes; along with having first hand experiences with our staff, young people and service users.

FRONTLINE VISITS

The Corporate Parenting Board has established a systematic process for ensuring that regular visits are undertaken to the frontline teams in Children’s Services to ensure that we continue to meet high standards. This practice is consistent with both recommendation 41 of the Victoria Climbié report and with a previous CIW safeguarding inspection report recommendation.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Attendees</u>
Tonypandy Office	West Intensive Intervention Team	10am Wednesday 18 th September, 2019	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Yeo
Ty Trevithick Office	East Intensive Intervention Team	10am Wednesday 16 th October, 2019	Cllr Leyshon
Glyncornel	Glyncornel	10am Wednesday 29 th January, 2020	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Rosser
Tonypandy Office	West & East Enquiry & Assessment Team	10am Wednesday 15 th January, 2020	Cllr Rosser Cllr Griffiths
Ty Trevithick Office	Childcare, Play & Youth Services	10am Wednesday 5 th February, 2020	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Rosser Cllr Griffiths
Ty Catrin	Ty Catrin	11:30am Wednesday 11 th March, 2020	Cllr Leyshon Cllr Rosser

The Children's Services area within the Council is huge and has a number of different teams who work tirelessly to excel in their remit. The above visits were organised to provide each of the Board members with an opportunity to meet with each of our teams and to hear firsthand of both the achievements and the pressures placed upon them. It provides us with a great opportunity to gain a better understanding of the day-to-day work carried out and the goals and improvements needed within each area.

Once again, the Corporate Parenting Board would like to take the opportunity to extend its gratitude to the management and staff for providing us with a warm welcome and giving us time out of their busy schedules. I think we can all agree that we learn something from the informal style visits, which gave us the chance to have various open discussions with one another. Furthermore, the sheer amount of knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm shown by the staff was humbling and gives the Corporate Parenting Board the assurance that our children and young people are in safe hands.

In the 2020/21 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board hope to continue making these vital visits to our teams.

REGULATION 73 REPORTS

Regular updates are presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in respect of the current position of the residential Children's Homes and respite service. The reports are exempt to ensure that the Board receive a detailed picture of the goings on at each home, and are inclusive of case studies, which inform us of the everyday challenges faced by our hardworking staff, any areas of concern and, of course, the wellbeing of the children who occupy the homes.

In November 2019, a new residential home 'Carn Ingli' became operational and as such, the Corporate Parenting Board received regular updates on its progress.

Each of the reports received during the Municipal Year, provided the Corporate Parenting Board with honest and reliable feedback from the young people who occupy the homes and further insight into the particular challenges associated with looking after and trying to develop young people who have been disadvantaged. It was pleasing to note that robust action plans and careful risk management planning had been established to ensure the necessary improvements.

Once again, it was evident to see from the updates, that our staff continue to carry out an excellent job by ensuring that our young people are provided with a high standard of support and safe placements.

SOCIAL SERVICES COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

An integral role of the Corporate Parenting Board is to receive quarterly updates in respect of the operation and effectiveness of the statutory Social Services complaints procedure. At each meeting, we monitor the number of complaints received, the nature of the complaints and any lessons learnt, along with noting those enquiries received from Elected Members, A.M's and M.P's.

The importance of feedback from those who use our services is invaluable to the Corporate Parenting Board as it allows us to better understand the service, note the improvements that are needed and just as importantly, note the vast amount of compliments received for our hardworking staff.

Once again, the reports received during the year were transparent and full of detail; and our questions were always responded to by the officer. The Board noted that there were still complaints dealt with outside of the statutory timescale, but were pleased to note that the issues were resolved to a high standard. It was also pleasing to note that the service was continued to be used by A.M and M.P colleagues, which builds upon the already strong relationship with our officers.

During the year, a steady flow of compliments were received in relation to the various departments from the service users. The Corporate Parenting Board acknowledge that the compliments are often overlooked and not recorded by staff, but would like to encourage staff to note the positive responses in the future.

ADVOCACY

In the 2019/20 Municipal Year, Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru were appointed as the Local Authority's new advocacy service. TGP have since attended their first few Board meetings and have already contributed greatly to discussions. The reports clearly broke down the issues by age, gender, referral source and issue type, which is interesting for the Corporate Parenting Board to monitor the various trends and compare to previous quarters.

The Corporate Parenting Board look forward to TGP's attendance at future meetings to present their quarterly updates on advocacy, which will strengthen the link between the two services and provide improved outcomes for the children and young people in RCT.

[More information on the services provided by Tros Gynnal Plant \(TGP\) Cymru can be found here.](#)

UPDATES TO THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Alongside the regular work programme, which includes statutory items, the Board receive updates and annual reports where necessary. The Board welcome information in respect of the exciting new initiatives within Cwm Taf, reviews into the service areas and the opportunity to have a positive impact on the lives of the children and young people within our care.

COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE SERVICE

In November 2017, the Cwm Taf Public Services Board (PSB) agreed to work with the Welsh Government to undertake a joint collaborative approach to redesigning Early Years arrangements across Cwm Taf. The aim of the work was to reconstruct the Early Years and Flying Start service, to create an integrated delivery model.

As such, the Corporate Parenting Board were fortunate enough to receive an overview of Rhondda Cynon Taf's Community Wellbeing and Resilience Service, which was developed in conjunction with the PSB's vision.

The Corporate Parenting Board welcomed the changes and were supportive of a service which promotes early intervention and prevention, in addition to supporting children returning to their families.

Furthermore, Members were pleased to learn that the service moves away from the delivery of services that are determined by geographical postcodes to a model that promotes universal access to services for all families in RCT.

In the 2020/21 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board would welcome a further update in respect of the service.

[A copy of the PowerPoint presentation can be found here.](#)

YOUNG CARERS OPERATING MODEL

In conjunction with the Social Services and Wellbeing Partnership, a Regional Partnership Group had overseen the development and implementation of a Carers Strategy. As a result, a Blueprint had been identified, which sought to outline what a comprehensive carers service should look like and whilst Rhondda Cynon Taf had a good record for supporting carers there were also some areas identified for improvement. As such, a carers review was undertaken, led by the Carer's Support Project, which considered the wider implications of the SSWB Act.

The Corporate Parenting Board praised the hard work, which was put into the review and were pleased to learn of the following positive outcomes of the Carers Support Project review, which will seek to:

- improve the experience for carers in Rhondda Cynon Taf, particularly young carers who will now receive the statutory IAA, assessment; support planning and review within the new Children's IAA service;
- strengthen the leadership capacity across the Council to address carers issues, rights and entitlements;
- continue the service delivery within the Carers Support Project; and
- Deliver the Blueprint carers offer

In particular, the Corporate Parenting Board were pleased to note that as a result of the review, the profile of young carers and awareness of their pressures would be raised.

In the 2020/21 Municipal Year, Members would welcome the opportunity to meet a young carer and hear of their experiences first-hand.

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER UPDATES

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (referred to as the SSWB Act) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 and 16 (referred to as the CPPCR Regulations) provide legislation and guidance pertaining to the role and functions of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires the Local Authority to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers to conduct reviews for Children who are Looked After and monitor the Local Authority's performance in relation to implementing the care plans for individual children. As such, regular reports are presented to the Board to monitor the activities of the IRO service.

During the Municipal Year, Members were pleased to learn that a key priority of the service was the continuing emphasis on the child being at the centre of the Reviewing process, meaning that the IRO prioritises seeking the child's views, ensuring that the child and family understand the Care and Support Plan, and monitoring the progress of the Care and Support Plan in between review meetings.

The Corporate Parenting Board were also informed that the team were committed to strengthening links with the newly appointed Advocacy Providers and although the Board were disappointed that they were unable to receive an update of the Two Sides website, officers were able to assure them that the development was ongoing.

CARE INSPECTORATE WALES UNANNOUNCED INSPECTION

The Corporate Parenting Board received an update in respect of the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) unannounced inspection at Beddau Community Respite Home, which took place on 7th August 2019.

The inspection process involved an unannounced visit to the home, where individual meetings are held with the young people and staff. The report detailed the findings in relation to the well-being of the young people, the care and support provided, the environment, leadership/management and the recommendations for improvement.

The Corporate Parenting Board was humbled to learn that CIW found the staff to be caring and nurturing to the young people. Members were pleased that the report identified the staff's commitment to encouraging the young people to partake in social and leisure activities, whilst dedicating time to their family and education. Furthermore, within the report were areas identified for improvement such as specific training for staff.

As ever, the Corporate Parenting Board welcomed the report as it highlighted areas of good practice and the areas required for improvement and development within the RCT residential children's home. In 2020/21, Members encourage unannounced inspections by the CIW as it is essential to receive independent feedback, which minimises complacency and ensures that the high standards are continued to be met.

REGIONAL FOSTERING UPDATE

The Corporate Parenting Board were provided with information on the recruitment and retention of foster carers and the changes to the operational delivery within fostering recruitment.

Members were informed of the three key messages of the service, which were promoted by the increase of paid social media, fostering events and content generation, i.e. videos and stories:

- Availability of placements, better matched to you;
- Links to Child's Social Worker/ Team around the Child; and
- Not for profit

Members were particularly pleased to note:

- That the 'Regional Front Door' collaborative project had launched in April 2019, between Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to enhance the service provided to the public;
- The Regional Fostering website and its addition of a modern point of contact for members of the public wishing to enquire about fostering services within the two Local Authorities;
- The addition of a dedicated recruitment telephone line, hosted by RCT customer care centre, which allows for numerous points of contact for potential applicants; and
- That there had been significant improvements evidenced in respect of response times from initial enquiry to both follow up recruitment calls and initial visits.

During the meeting, discussions ensued around the daily recordings of significant events for the young person, which a foster carer must submit as part of their duty. Members agreed that it would be beneficial to modernise the service to allow the foster carer to submit this electronically.

In the next Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board would welcome a further update in respect of the progress made by the Regional Fostering Network and further information on the core offer for Local Authority foster carers.

PUPIL DEPRIVATION GRANT

The Corporate Parenting received an overview of the Pupil Development Grant by the Regional Lead PDG CLA Central South Consortium, along with an update on the school cluster model by the Deputy Principal Educational Psychologist.

Members were provided with a detailed presentation, which outlined the Central South Consortium's vision, which was for every CLA to have the right to provision and support to enable them to fulfil their potential. She went on to speak of the key priority, which was to reduce exclusions, which often lead to bigger problems in the future; and the need for teachers to understand the reasons behind the child's behaviour.

Members were also informed of the various areas of training, which had been successful across clusters. These included, but were not limited to, play and lego therapy, trauma training, ELSA/Thrive training, relationship based training and training in relation to adverse childhood experiences and attachment issues.

In respect of CLA Friendly Schools, Members acknowledged the importance of all schools becoming CLA friendly in readiness for the potential of a vulnerable young person attending in the future. The Board were pleased to note that 14 RCT schools had achieved the Quality Mark, with 5 schools attaining gold and 9 schools attaining platinum awards. A further 12 schools within RCT would be undertaking the Quality Mark for the academic year 2019/20.

In the next Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board would welcome a further updates on the Pupil Deprivation Grant. The Board are particularly interested in the progress of CLA Friendly Schools and the training opportunities provided by the Central South Consortium.

CWM TAF REGIONAL STATEMENT OF INTENT FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

The Corporate Parenting Board were provided with an update on the Cwm Taf Statement of Intent for Children and Young People: 'A Shared Regional Strategy for Supporting Children, Young People and Families'.

Since the Statement of Intent was approved, the Children and Young Persons Group had become well established; meeting regularly to work more effectively together, to commission and deliver services and to ensure that the voice of children and their families are embedded within any processes or systems developed.

The Board learned of the following regional priorities, which had been identified to better meet the needs of children and young people with complex needs:

- Regional Commissioning Opportunities
- Emotional Wellbeing

Members were particularly pleased to note that the robust pathway to improve the mental health had been identified as an area for action, as it was chosen by the young people themselves. Both the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee have continuously raised concerns in respect of the mental health provision available for our young people to access.

NEWLY ESTABLISHED RCT CHILDREN'S HOME CARN INGLI

During the year, Members were fortunate enough to be provided with an update in relation to Rhondda Cynon Taf's newly registered Children's Home, following work throughout 2018/2019, to source an appropriate property, refurbish the home to a high standard and gain Registration with CIW to begin operating.

The home was established to look after 2 children and young people, between the ages of 8 -18 at any one time. Members were informed that the staff team would be trained in Trauma Informed practice to ensure that all young people moving into the home experience a high standard of care, which is sympathetic to their needs and experiences. Placements would be

time limited up to 3 months, and will aim to ensure that all children and young people move on successfully to an appropriately assessed alternative.

The report included various photographs of the furnishings and the effort put into the home by all. Members were particularly pleased with the room layouts, which assured staff could monitor the use of social media, without being obstructive to the young people's social time.

ANNUAL UPDATES TO THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MISKIN ANNUAL REPORT

The Corporate Parenting Board were provided with an update in respect of the work undertaken by Miskin between April 2018 to end March 2019, which consisted of various informative case studies for Member consideration.

The Board were presented with a summary of referrals, which identified the age and gender demographic, which did not appear to change significantly in comparison to previous years; and the accommodation status following intervention.

Members noted that there had been a year on year rise in the numbers of referrals that had met Miskin criteria and which had been accepted and worked with. Members were pleased to learn that the team had been integrated in to the Miskin older teams which has enabled them to further maximise their capacity and support offered to children and families.

Once again, Members were complementary of the staff for their hard work, acknowledging that the service plays a vital role in preventing children coming into care.

VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) provides a regional adoption service to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council. VVC is one of the five regional Collaboratives which form part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS). All adoption services are required to provide an annual review of their service as set out in Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007.

ALSO CONSIDERED BY
THE CHILDREN &
YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

[CLICK HERE](#)

During the meeting, Members learned of the following:

- There had been 259 enquiries from prospective adopters in total for the year 2018-19;
- That 46% of children were recorded as having life journey materials at the second adoption review;
- The number of children referred for adoption totalled 218, which marks a decrease on the previous year; and
- That 100 children had been placed for adoption during the year, a 16% increase on the previous year.

Members were informed of the Welsh Government grant of £2.3M, which had been awarded to the VVC to improve the provision of adoption services in Wales. The grant would be allocated to initiatives such as improving life journey work and pre-settlement support to families.

Members noted that the report evidenced a 7% increase on the previous year for enquiries from prospective adopters, which evidenced positive progress following the successful recruitment of the Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator in August 2018.

Members were particularly pleased to note that the VVC had appointed a marketing officer to specifically work on increasing the number of adopters in the region.

Members value the service and feel that it is important to have sight of and review its progress. In the next Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board hope to see more marketing focus on RCT, as it was felt that there was more focus on the Vale of Glamorgan.

Members also hope that the 'Life Journey Letters' process is refined to ensure it is a more timely and integral part of the work, following the appointment of the Senior Adoption Practitioner.



SCRUTINY AND THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

RCT PLACEMENT COMMISSIONING STRATEGY MAY 2019 - APRIL 2022

Members were presented with the RCT Placement Commissioning Strategy from May 2019 to April 2022. The Strategy outlined the priorities for the development within the placement service and our external commissioning up to 2022. It sought to provide insight into the current services and identify the priority areas.

The priority areas were as follows:

- Recruit more foster carers able to meet the more complex needs of children and young people;
- Provide more in house residential placements within the local area to meet needs;
- Provide better support packages to carers to encourage them to apply for Special Guardianship Orders rather than be kinship foster carers;
- Provide a range of accommodation for 16+ and care leavers;
- Improve our commissioning processes for external placements including integrated commissioning with key partners; and
- Develop a reunification model to return young people safely to their family members.

At the meeting, the Corporate Parenting Board were informed that the report had been presented to the Council's Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and were provided with an overview of their colleague's observations in respect of out of County placements and unplanned placements.

In addition to the Scrutiny Committee, the Corporate Parenting Board was happy to endorse the Strategy.

The minutes of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee can be found [here](#).

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BRIGHT SPOTS SURVEY FINDINGS

In 2018, RCT Children Services supported children who were looked after to complete the Your Life, Your Care Survey. The survey had been developed through the Bright Spots Programme to measure the well-being of children looked after.

Following the survey, the following areas of improvement were identified:

‘Social workers need to:

- *Ensure that children and young people understand who they are.*
- *Work with children and young people to involve them in decisions.*
- *Explain to every child why they are in care and regularly review this with them to establish if they would like more information.*
- *Continue to communicate with schools to identify and help children who feel bullied at school and those who feel that they do not have a good friend.*
- *Give carers further training in therapeutic parenting.*
- *Consider not just organised activities but contact with nature when reviewing opportunities to have fun/hobbies*
- *Regularly review contact plans taking into account children and young people’s wishes and feelings*
- *Be aware of gender difference and give opportunities to young people (11-18 years) to build self-esteem and a positive self-image.’*

Members spoke of the importance of involving young people in decisions and ensuring that their voices are heard; and were pleased to learn that the areas identified had been incorporated into improvement plans, all with the aim of improving the care experience and well-being of children looked after and care leavers.

The Board were pleased to note that the survey would be undertaken every two years as part of the performance framework. Members would welcome a further update in the future and the opportunity to compare data.

The minutes of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting can be found [here](#).

THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – MOVING FORWARD

In the 2020/21 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board will develop a robust work programme and wish to consider the following:

REGULAR PERFORMANCE DATA

Regular performance data allows Members to effectively analyse key areas, recognise the achievements; determine ways to further improve and enhance the services we provide; and to compare RCT's performance to previous years and other Local Authorities.

It is essential that the Corporate Parenting Board regularly receive the qualitative data and statutory updates at each meeting, in order to closely monitor progress:

- ✚ Regulation 73 Reports
- ✚ Complaints & Compliments
- ✚ Advocacy Updates
- ✚ CIW Inspections reports in relation to the four Children's Homes

The Corporate Parenting Board would like to receive annual updates on the following reports:

- ✚ Miskin
- ✚ Youth Offending Service
- ✚ Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Regional Adoption Annual Report
- ✚ Registered Childcare Provision
- ✚ Independent Reviewing Officer Reports
- ✚ Educational Outcomes
- ✚ Young Carers Annual Report

INTERACTION WITH OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

In our work programme for the Municipal Year, we were due to receive a visit from the RCT Forum. The RCT Forum provide looked after young people and care leavers in RCT with opportunities to have their voice heard and to enable their life experiences to contribute at a strategic, policy and legislative level both locally and nationally.

Due to COVID-19, the meeting with the RCT Forum was cancelled for the safety of all. As such, Members were incredibly disappointed to not meet with any young people during the year and feel their presence is key for 2020/21.

Members enjoy the opportunity to hear first-hand of the successes and achievements; and acknowledge that is equally as important to hear of their concerns of suggestions for improvements. Not only is it important for Members, but it is the Board's duty to show the young people that they are listened to and supported.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The Corporate Parenting Board welcome further training opportunities during the next Municipal Year. This would be useful for any new Members, and refresher training is always welcomed by the longstanding Members, in order to further strengthen our role.

TWO SIDES WEBSITE MONITORING

As the Board was unable to receive its regular update in respect of the Children Looked After Website 'Two Sides', it is essential that a demonstration of the progress is provided early in 2020/21.

It is clear that we are living in an age, in which the internet is an integral part of the lives of many and now more than ever, it is essential that our website is a useful resource to provide important information about the services and support available.

In 2018/19, Members spoke positive of the website and were informed of a number of exciting developments due to be implemented. At the time, the young people felt that it lacked various opportunities, wasn't well publicised and was considered to be dated. The young people felt that in order to increase its use, it would need to be more interactive and modern in appearance, with less text.

In 2020/21, Members look forward to see the progress of the content, appearance and accessibility of the website and receive an update on the views of the young people.

STRENGTHENING THE LINK WITH SCRUTINY

The Corporate Parenting Board's link with the Council's Scrutiny Committees is invaluable and as always, the Board strives to build upon this. The Corporate Parenting Board membership comprises of the Chair of the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Committee, who successfully takes it upon herself to update on any work taken forward by the Committee and recommend any pieces of work that the Board may find useful.

In the Corporate Parenting Board's 2019/20 Annual Report, it was stated that it would be beneficial if its reports outline the general discussions and thoughts of Scrutiny, in order to aid transparency and to allow Members to build upon the in depth discussions that have already taken place in Scrutiny. The Corporate Parenting Board has started to witness these changes being implemented into its reports and feels it has been beneficial in maximising resources and avoiding the duplication of discussions.

In 2020/21, the Corporate Parenting Board wish to see more of its reports, which have been subject to detailed scrutiny, inclusive of their feedback to continue the positive synergy.

It is also worth touching upon the meeting held between the Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs, which are held twice a year to discuss their subsequent work programmes and share ideas to improve service areas. The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board welcomes these meetings and has sought to leave space in the 2019/20 work programme, should more reporting ideas arise from the meetings.

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2020-2021

A draft work programme of the Corporate Parenting Board is set out below. This is a fluid document, allowing the programme to be amended with changing priorities. The programme is based on factors highlighted within the Boards Annual Report and does not include the usual updates presented to the Board, or other items Officers deem appropriate to bring forward to the Corporate Parenting Board.

REPORT	BOARD DATE	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER
Developing the Work Programme	September, 2020	Hannah Williams
Employment, Education & Training Programmes for CLA	September, 2020	Emma Brabon (HR)
RCT Forum	September, 2020	Chris Dunn & Young Person Representative
Independent Sector Monitoring Update	September, 2020	Karen Benjamin
Children Looked After Website Advancements Presentation	September, 2020	Judith Davis/Ceri Mann
Miskin Annual Report	November 2020	Matthew Free
Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Regional Adoption Annual Report	January, 2021	Ann Batley
Pupil Deprivation Grant – evaluation of cluster based model.	January, 2021	Siriol Burford, the Central South Consortium /Hannah Bevan
Children Looked After – Educational Outcomes 2019-20	March, 2021	Ceri Jones / Kerry Webster
Youth Offending Service Annual Report	May 2021	Lyndon Lewis

Registered Childcare Provision – Annual Update	May, 2021	Jessica Allen
Young Carers Annual Report	May, 2021	Rachel Spry/Claire Williams & Young Person
Frontline Visits 2019/20	May, 2021	Chair

Corporate Parenting Board – Frontline Visits 2020/21.

<u>Team</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>
West Intensive Intervention Team	Tonypandy Office	10am Wednesday 14 th October 2020
East Intensive Intervention Team	Ty Trevithick Office	10am Wednesday 11 th November 2020
Glyncornel	Glyncornel	10am Wednesday 2 nd December 2020
West & East Enquiry & Assessment Team & the Information, Advice & Assistance (IAA) Team	Tonypandy Office	10am Wednesday 13 th January 2021
Childcare, Play & Youth Services	Ty Trevithick Office	10am Wednesday 3 rd February 2021
Youth Offending Service	Maritime Industrial Estate, Pontypridd	10am Wednesday 17 th February 2021
Ty Catrin	Ty Catrin	10am Wednesday 17 th March, 2021

CONCLUSION

Thank you for taking the time to read the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report for the 2019/20 Municipal Year. The report seeks to highlight the commitment to improving the outcomes for the children and young people who are looked after in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

With the aid of a flexible work programme, the Corporate Parenting Board have considered many reports during the year, which have covered key topics ranging from education to social care. However, unlike previous years, there were few meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board due to the COVID-19 national pandemic. As a result, the Board were unable to consider all of the reports included within its work programme. Notwithstanding that, the annual report evidences that each of the meetings the Board did have, were robust and full of discussion.

In the 2020/21 Municipal Year, the Corporate Parenting Board will ensure that a full and varied work programme is set, which will focus on the above-mentioned reports, as well as any other urgent business which may occur at the time.

As always, it is essential that the meetings remain a comfortable and honest place for Elected Members, key officers and young people to come together and to challenge and improve the services provided in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

We will continue to seek the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in our care. Despite often uncertain times and the national rise in the number of children who are becoming looked after, the Corporate Parenting Board and the Council as a whole are committed to safeguarding duties.



Councillor Christina Leyshon
Chair, Corporate Parenting Board;
Cabinet Member for Children & Young People

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2020/21

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13TH JANUARY 2021

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Author: –Ann Marie Browning Head of Looked After Children Services.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Further to the Notice of Motion that is included below at 1.2 and 1.3 in the names of Councillors J James and L Hooper, this report is to provide scrutiny committee with the opportunity to consider and scrutinise the current services to friends and family members providing care kinship care in line with the Council's statutory duties.

Notice of Motion

- 1.2 It is estimated that there are 200,000 children being brought up by family members or friends in the United Kingdom in what is termed as 'Kinship Care'. These kinship carers have stepped in to care for children whose parents are unable to look after them and keep their families together, and it represents three times the number of children in the national foster care system – and is a growing figure. Kinship care is one of the main ways to provide a sense of security, continuity and belonging for children who cannot live with their parents and it provides high levels of stability and enduring support well into young adulthood. However, the support that is offered to kinship carers throughout the country lacks consistency, and carers often feel isolated, abandoned and 'hung out to dry'. This is in marked contrast to the support that foster carers and adoptive parents can receive.

- 1.3 This Council recognises the invaluable work that kinship carers do for their loved ones, often under the most trying of situations, and is committed to providing the help, engagement and support that they need. This Council requests that a report be considered by the Children & Young People's Scrutiny Committee to look further into the role of kinship care in the County Borough and to work closely with Grandparents Plus to identify ways in which it can meet the needs of kinship carers and those in kinship care.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that scrutiny considers and endorse the contents of this report.
- 2.2 Agree the outlined next steps.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The reasons for the recommendations are so that scrutiny can:
- Acknowledge the information contained within this report.
 - Scrutinise and comment on the information provided.

4. BACKGROUND:

- 4.1 Under Part 6 of Social Services and Well Being Act (Wales) 2014 Rhondda Cynon Taf children's services are responsible for making sure that where there is no safe alternative to becoming looked after, children are afforded every opportunity to grow up within their family and kinship network. Arrangements are in place as part of the Service's permanence planning practice and policy to make sure that, where safe and appropriate, placement within the family and kinship network is an option that is given primacy. We recognise the contribution of family and friends' carers to ensuring that children remain well cared for and living within their extended families.
- 4.2 The following regulations inform the development of services and support for family and friends' carers:
- Social Services and Well Being Act (Wales) 2014
 - Regulated Fostering Services Regulations 2019
 - Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulation 2015 (Reg 24)
 - Special Guardianship (Wales) Regulations 2018
 - Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
 - Child Arrangements Order (Section 8), Children Act 1989

4.3

There are several ways a family member may become a carer for a child or young person. This can be through obtaining, child arrangement orders, special guardianship orders (SGO) or through approval as a kinship foster carer. Family members within communities are also able to make informal arrangements where safe and appropriate. The law and accompanying guidance and regulations require children's services to carry out assessments and provide support for children who are subject to a special guardianship order or care order. Family and friends' carers who wish to be considered as alternative carers for a child and young person are assessed as to their suitability.

4.4

In recognition of the increasing numbers of family and friends' carers and need to develop our services, children's services restructured its fostering services in 2016. The service consists of a specialist kinship assessment team, special guardian assessment staff, support workers and a fostering support team consisting of a senior practitioner and social workers who co-ordinate services that support approved kinship foster carers.

4.5

Family and friends' carers who may be special guardians or have informal arrangements for care of a family member are also able to self-refer for access to support through the Resilient Families Service.

4.6 A task and finish group has been in operation with a view to reviewing the offer to special guardians and implementing the SGO code of practice published in May 2019. In February 2020 children's services developed a new pathway, which includes the provision of information, advice and assistance regarding special guardians at the front door Information Advice and Assistance Team. We also developed our access to information for those interested in SGO through a new web page on RCT website.

4.7

Children's Services have extended the range of support opportunities to family and friends' carers over recent years to mirror those received by mainstream foster carers. Progress with this has been slower in 2020/21 due to the impact of the COVID Pandemic. However, we have established:

- Support groups specifically for kinship carers and special guardians
- Annual Christmas events for children living with kinship carers
- Training opportunities and masterclasses co-ordinated by RCT learning and development team
- Pioneer foster carers able to support kinship carers where support needs are identified as a priority

4.8

Children’s services remain committed to developing our package of support to family and friends’ carers during 2021/2022. Officers are active members of AFA Cymru specialist interest group for family and friends carers and are currently participating in research reviewing stability of special guardianship order arrangements. We have also implemented the AFA Cymru good practice guidance in assessing kinship (connected persons) foster carers.

4.9

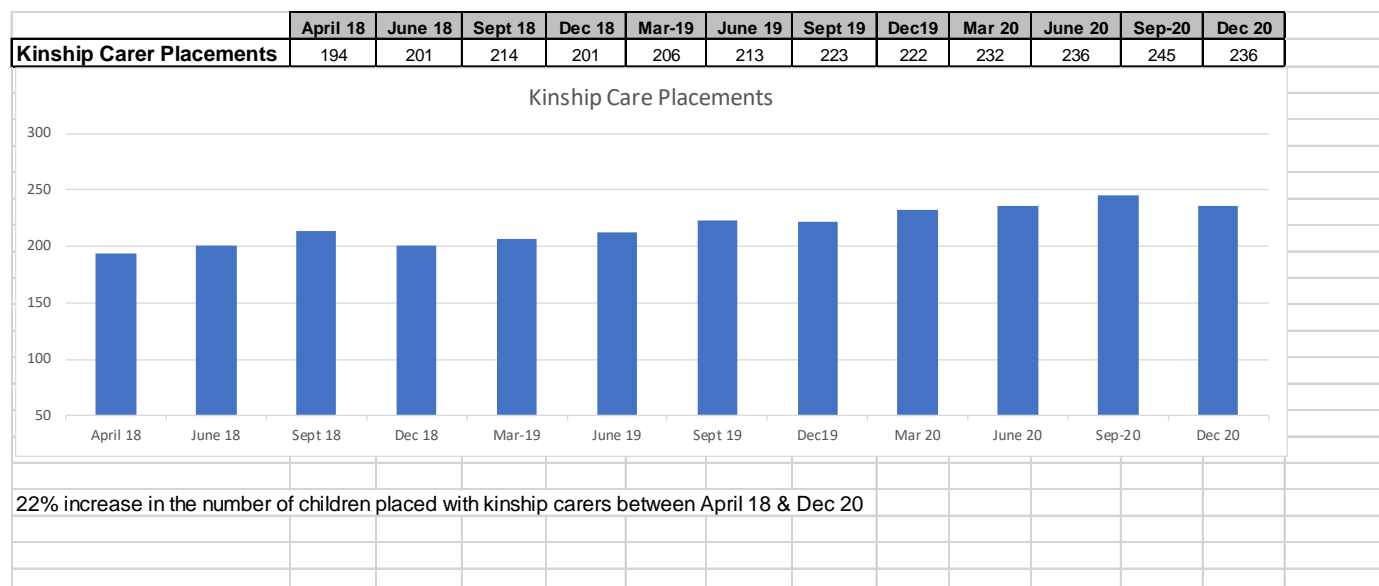
During 2020 the Service Manager Children for Looked After Services developed links with Grandparents Plus who had recently established their organisation in Wales for the first time. The organisation had previously been very active across England; however, they have now based their regional service across RCT and Merthyr Tydfil for the first time. During 2020 they have appointed a regional officer and will be implementing a programme of work to improve support to kinship carers across the region. Children’s services have invited the newly appointed regional officer to attend meetings with staff and carers and will continue to work collaboratively to improve and review our support offer.

Data

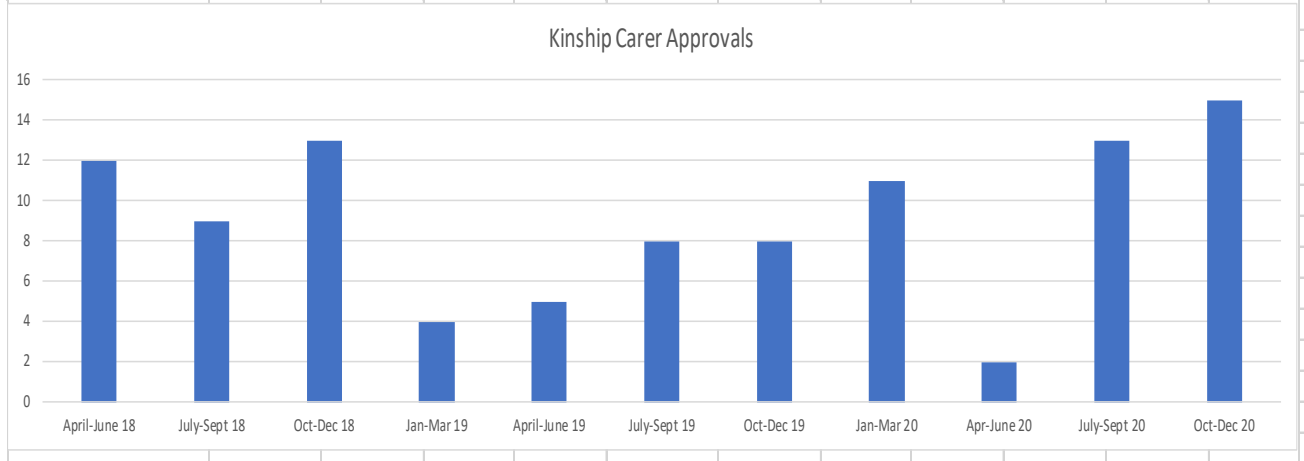
Kinship Foster Carers

4.10

The trend data between April 2018 and December 2020 indicates a 22% increase in the number of children placed with approved kinship foster carers. We also continue to see an increase in the number of kinship placements made and the number of kinship foster carers approved.



	April-June 18	July-Sept 18	Oct-Dec 18	Jan-Mar 19	April-June 19	July-Sept 19	Oct-Dec 19	Jan-Mar 20	Apr-June 20	July-Sept 20	Oct-Dec 20
Kinship Carer Approvals	12	9	13	4	5	8	8	11	2	13	15



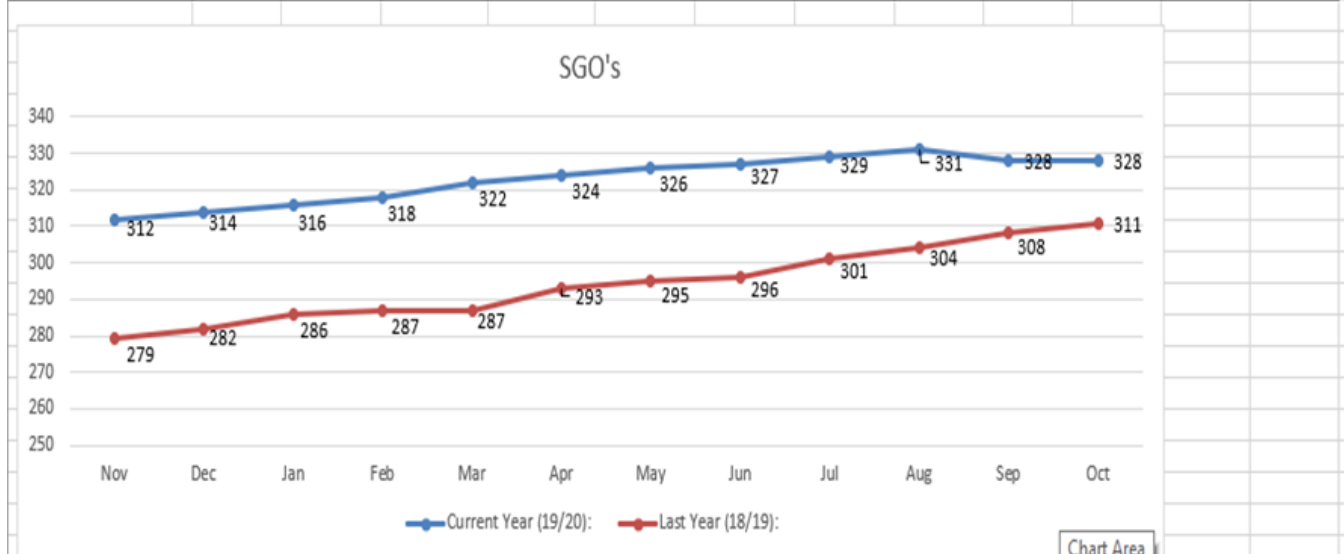
Special Guardianship Order Arrangements

4.11

The trend data indicates a gradual increase of special guardianship orders being granted over the past 12 months when comparing to the previous 12-month period. The number of Special Guardianship Orders granted has been on an upward trend, but at a reduced rate due to the impact of the COVID Pandemic. We anticipate that the number of SGOs granted will continue to rise. We do not anticipate a decline in the level of demand for SGO assessment and support going forward.

Monthly SGO numbers over the last 12 months, compared with SGO numbers at the same period last year

	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Current Year (19/20):	312	314	316	318	322	324	326	327	329	331	328	328
Last Year (18/19):	279	282	286	287	287	293	295	296	301	304	308	311
Variance:	33	32	30	31	35	31	31	31	28	27	20	17



6. NEXT STEPS:

The next steps:

- To continue to develop and improve the support services available to kinship foster carers
- To continue to implement the code of practice for special guardians and improve the support offer available
- To continue to collaborate with organisations to improve support to friends and families carers across RCT

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1

An Equality and Assessment Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the development of services to kinship carers

8. CONSULTATION

8.1

This report did not require specific consultation, however, consultation has taken place with kinship foster carers as part of the support groups.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

9.1 There are no direct financial implications aligned to this report for the council.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

10.1 The legal requirements for children looked after are set down within Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act (2014)

11. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ SIP

11.1 The appropriate placement of children looked after will make a positive contribution towards the Council's Corporate Plan Vision of '*a County Borough that has high aspirations, is confident and promotes opportunity for all*'; as it will deliver against the specific priorities of '*People - Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone and Place - Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work*'.

11.2 It will also help the Council to meet three of the seven wellbeing goals that The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015' puts in place as follows:

1. A more equal Wales
2. A healthier Wales
3. A Wales of cohesive communities

12. **CONCLUSION**

12.1

The role of family and friends' carers in supporting children and young people are recognised as significant and valuable. Children's services will continue to work with a range of carers to ensure vulnerable children and young people receive the best care.

12.2

The reasons why children become looked after are complex and when they enter the care system, they often have a wide range of problems including complex and cumulative vulnerabilities. To ensure we can meet the needs of these children and young people we recognise the need for a variety of placements and accommodation options so that children and young people are able to achieve the best possible outcomes and live successfully in their communities. Where appropriate, where appropriate being able to live with extended family and friends.

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