



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CYNGOR BWRDEIS TREF SIROL RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

A virtual Meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Board** will be held
on

31 January 2022 at 10.00 am

Contact: Yula Kampourpoulou - Council Business Unit, Democratic Services (07747
485569)

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

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.

2. MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the 29th of November 2021, as an accurate record of the Corporate Parenting Board meeting.

3. VALE, VALLEYS & CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT

(Pages 5 - 60)

4. FOSTERING SERVICE QUALITY OF CARE ANNUAL REPORT

(Pages 61 - 94)

5. CWM TAF FOSTERING FRONT DOOR

To receive update on developments and impact of marketing campaigns.

(Pages 95 - 100)

6. TROS GYNNAL QUARTERLY REPORT

To receive the Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru quarterly progress report

(Pages 101 - 110)

7. TO CONSIDER PASSING THE FOLLOWING UNDER-MENTIONED RESOLUTION:

“That the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended) for the next item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Act.”

8. SOCIAL SERVICES QUARTERLY COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

To receive the report of the Group Director, Community & Children’s Services providing the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the operation and effectiveness of the statutory Social Services complaints procedure.

9. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE FROM THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN SERVICES

Circulation:

County Borough Councillors:

Councillor C Leyshon (Chair)
Councillor G Hopkins (Vice-Chair)
Councillor E Griffiths
Councillor L Hooper
Councillor S Rees
Councillor S. Rees-Owen
Councillor J Rosser

Officers:

Ann-Marie Browning, Head of Children's Looked After Service
Christian Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Ceri Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Annabel Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Paul Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Cara Miles, Childcare Solicitor
Jayne Thomas, Complaints & QA Manager, Social Services

Tros Gynnal Plant Cymru – Electronic copy



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on Monday, 29 November 2021 at 10.00 am.

County Borough Councillors - Corporate Parenting Board Members in attendance: -

Councillor C Leyshon (Chair)

Councillor J Rosser Councillor L Hooper

Officers in attendance

Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services

Ms C Miles, Childcare Solicitor

Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion

Mr C Mann, Reviewing Team Manager

Mr M Free – Service Manager

Ms J Thomas, Complaints & QA Manager, Social Services

Others in attendance

E Phillips-Magil - VfCC

Annabel Galt at VfCC /Blueprint Forum

A W – Young Person Representative

30 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

31 Welcome

The Chair took the opportunity to welcome officers from Voices from Care Cymru to the meeting with a particular welcome to a young person representative.

32 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillors G Hopkins, S Rees, S Rees Owen, and E Griffiths.

33 Minutes

RESOLVED to approve as an accurate record, the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on the 13th September and 12th October 2021 respectively.

34 RCT Forum Annual Summary Report

The Director of Operations, Voices from Care Cymru (VfCC) provided Members with a summary of achievements made by VfCC towards the outreach of Young People within the Rhondda Cynon Taff. Members were advised of the activities and support arrangements taken forward over the past 6 months to encourage independent living, sharing ideas and the generation of support Networks taken forward.

The Officer acknowledged the significance of Young People's voices across the area as a stimulus of positive change.

The Director of operations introduced a young person representative who has been a part of Voices for Care for the past 6 years to highlight their positive experiences with the group and its impact in their life. The young person spoke positively of the activities undertaken as part of the forum which provided access to community networks, independence, and the attainment of new skills. The young person also spoke of the positive role of the forum through the pandemic, with the continued support to young people.

Officers from the Forum took the opportunity to advise of the hurdles faced by the service through the pandemic, which the Forum were able to overcome through new ways of working. Details of the support arrangements currently made available to young people were advised upon with Members being advised of the support arrangements available through certain Library locations across the County Borough and the future work to be taken forward with Schools and Residential Homes. Officers also discuss the need to promote the right message to ensure maximum engagement with young people with officers stressing the importance of the young person's voice to ensure positive change for the young people of the County Borough and generations to come.

The Chair thanked the Director of Operations and the young person representative for their contributions and positive work undertaken targeting young people within RCT. The Chair commented on the accessibility of venues across the County Borough for the forum to utilise and suggested that further meetings with the Director of Children services and other relevant officers be taken forward to progress the matter.

Fellow Members of the Board commented on the update and took the opportunity to thank the Forum for their work undertaken with reference to the support provisions that were put in place during the pandemic.

Following discussions, it was **RESOLVED:**

- To note the update provided to the board and to receive a further progress report to a future meeting of the Board.

35 Miskin Annual Report and Therapeutic Families Team Annual Report 2020-21

The Service Manager provided Members with an update on the work of the Miskin Teams and Therapeutic Families Team set out in the services annual reports for 2020-2021 and drew Member's attention to the achievements of the two teams and their initiatives in keeping families together within RCT.

The Service manager informed Members that the Miskin team comprised of 5 people and 40+ personnel all aiding in improving parenting capacity to enable families to care for children with minimum statutory involvement. He added that over the years the Miskin team has become well established within the community due to its interventions, highlighting that in 2020-21, 91% of children remained with their parents or immediate family after the intervention.

Details of the Therapeutic Family Team (TFT) services were provided including details of consultations, therapeutic assessments and interventions to children and families in RCT. Similarly, to Miskin, the Therapeutic Family team has seen a continual improvement since its inaugural year by supporting and engaging with families and producing a positive outcome.

The Chair thanked the Service Manager for the report and was pleased to see the broad scope of initiatives in place to support families and children within RCT.

One member thanked the team for all the efforts and positive impact towards families and children.

The Corporate Parenting Board **RESOLVED**:

- To Acknowledge the information contained within the report.

36 Children Looked After Website

An officer from the Safeguarding and Reviewing Management Team provided Members with an overview of the advancements made on the Children looked after website which was due to be launched in the New Year. The officer highlighted that the website was two sided and specifically made for children and young people within RCT.

The Officer advised that the website would be beneficial to Social Workers as a resource that could be utilised to share information and engage with children and young people in RCT. Members learnt that the team intended on working in partnership with the Fostering and Residential teams to take forward opportunities through usage of the website as part of their key working sessions.

Despite the successes of the website the officer did recognise the challenges experienced with the development of the website and further areas of improvement to ensure a better experience for service users commenting on aspects of improved interactive content and a need to improve the incentive for children and young people to return to access the website. Members were advised that the team had taken forward work with Wicid.tv to provide interactive content which allows children and young people to participate in activities, competitions, and educational opportunities.

Members were advised that the website had an online Consultation Document (My voice review document) which permitted young people to post their reviews on aspects they were enjoying and areas for improvement, which assisted the service in taking forward open discussions.

The officer did recognise the opportunity to collaborate with Voice of Care Cymru (VfCC) as part of the consultation with young people.

The Chair welcomed the update and the news that the website would be launched in the New Year, which would be a beneficial tool to service users.

Members recognised the difficulties experienced by the team in respect of engagement of children and young people and praised the service for the work undertaken to date to improve these aspects. Members welcomed future collaboration with Voices from Care Cymru (VfCC) to assist in the developments of the website going forward.

The Corporate Parenting Board **RESOLVED:**

- To note the content of the update.

37 TROS GYNNAL QUARTERLY REPORT

The Board received an update from the Service Director of Children Services on the progress made by Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru. The Service Director began by discussing Quarter Two Advocacy statistics relating to Children Looked After (CLA). Based on the Active Offer in Quarter Two, 87 children and young people became eligible for Active Offer; out of these only 8 young people were CLA; one person was referred; however, the rest declined the opportunity to meet with an advocate.

In quarter two TGP Cymru received 17 Active offer referrals; Out of the 17 one person was CLA. The Service Director advised that there had been a significant increase in referrals compared to previous years quarters. Members were advised that TGP had met with officers from within the Council to take forward approaches to allow the Council to advise of potential reasons why Active Offers were being declined.

The Service Director advised that the Visiting Advocacy would continue across the four community homes within RCT with the support being provided virtually at present with weekly contact: however, plans were in place to offer Face-to-Face contact during the next quarter following discussions with community homes managers.

The Chair thanked the Service Director of Children' Services for the verbal update on Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) and spoke of the importance of the Face-to-Face engagement through active referrals and welcomes the reintroduction of this provision as soon as it was safe to do so.

It was **RESOLVED:**

- To note the report
- To receive updates on future progress made by TGP.

38 INFORMATION REPORT

The chair advised members that the following reports were presented to the Board for information purposes only, although welcomed the opportunity for any questions in respect of each of the reports.

39 Care Inspectorate Wales

The care inspectorate wales report was provided to the board for information purposes to which the board **RESOLVED** to note.

40 Exemption of the Press and Public

It was **RESOLVED** that the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act (as amended) for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of the exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of the Schedule 12A of the Act.

41 Social Services Quarterly Complaints and Compliments

The Social Services quarterly complaints and compliments report was presented to Members for information which contained exempt information. Members **RESOLVED** to note the report for information.

42 Regulation 73 Reports

The Regulation 73 reports were presented to Members for information. The Director of Children Services referenced a query raised at the previous meeting of the Board in respect of the outcome of the inspection outcome at Beddau residential home and Members were advised that the outcome of the inspection was contained within the report provided.

Members **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report for information purposes.

- To note the contents of the report for information purposes.

This meeting closed at 11.00 am

**Cllr C Leyshon
Chairman.**

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

31st JANUARY 2022

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

VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF REGIONAL ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

Author: Angela Harris, Regional Adoption Manager, Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Collaboration

1. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an update against progress of the Regional Adoption Collaborative.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Corporate Parenting Board note the content of the report.

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 sixth annual report and covers the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. 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 provides:

- information in respect of the governance and scrutiny of the regional arrangements at a local level, staff changes and areas of service development;
- key performance information relating to the placement of children for adoption, recruitment and assessment of adopters the provision of adoption support services;
- outlines the impact of COVID 19 on service delivery and how the service adapted to respond to these challenges and reduce delay;
- highlights some of the key challenges and future priorities for the service in terms of maintaining core business but also embracing changes being brought about at a national level with the implementation of Good Practice Guides and the two stage model of adopter assessment;
- The appendices to the report provide data in respect of key performance measures in respect of children, marketing activity, adopter recruitment, adoption support and the Adoption Panel. It also highlights activity in respect of the new grant funded posts. This information is broken down by local authority.

3.4 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 Annabel Lloyd, Children's Service Director will deliver the Report to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Appendix 1



VALE, VALLEYS AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE REVIEW OF SERVICE AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

For Period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE



**Achieving More Together /
Cyflawni Mwy Gyda'n Gilydd**

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Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Adoption Service
Review of Service Report
1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 The requirement to provide six monthly reviews of the adoption service is set out in Regulation 39 of The Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019. The aim of this report is to bring into one document a presentation and analysis of the activity of each of the local authority adoption agencies, operating as a regional service.

1.2 The report will be used for:

- ❖ The Review of Service (Regulation 39 report).
- ❖ Annual reporting requirements to Cabinet/Scrutiny Committees as per the governance arrangements set out in Vale, Valleys & Cardiff Legal Agreement.

1.3 This is VVC's sixth annual report and covers the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information presented is an accurate record of the activity and quality of the adoption service.

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. Background

2.1 Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC), as part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS) was established on 1 June 2015. 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 Vale of Glamorgan hosts the service.

- 2.2 The governance structure for the Collaborative is set out in a Legal Agreement agreed in 2015 and amended in 2019.
- 2.3 The organisational and managerial structure of the service has remained unchanged since its' original inception although the staffing establishment has grown. Service delivery continues to be structured around three functional teams with a separate Business Support Team.

3. Service Development and Governance

- 3.1 The context for the delivery of our service during this reporting period has been the restrictions imposed due to COVID-19 and the impact this has had upon VVC's performance. In late March 2020, our office closed, and staff began remote working from home. This has largely remained the position since this time. As with other services, staff were required to adapt quickly and a new infrastructure to promote virtual working was developed. Due to the geographical spread of the region, staff within VVC had already been used to a pattern of agile working and so the new way of working did not pose too many challenges. Early on we identified those core tasks which required an element of office working and arrangements were made for one of the Business Support team to attend the office two days per week to deal with basic administrative functions. The office space was also risk assessed to allow a small number of staff to utilise the office space on a restricted basis to carry out specific functions and to improve overall work life balance.
- 3.2 The National Adoption Service facilitated regular Regional Manager/ VAA meetings to monitor the impact of the pandemic upon services and to develop consistent approaches to key areas of service. This provided an opportunity to raise key issues affecting the service and which required a standardised approach. In addition, the Regional Manager attended Vale of Glamorgan

Divisional Manager Meetings to address issues at a local level and monitor progress.

- 3.3 In line with Welsh Government advice several risk assessment processes were developed locally and nationally. NAS developed a Transitions Risk Assessment for authorisation by the respective Head of Service and Regional Manager to ensure a safe transition of children into adoptive placements.
- 3.4 NAS also in conjunction with Medical Advisers and regional services developed a protocol to reduce the delays in adopter medicals being undertaken.
- 3.5 On 1 April 2020, the two-stage process for the assessment of adopters came into force. Welsh Government allowed an easement to the Regulations to allow both stage 1 and 2 to run concurrently. VVC contributed to the development of a piece of national guidance to assist agencies in implementing the new process. The easement to the Regulations has continued but full implementation will take place from 1 October 2021.
- 3.6 The Recruitment & Assessment Manager within VVC developed a risk assessment process to enable part face to face and part virtual assessment sessions for prospective adopters to be undertaken which was adopted on a national level.
- 3.7 During the year, the National Adoption Service commissioned AFA Cymru to develop a Series of Good Practice Guides covering Adoption Support, Transitions, Contact and Working with Birth Parents. These guides were formally launched in the autumn of 2020 and regional training for managers and staff across the region was provided in the last quarter of the year. These guides will have a significant impact upon practice and will impact upon the resources needed to support their full implementation later this year.
- 3.8 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 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. As a result of these monies VVC was 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.

- 3.9 The service was also able to recruit two new unqualified posts, a Children & 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 national programmes being delivered by Adoption UK; the Connected service which supports young adoptees and the TESSA programme which supports adoptive families.
- 3.10 In addition to the posts located within the Collaborative, 10.5 practitioner posts were 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.
- 3.11 As part of the deployment of the grant a national Implementation Plan was developed requiring reports to be submitted monitoring the spend against the grant and detailing areas of improvement in performance in service provision. The National Adoption Service prepared the bid for the grant in 2020-1 and took over the monitoring function in conjunction with Welsh Government requiring regions to report upon progress to NAS. The Regional Adoption Manager completed the monitoring reports against the grant in October 2020 & March 2021 to enable the full allocation to be awarded to the region.
- 3.12 VVC's Management Board has continued to meet on a quarterly basis during the year although meetings are held virtually. The composition of the Board has remained the same although a representative from NAS now attends meetings to improve links between the national and local agenda. The Director of Social Services took over as chair of the Board in October 2020.

- 3.13 The overall remit and accountability of the Management Board is prescribed within regulation and the Legal Agreement underpinning the Collaborative. VVC's Management Board has continued to play a key role in monitoring the performance and business plan of the regional service highlighting areas for improvement.
- 3.14 The second tier of governance within the Collaborative is via the Operational Group which is comprised of senior managers from each of the four local authorities and regional managers from VVC. This group has also met on a quarterly basis during the year , although competing priorities within local authorities has impacted upon quoracy of some meetings which has required a mechanism to be put in place to agree matters discussed outside the formal meeting. 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.
- 3.15 The overall governance of the region remains via a Joint Committee which meets twice a year comprised of lead Members from each of the four authorities. It is chaired by the Cabinet Member for the Vale of Glamorgan. Meetings were held in May and December 2020 as per requirements to approve the annual accounts, the annual budget and annual plan for the Collaborative.
- 3.16 Following a review of NAS' governance structure by IPC, a National Partnership Agreement was developed by NAS for sign up by each of local authority in Wales. This Agreement lays out the national and local requirements in terms of governance. The recommended local governance structure for regional services outlined in the Agreement is modelled upon VVC's. The Partnership Agreement was signed off by the four partner authorities during November and December 2020.
- 3.17 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 a small underspend in the budget for 2020 -21

created partly by revised working methods and some staff turnover. A proposal to retain the underspend within VVC has been agreed by Management Board and Joint Committee. These monies will be held over to provide the regional contribution to the TESSA programme.

- 3.18 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 “generally there was a sound system of governance, risk management and control in place but two areas of improvement were noted”. These areas related to revision of the WASPI Agreement and the audit trail of a couple of invoices which have now been addressed.
- 3.19 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. Due to the pandemic a shortened list of indicators was agreed for submission and uploading to the Data Cymru database. VVC continued however to collate data against the full range of measures to enable fuller reporting upon performance at a regional level.

4. Staffing

- 4.1 The overall staff establishment has remained unchanged during the period..Two permanent vacancies arose during the year, a part time Social Worker in the Adoption Support Team and part time Birth Parent Adviser They were filled on a temporary basis until they were successfully recruited to in December 2020.
- 4.2 A temporary vacancy in the Recruitment & Assessment Team due to maternity leave has been covered by a part time member of staff taking on additional hours.
- 4.3 Temporary arrangements to cover a vacancy within our Business Support Team have continued whilst a review of the structure is being undertaken.
- 4.4 A staff repurposing exercise undertaken at the beginning of the pandemic resulted in two staff being redeployed on a short-term basis to Adult Services.

5. Children

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 The number of children referred for adoption totalled **171** in the year which marks a 20% increase on the previous year. This follows a previously sustained reduction in referral rates. It is unknown at this time to what extent the pandemic has impacted upon referrals to adoption; however, we note the rise in referrals in relation to the workload within the region, albeit not as high as observed pre-2019.
- 5.3 The rates of our referrals which were withdrawn remained steady at **43%** of those referred in 2020-21. This can be seen as a positive as alternative care

plans for these children meant a vast majority of these either returning to parents' care or being placed with Connected Persons following positive assessment. Withdrawn referrals, in many instances however do not equate to a decrease in workload for the service as a lot of work and staff capacity is invested in progressing the adoption plan prior to it being discontinued.

- 5.4 The number of 'Should be Adopted' decisions made in respect of children has remained steady at **81** (up from 80 the previous year). If the number of referrals continues to increase, we would anticipate the number of SBA decisions also to increase.
- 5.5 The region has recorded **62** Placement Orders being made within the year, a slight reduction from the 71 of the previous year and again but should be viewed in the context of reduction in referrals overall within the past couple of years. The reduction in Placement Orders is a trend seen in other parts of Wales although it is less noticeable within VVC.
- 5.6 VVC placed **65** children for adoption during the year which is a considerable drop from the previous year but is however significant given the constraints upon the service. Alongside COVID restrictions, the other inhibiting factors were the reduction in Placement Orders and therefore a reduction in the number of children within the region requiring placement for adoption. The number of children placed was as a result of the service having to adapt quickly and respond to the challenges of bringing together different households for the purposes of transitioning a child from one placement to another. VVC utilised the NAS Transitions Risk Assessment and developed a process for this within the region to prevent delay in moving children on to adoption because of the pandemic. Transitions have included in most cases the use of self-isolation for both households and supplemented by the use of lateral flow testing where complete isolation could not be maintained.
- 5.7 One of the positive developments brought about by the pandemic has been the increased use of virtual communications between adopters and children prior to face-to-face introductions commencing. Whilst we have not used this

to reduce the face-to-face time needed for children, it has enhanced the relationship building and familiarity between child, adopters and foster carers and the feedback from those involved has been overwhelmingly positive about the impact this has had on the overall introductions. This now forms part of all transitions plans for children moving into adoptive placements.

- 5.8 The average time from Placement Order to placement has remained at a similar rate at **10.6 months**. Some of the reasons for the delay includes some slightly delayed plans at the start of the pandemic until safe systems were in place to move children on and reflects some high outliers of children waiting a significantly higher period than others. It is positive however, that have seen an increasing number of placements for older, potentially harder to place children although the preparation and placement for adoption in such cases may take longer to ensure this is taken at the child's pace.
- 5.9 VVC has continued to place a high proportion of our children with VVC approved adopters (68%) maintaining a similar level to the previous couple of years.
- 5.10 At the end of the year there were **63** children on Placement Orders awaiting an adoptive match which is a reduction of **14%** from the previous year. A further 5 children had a very strong link proceeding but not yet matched as at the end of March 2021 and so the number waiting was **48**. It is positive to see a continued decrease in the number of children waiting for adoptive placements.
- 5.11 There were **83** Adoption Orders granted during the year which is a continued pattern from previous years. There were no placements which disrupted during 2020-21 which is hugely encouraging.
- 5.12 **172** birth parents of children referred during 2020-21 were offered birth parent counselling and **35%** took this up which is lower than in previous years. Opportunities to offer birth parent counselling virtually and via phone calls have been utilised during the pandemic , however lots of opportunities to

provide this in person, usually following a direct contact session for parents with their children have not been possible for much of 2020-21 due to contact moving to virtual arrangements during the strictest lockdown measures. Following the easing of restrictions we have offered parents a range of options: in-person, virtual or telephone according to their individual circumstances.

- 5.13 Performance in relation to the provision of Life Journey Material for children being placed for adoption has improved considerably and at the point of matching this was 100% by the end of Q4. Overall, for the year this was 83% but with a quarter-on-quarter increase. The provision of finalised materials at 2nd adoption review has increased from 60% in 2019-20 to 84% in 2020-21 however again we saw this increase to 100% in Q4.
- 5.14 The increase in performance can clearly be linked to the additional Welsh Government funding which has provided the region with a Life Journey Work Co-Ordinator and Life Journey Work Practitioners based within the local authorities.
- 5.15 The Life Journey Work Co-ordinator offers regular support, advice, and guidance to the Practitioners and in addition has offered workshops/briefings to local authority teams and was integral in the recruitment panels for the Practitioner posts. There are regular meetings established now between the Practitioners and the Co-ordinator supports the allocation process and monitoring of performance across the region.
- 5.16 Our Transitions Worker post has become integral to the service we offer and to our ability to provide an enhanced level of support to children moving on to adoption. Over 2020-21 the Transitions Worker has supported **46** children with direct transitions work. This includes ongoing post-placement support for children who were placed in 2019-20 and 26 new referrals for direct work in 2020-21. This means that 40% of our children being placed for adoption were in receipt of this service which is aimed at children over the age of 3 years. In context, 55% of our children placed were under the age of 2. The Transitions

Worker accepted referrals for some children aged 2+ where it was considered appropriate to work directly with them. Understanding the Child Meetings were held in respect of **20** children during 2020-21 along with the completion of Trauma/Nurture timelines for these children. There were an additional **2** families who were having a sibling placed with them where the Transitions Worker supported the children already within the family to manage the transition. The Transitions Worker has also led training for foster carers on moving children on to adoption and assisted in the delivery of training for 2nd time adopters.

- 5.17 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. The service delivered a virtual regional profiling event for 18 adopters and 17 children where 6 potential links were identified and are working with NAS to run a further event. VVC has not been able to access a Welsh Adoption Activity Day as these have not run in person due to the pandemic however some available spaces have been utilised at other events run in England on . A Welsh Activity Day is planned for later this year.

6. Disruptions and Breakdowns

- 6.1 There were no placement disruptions during the year.

7. Advertising and Marketing

- 7.1 VVC's Marketing and Recruitment Strategy has continued to focus on raising the profile of the service and helping the public see the Collaborative as very much their first choice when they are exploring adoption. The Recruitment and Marketing Officer's role is crucial in creating a flexible and relevant approach. Our Marketing Officer ensures our Strategy continues to be influenced by the National Adoption Service 's Strategy and she has

developed links with her counterparts in other regions to ensure there is cohesive approach.

- 7.2 The Marketing Officer has also continued to work closely with Cowshed, the marketing company commissioned by NAS to develop the national strategy and to support regional activity. VVC is recognised by the national team as being an active contributor when it comes to adopters who can share their lived experience of adoption during media events and campaigns. Four VVC adopters contributed to a podcast during National Adoption Week and a webinar. A single male adopter from VVC participated in a BBC feature on single male adopters.
- 7.3 Previously formed links with local Comms Departments across the region continue to be useful resources as they ensure adoption features as part of their local advertising particularly during such events as National Adoption Week.
- 7.4 In the previous year, the Collaborative had been proactive in having a physical presence at a variety of community events e.g., National Eisteddfod Cardiff Pride, the Vale of Glamorgan's Agricultural Show and we had engaged with different faith organisations, all activities to raise the profile of the region. COVID-19 meant however that these face-to-face events were cancelled and so the service had quickly to adapt to alternative mechanisms and to further develop our social media presence. VVC specifically uses pay-per-click (PPC) advertising on Facebook and Instagram. This approach has been cost effective as it allows us to target specific geographical locations and provides us with a rich pool of information about the profile of those engaging with our posts.
- 7.5 In addition to using our social media platforms, the service decided to trial including information about the Collaborative in council tax notifications within the areas of Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Vale of Glamorgan. Unfortunately, Cardiff Council were unable to provide the service. During the weeks after these inserts were delivered, the service experienced a sustained

increase in the number of visits to our website and in enquiries received. As a service we capture feedback from any enquirer to ascertain where they learn about us and positively many people referred to receiving information within the council tax letter.

- 7.6 Moving forward in 2021/22, it is our intention to repeat this approach with all four of our local authority areas, in addition to continuing our PPC advertising.

8. Adopters

- 8.1 As outlined above, our continued marketing activity has had a specific goal to increase the number of enquiries the agency receives. 2020/21 saw a significant and sustained increase in the number of enquiries – **374** in total compared to **336** received during 2019/20. 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 the well-established regional input is also having a positive impact in providing a consistent and coherent message to the wider public.

- 8.2 2020/21 saw the Collaborative hosting seven Information Evenings for prospective applicants. These events were delivered remotely but were well attended and feedback received has continued to be positive.

- 8.3 VVC's three day 'Preparation to Adopt' training course continued to be provided by an Independent Social Worker during the period but again this had to be quickly adapted to a virtual means of delivery. In preparation for the implementation of the two-stage process of adopter assessment and to avoid delay, the frequency of our training was increased in the latter part of the year. Since January 2021, our preparation training has been delivered jointly with Western Bay region which has allowed us to increase the number of training courses from six a year to 10 per year without any increase to overall costs as trainer's fees are shared equally with Western Bay.

- 8.4 With the recent retirement of our independent trainer, the service has used this as an opportunity to redevelop the training content and from October 2021 the frequency of the training will increase further to 11 preparation training courses a year. These will now be delivered by an experienced member of the VVC Recruitment & Assessment Team and an experienced member of the Western Bay Post Adoption Support Team.
- 8.5 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 received has been continued to be positive.
- 8.6 **71** households attended the courses. Out of those **71** households three did not go onto submit applications to progress onwards to an assessment. These potential applicants have been followed up. All three households feedback that they wished to take more time to consider their future plans.
- 8.7 During 2020/21 a total of **67** adopter approvals were presented to VVC's Adoption Panel and positive recommendations were made. **66** of these approvals were ratified within the reporting year. The approvals are broken down as follows: **Cardiff – 26, Merthyr Tydfil – 4, RCT – 17, and Vale of Glamorgan – 19 (included in the Vale of Glamorgan figures are approvals for four adopters outside of our area (2 - Newport, 1 - Caerphilly and Powys - 1)**. This represents a small decrease to the previous year but against the background of the challenging COVID-19 environment, this performance is a pleasing result.
- 8.8 Out of the **66** ratified approvals achieved in 2020/21, **9** were foster carers assessed to adopt a specific child, **6** were second time adopters and **51** were first time adopters.
- 8.9 The majority of the applicants approved during 2020/21 have gone onto be matched with children from within VVC. Four have had a child placed from

outside of our region: two from SEWAS region, one from Scotland and one from Devon. A further two are in the matching process of adopting non VVC children

9. Adoption Panel

- 9.1 VVC continues to manage a central list of Adoption Panel members. In terms of practical delivery, VVC typically holds four Panel sittings a month. Again, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in Panel sittings being delivered remotely which in many respects has proved more efficient, especially in reducing travel time etc.
- 9.2 Panel membership has seen several changes during the year with the retirement of one of our independent Chairs just prior to the pandemic and then one of our Vice Chairs, leaving just one Chair & two Vice Chairs to maintain all Panel meetings. As the year progressed, our one remaining independent Chair also stepped down and one of the Vice Chairs with the result that an expression of interest was sent out to members in respect of the vacant positions. As a result of this process our one remaining Vice Chair was successful in being appointed as Chair alongside one of our independent members. Our new Chairs have demonstrated flexibility in being able to cover each other where required and in supporting the ever-increasing Panel workload. There is however a need to recruit a new Vice Chair.
- 9.3 Also, during the past year, VVC has been proactive in recruiting several new Panel members, with a particular focus upon increasing representation of adoptive parents and adopted people. There is an ongoing need to increase our Social Worker membership from our partner authorities whilst recognising that workload constraints often prohibit this.
- 9.4 During the past year the importance of understanding diversity and unconscious bias has been recognised as an important area of development for Panel members with the result that NAS provided training for all Panel

members across Wales on this topic. This training explored a range of equality and diversity issues and was attended by 23 members of VVC Panel.

- 9.5 Our Panel Chairs have also benefitted from participating in several information sessions and training events linked to the launch of the National Adoption Services Good Practice Guides.
- 9.6 During 2020/21 42 Adoption Panel meetings were held. The workload of the Panel is outlined in Appendix 4.

10. Adoption Support

- 10.1 Referrals into the service for post adoption support services dipped in the first quarter of the year but then increased during the second quarter and have continued to rise. This increase is in line with the previous reporting year and reflects the focus from the NAS on improving awareness of support services for adoptive families. **92** referrals were received during the year which has created a backlog of unallocated work and a waiting list. When compared to previous years, the service has observed a 20% increase in the number of referrals received over the past three years.
- 10.2 The increased focus on adoption support services at a national and local level has in turn enabled adopters to request earlier services following the making of Adoption Order. It is anticipated that this will increase as with the implementation of the Good Practice Guides which emphasise earlier involvement of the Adoption Support Service in planning for the child and maintaining contact with the adoptive family post Adoption Order.
- 10.3 Referrals for Access to Birth Records for adopted adults have also seen a rise this year with a total of **68** referrals. There has also been a rise in request for information under the Post Commencement Regulations 2005 as a number of those enquirers have reached 18 years of age. **31** referrals for Intermediary Services have also been received. COVID restrictions have impacted to some

extent on our ability to access paper records as offices have been closed which has also contributed to our waiting list.

- 10.4 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 **£167.550.50** which covers **64** children. The average spent per child has increased to **£2618** per child, although this only represents **24 %** of children who are being supported by the team. 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.
- 10.5 The Adoption Support Team embraced the constraints imposed by the pandemic and developed a range of virtual support mechanisms for families. The monthly Toddler Group was facilitated remotely until the easing of restrictions allowed some outside gatherings. A quiz for adoptive families was also developed. The team also facilitated a Nurturing and Attachment Course and two courses on Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) remotely. A support group established following the NVR training has also been run remotely. The mechanisms put in place have been well received and take up has increased as families have found ,in most instances, it easier to engage with virtual platforms of delivery.
- 10.6 ICF funds within Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan has been utilised to commission a Psychology Service, Enfys which includes support for adopted children. The Adoption Support Team can refer a small number of cases and the service provides consultation and peer supervision for staff within the team undertaking direct work with families.
- 10.7 The Birth Parent Adviser's role post has become more established within the service despite the change in the postholder . A referral process and

information leaflet for Social Work colleagues across the region and an information leaflet for birth parents has been disseminated with the aim of promoting the service and increasing support to birth parents. A birth parent group has been developed and is been delivered on a hybrid basis (part virtual and part face to face) to enable a wider reach and to meet differing needs. **35** referrals for individual birth parent support have been received and supported.

- 10.8 The TESSA Co-ordinator's role has also been further established within the region during this period. The Co-ordinator undertakes assessments of need and processes referrals of families who may be eligible for the service **.41** referrals have been made to TESSA by VVC during the year which is the highest in Wales. The TESSA Parenting group was unable to run due to COVID restrictions and so these families were redirected to one of the training courses being provided by VVC.
- 10.9 Since being established the Children and Young People Co-ordinator has been directly involved in running Connected groups on a Saturday each month with staff from the Connected service. During lockdown the frequency of these groups increased to fortnightly on a virtual basis which the Co-ordinator continued to service. The service caters for adopted children and young people 7 upwards, **59** children and young people from VVC are registered with the service. In addition, the postholder has provided direct support sessions to **17** children from the region and has also supported **8** direct contact sessions for adopted children, which can be as frequent as 3 times a year and can also include separate sibling contact.
- 10.10 There is a need to continue to collect data from the Evaluation forms that have been developed. The main objective is to ascertain the benefits of the service provided and the 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.

11. Policies and Procedures

11.1 The first six years of operation has seen great strides in delivering a service that meets objectives set both locally and nationally. Whilst there have been numerous examples of regionalising the paperwork, processes and systems, the development of general policies has been limited due to capacity.

11.2 The need to address gaps in our policy framework and to standardise processes has been acknowledged across regions. NAS have therefore commissioned Practice Solutions to develop a common set of policies and procedures and VVC has contributed to the initial audit undertaken to scope the work involved.

12. CIW

12.1 The service has not been inspected by CIW.

13. Consultation, Engagement & Quality Assurance

13.1 During 2020-21 VVC has developed a range of consultation and feedback tools at various points for all functions with the overall aim of improving our service user engagement and to develop our quality assurance system. Additionally, the evaluations undertaken have enabled us to ascertain the benefits of the service provided and identify needs 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. In addition, VVC adopters contributed to Adoption UK Barometer Study and IPC's review of the Adoption Support Framework commissioned by NAS.

14 Complaints, Comments and Compliments

14.1 There was one complaint received during the reporting period:

- 14.2 Complaint from a birth parent concerning the role undertaken by the Family Finding Social Worker and the delay in receiving her post adoption letter from the adoptive parents. This complaint was investigated by the Regional Manager under stage 1 of the Vale of Glamorgan Complaint Procedure.
- 14.3 Regional staff have continued to receive positive feedback on the range of services they provide from a variety of sources. These compliments are recorded, and staff are encouraged to collate this information to contribute to their own personal development plans. The new services established because of the investment, particularly the role of the Transitions Worker, have been particularly well received.

15. Conclusion, Future Priorities & Challenges

- 15.1 In terms of key performance indicators the end of year position presented a much healthier position than was anticipated at the beginning of the reporting year. Despite the restrictions imposed upon service delivery, the region was successful in placing a significant number of children and in approving a comparable number of adopters to the previous year . The priorities going forward remain as in previous years. We need to continue to build upon our performance and ensure that we can meet the range of needs presented by children requiring adoptive placements within the region . The increased complexity and profile of the harder to place children will continue to challenge our ability to secure timely, appropriate matches for these children.
- 15.2 The report hopefully highlights the ways the service quickly adapted to the need to develop new ways of working to reduce the impact upon service delivery by the pandemic. The use of virtual platforms has been beneficial in many parts of our service and has enabled us to reach more families. Going forward there is a need to evaluate which functions can continue to be delivered in this way and which parts of the service will require a combined approach. This will continue to inform our recovery planning.

- 15.3 The investment received from Welsh Government has been a significant, positive development for the service as a whole and there is clear evidence of the benefits of the additional roles in enhancing performance . These improvements will however need to continue to be monitored and evaluated to meet the objectives and targets set by NAS. This is particularly important in respect of the provision of life journey work due to the large amount of the investment secured for completion of this work.
- 15.4 One of the key priorities for the service highlighted during the period and continuing into the current year is how best to address the ever-increasing demand for post adoption support services. The raised awareness of adoption support services at a national and local level can only be seen as positive for families in need of support but it has also highlighted the shortfalls within the service to meet these needs in a timely way. The investment monies have served to enhance the range of preventative services we can offer but they have not impacted significantly upon the services required for families in crisis. An urgent evaluation of the resources needed to support such families is required.
- 15.5 The full implementation of the Good Practice Guides will impact directly upon our Family Finding practice and our Adoption Support Service, although the need to promote ongoing and in some cases direct contact with birth families will need to be factored into our assessment process for prospective adopters. Again, an evaluation of the resourcing implications in respect of the new ways of working promoted by the Guides will need to be undertaken.
- 15.6 The easement to the Regulations in respect of the two-stage process for adopter assessments ceases on 30 September 2021 and the new process is to be fully implemented from 1 October 2021. VVC will need to collect data in respect of compliance with the new timescales for assessments and performance will need to be closely monitored.

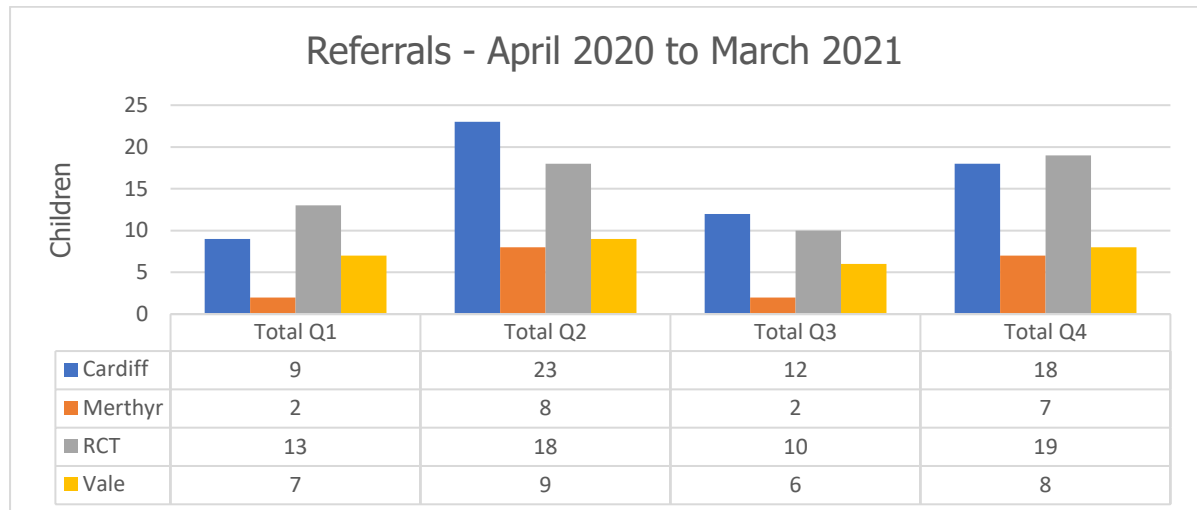
Angela Harris
Regional Adoption Manager
October 2021

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Appendix 2 – Family Finding

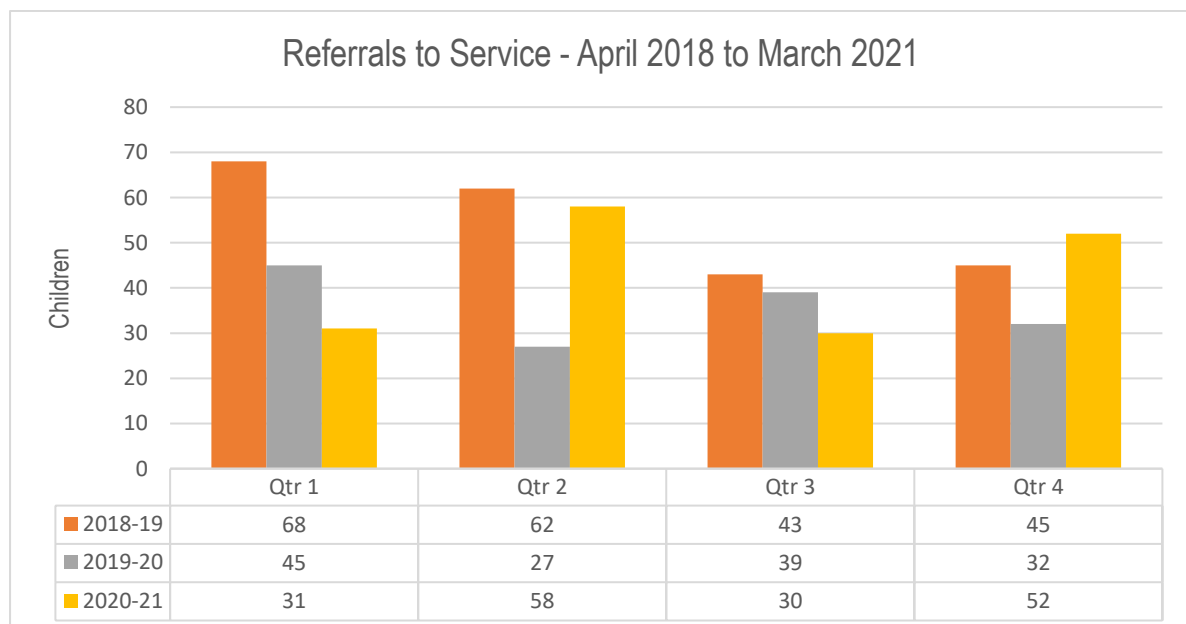
Children Referrals

171 children were referred to the service during the period April 2020 to March 2021. On average 14 referrals were received monthly, with 36% and 35% of referrals received from Cardiff and RCT respectively. 18% of referrals were received from the Vale of Glamorgan and 11% from Merthyr Tydfil.



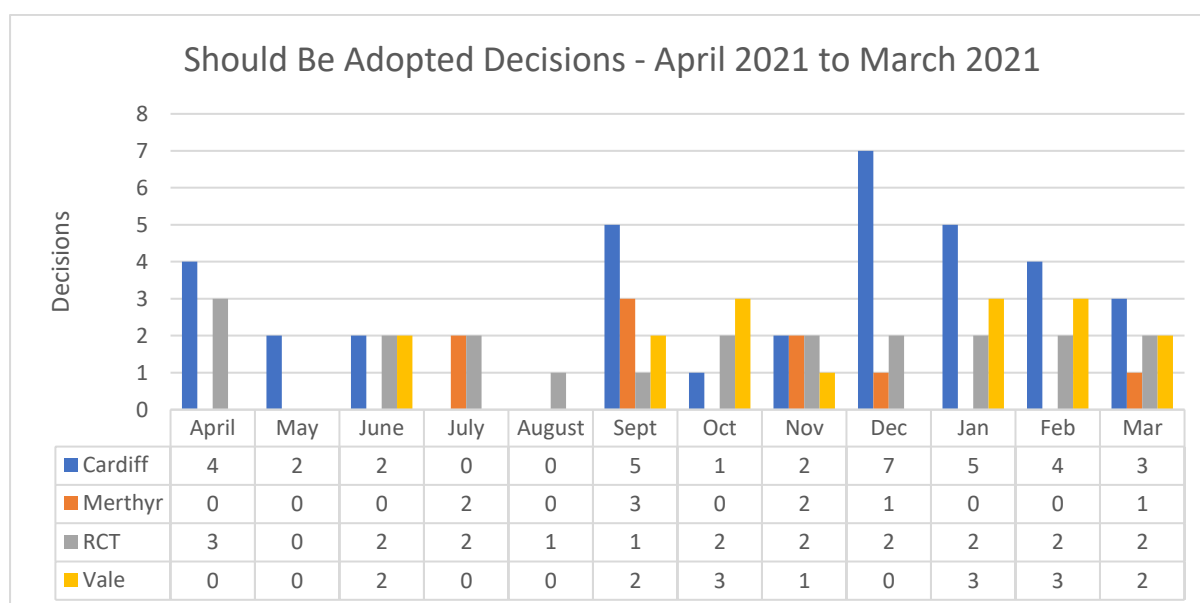
Comparative Data

Comparative data for 2018-19 and 2019-20 noted a 34% decrease in the number of referrals made to the service and was in line with national trends. However, when 2020-21 data is compared with 2019-20, a 20% increase is noted.



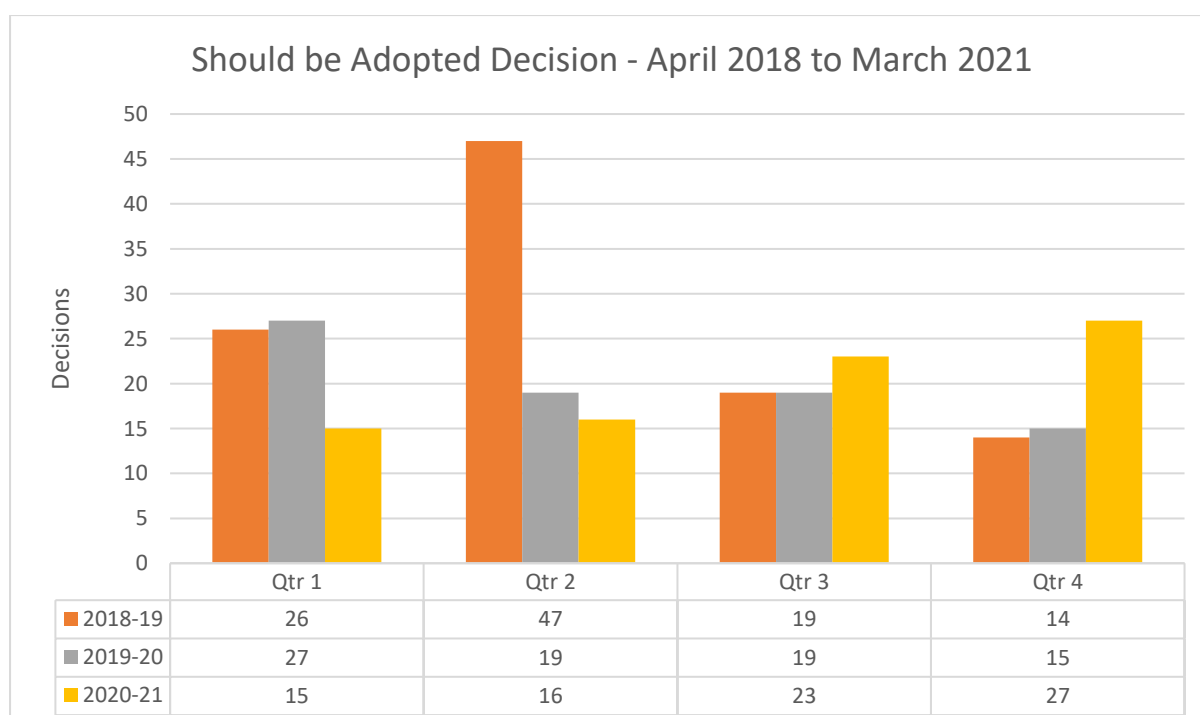
‘Should be Adopted’

81 SBA decisions were made during the period April 2021 to March 2021. This is consistent with previous years.



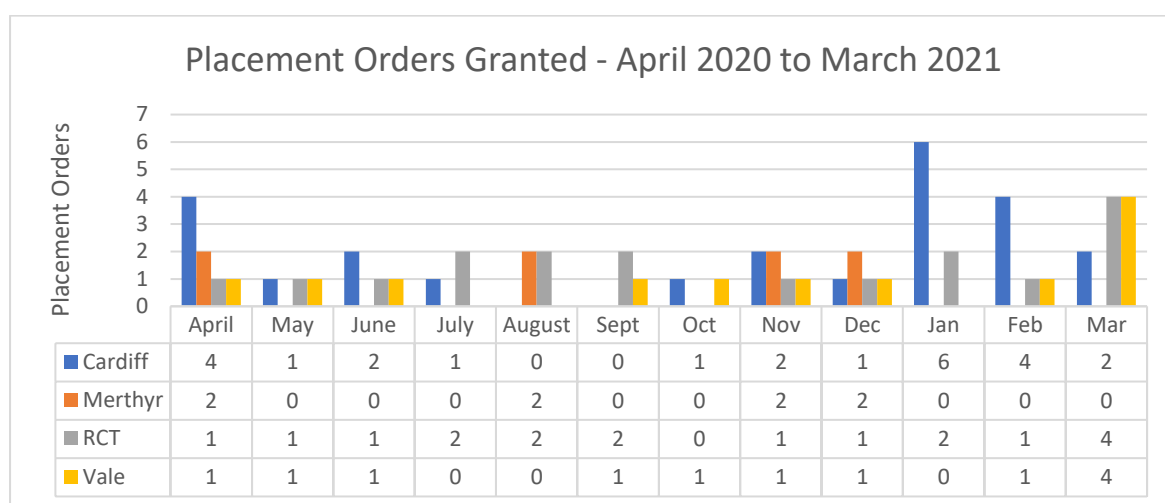
Comparative Data

Comparative data demonstrates a 23.5% decrease of SBA decisions when compared to data held for 2018-19 and is consistent with national trends.



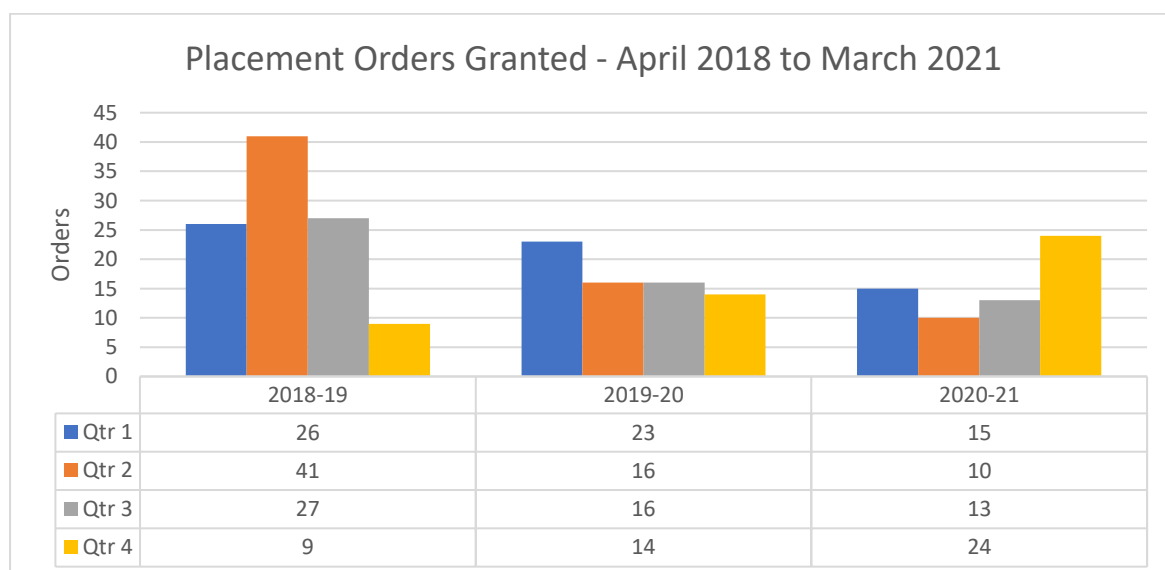
Placement Orders

62 Placement Orders were granted in the first half year, which is **13%** lower than the same period in previous year, however we are slowly seeing an increase in the number of Placement Orders being granted. The active family finding data monitored by Welsh Government shows 53 children with a Placement Order who are yet not linked, matched, or placed and whose care plan remains one of adoption. This number of children 'waiting' has significantly reduced through a combination of increased adopter recruitment, utilisation of specialist family finding measures and the reduction in Placement Orders over the past two years.



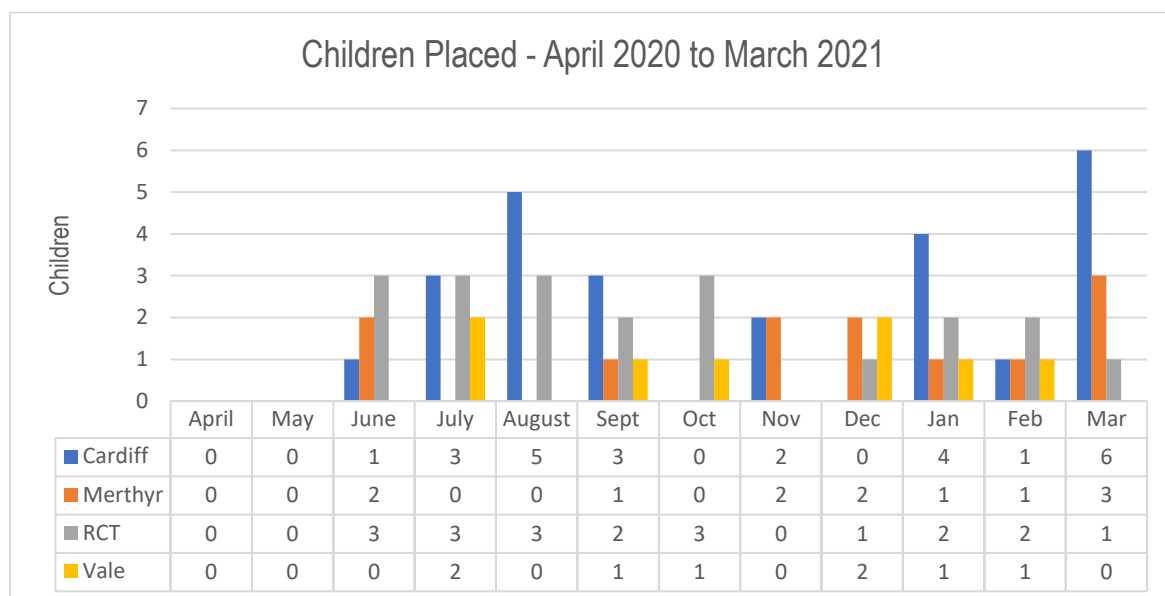
Comparative Data

Comparative data indicates a marked decrease (33%) in Placement Orders granted during the period 2018-19 and 2019-20 which is indicative of national trends.



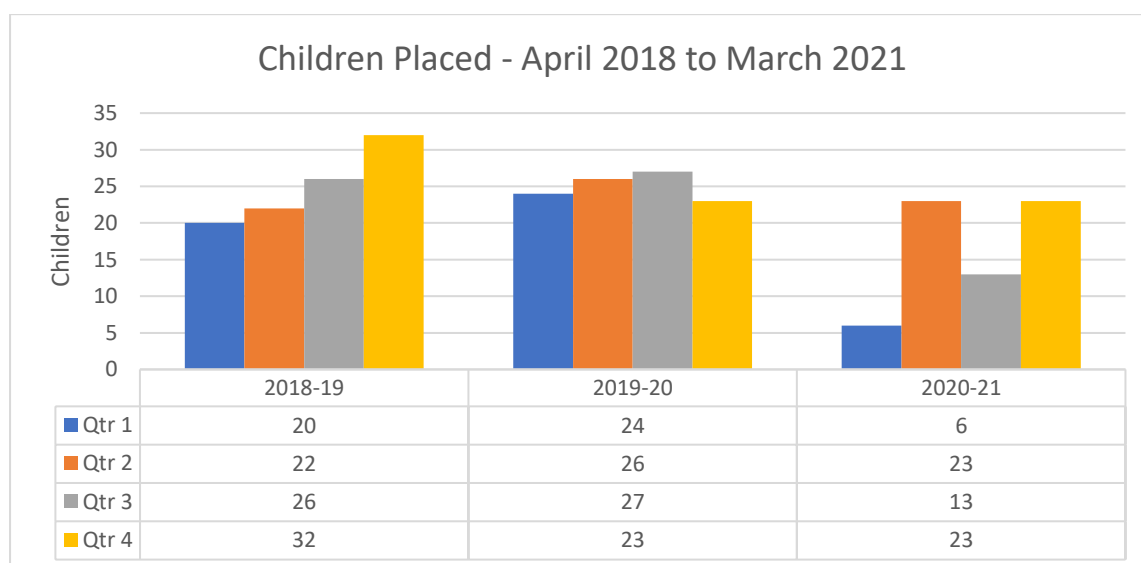
Children Placed

65 children were placed between April 2020 and March 2021. Whilst there was an initial delay in being able to place children early on due to the coronavirus pandemic, there have been no ongoing delays because of this, and the transitions risk assessment process is enabling placements to continue.



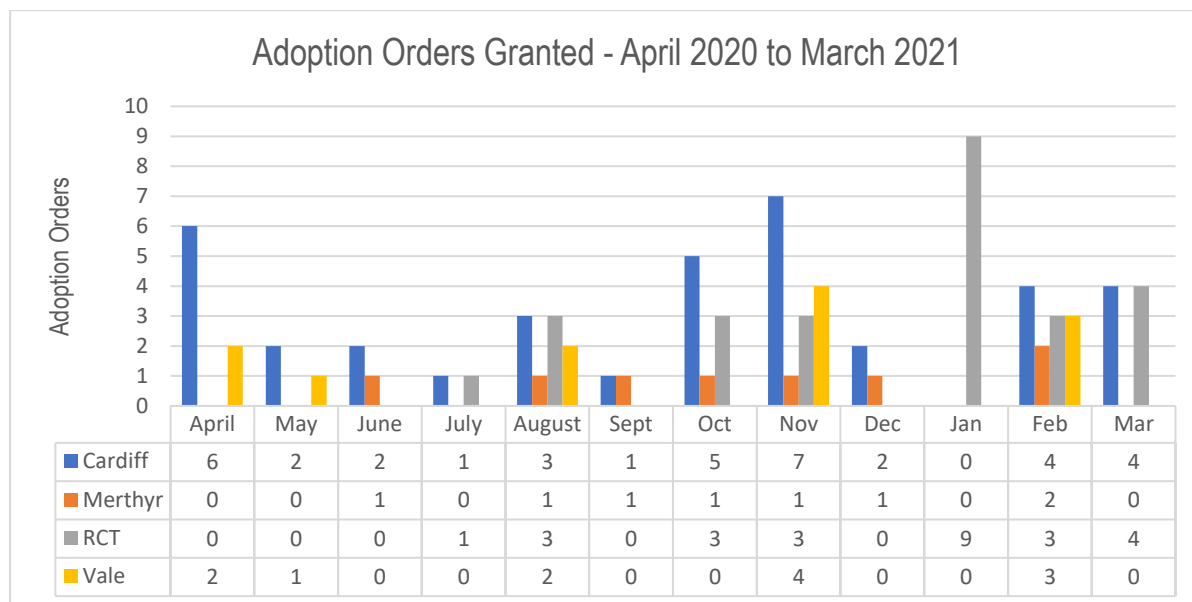
Comparative Data

The number of children placed is lower than in previous years, in line with the overall reduction in the number of children requiring adoptive placements observed over the past two years.



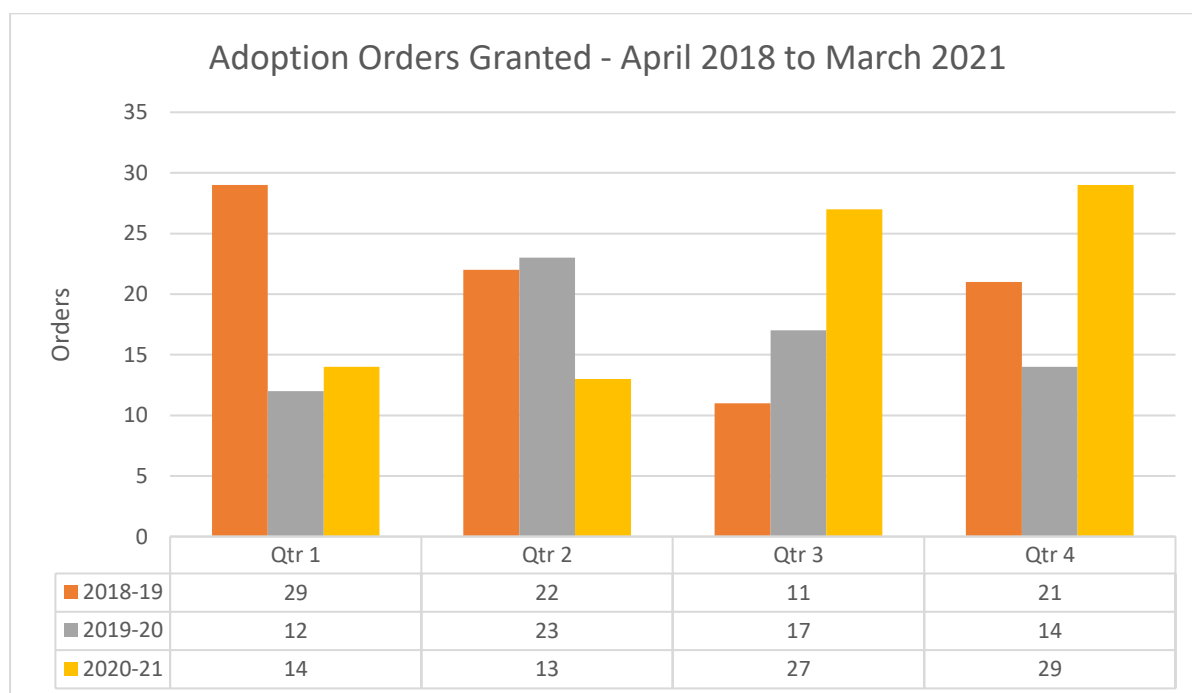
Adoption Orders

83 Adoption Orders were granted in the reporting period. There has been a significant increase from the first two quarters to the end of quarter 4 in line with an increasing number of final adoption order hearings which have been able to take place following the initial delays earlier in the pandemic.



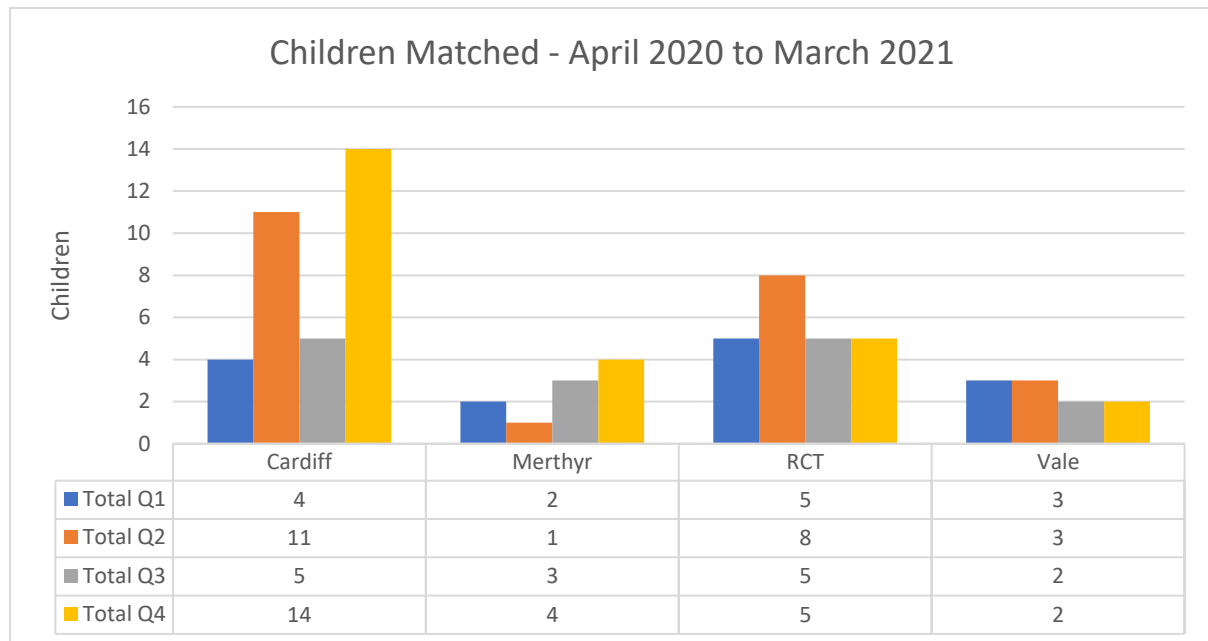
Comparative Data

Adoption Orders granted during 2020-21 are comparable with data held for 2018-19. A slight decrease (16%) in Adoption Orders granted was noted in 2019-20.



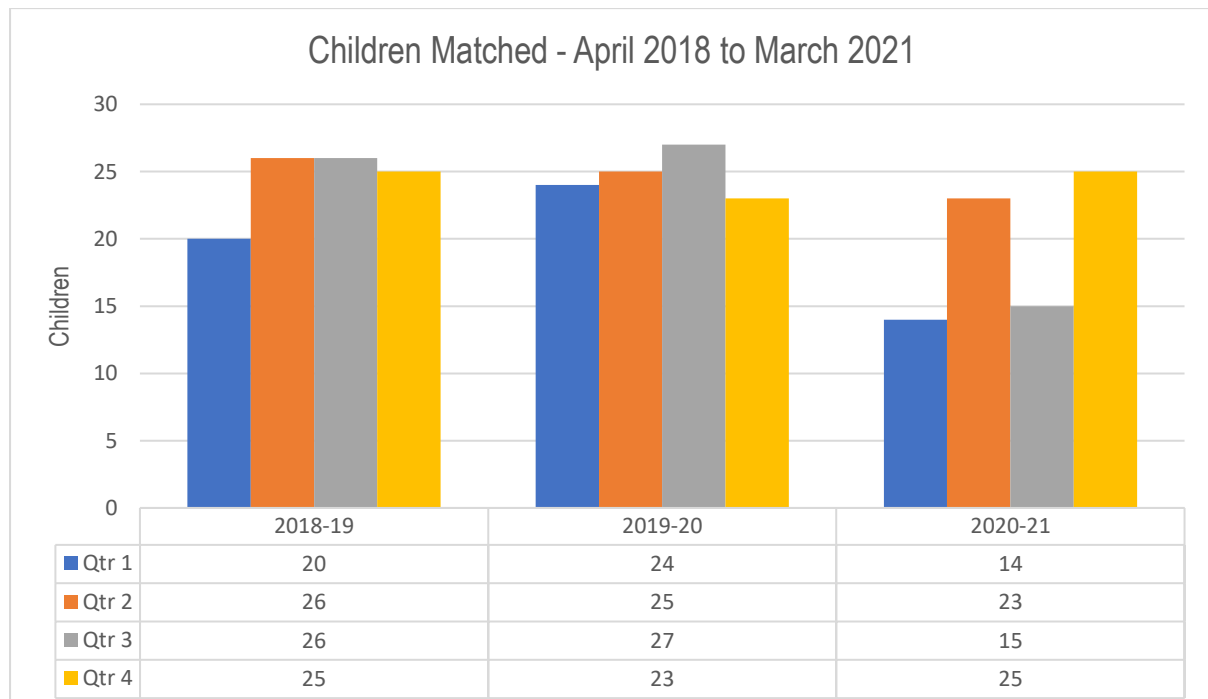
Children Matched

77 children were matched to adopters during the reporting period. This figure is **22.22%** lower when compared to the same period in previous year.



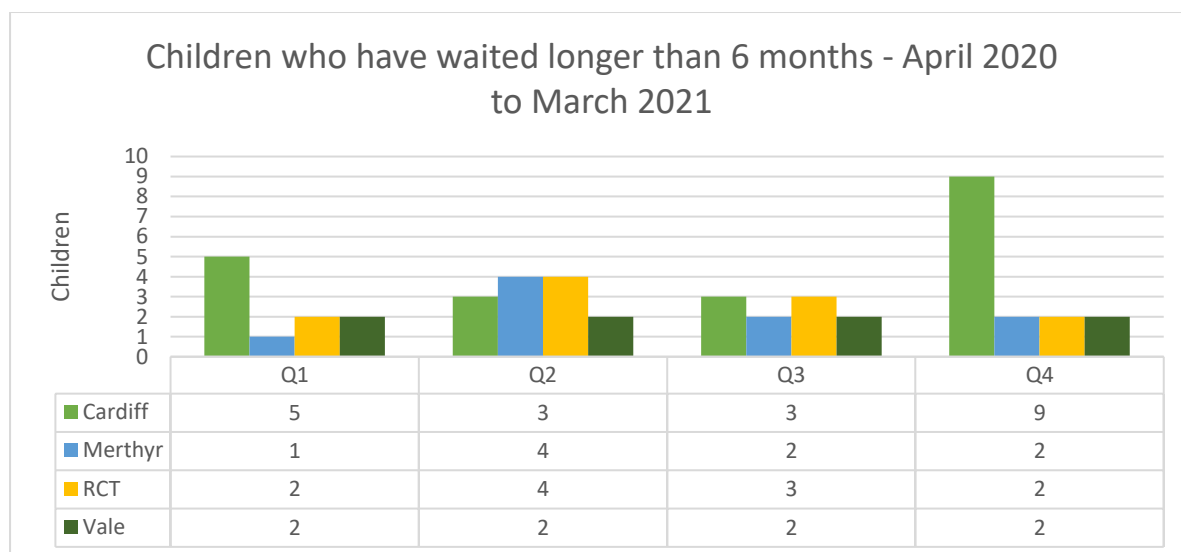
Comparative Data

The service continues to consistently match children. It should be noted however, children placed in 2020-21 is 21% lower when compared to previous years.

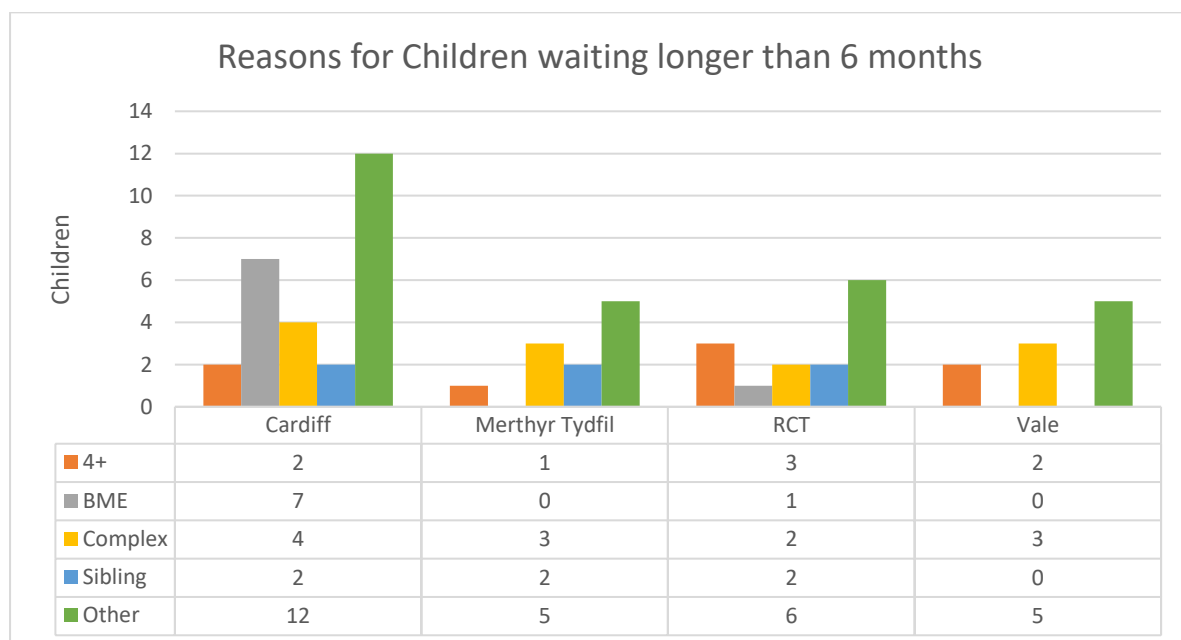


Number of children Matched since April 2020 who have waited longer than 6 months (or 3 months for a relinquished child under 6 months of age) to progress from “Should be placed for Adoption” decision to approve to Match

48 (73.84%) children matched in 2020-21 have waited longer than six months to progress from SBA to approve to match. This includes several children with additional/complex needs whose adoption searches have taken time but also whose matching with adopters has been drawn out over a longer period to ensure both that adopters have had sufficient time and information to proceed and that children have been able to be prepared.

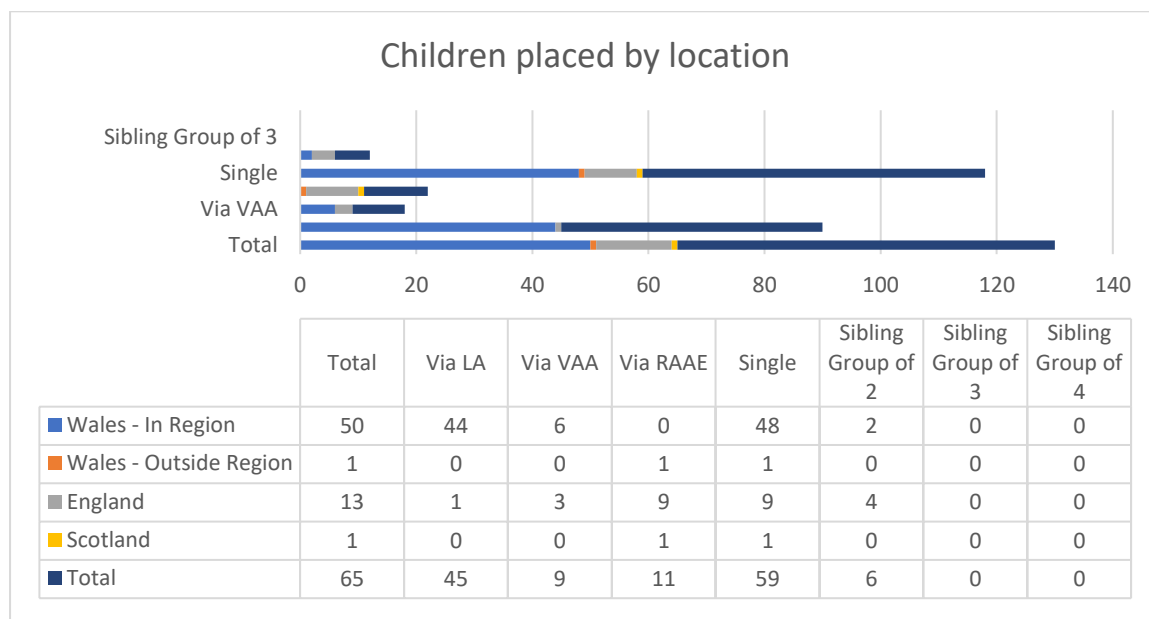


In many cases, children who have waited longer than six months come under more than one category.



Type of Placement

68% of the children have been placed with VVC adopters



Life Journey Work

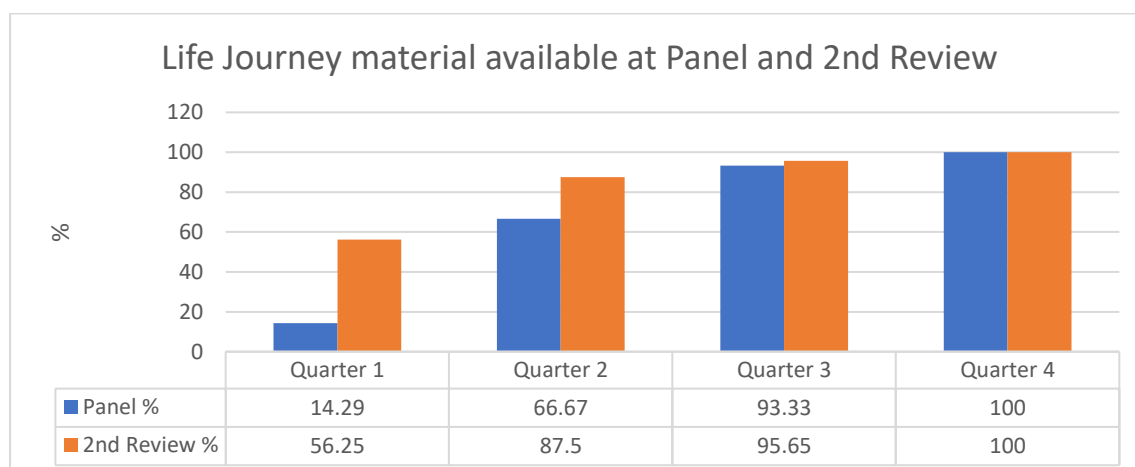
Amendments to the performance indicators for Life Journey work came into effect on 1st April 2020.

M20A The number of children during the quarter where life journey material has been provided by the time of matching panel. ***Life Journey material at matching panel has been defined as: draft later life letter; and draft life storybook.***

M20 The number of children for whom life journey material has been provided to adopters by the time of the second adoption review.

M21 The number of children during the quarter who had their second adoption review.

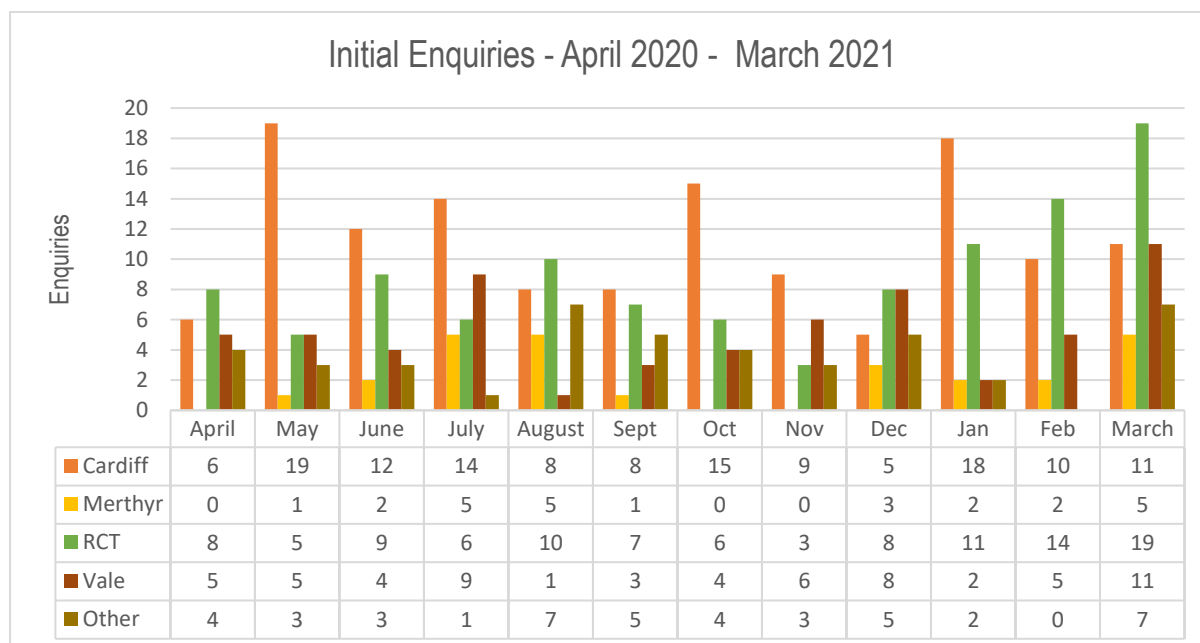
Quarter on quarter we can see a steady increase in performance with most local authorities achieving 100% compliance. Given the relatively small numbers of children involved in both measures, just 1 child can show a significant impact on the overall %.



Appendix 3 – Recruitment and Assessment

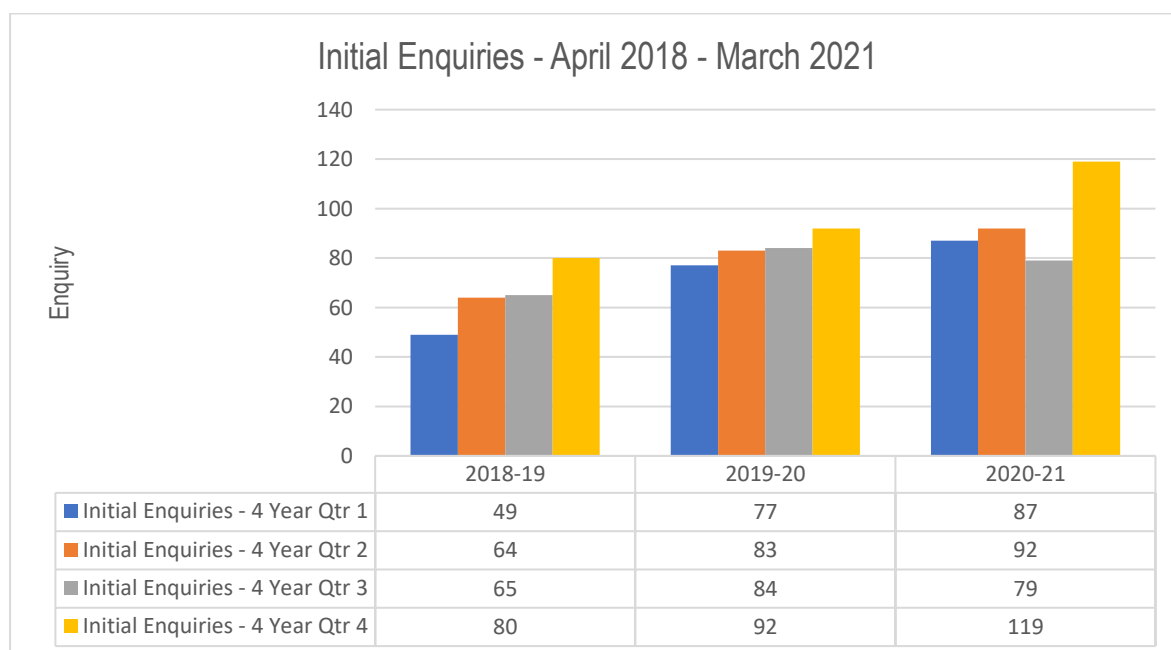
Initial Enquiries

374 enquiries were received during the period April 2020 – March 2021. Of this, 36% and 28% of enquiries were received from Cardiff and RCT respectively, 17% and 7% of enquiries were received from the Vale of Glamorgan and Merthyr Tydfil respectively and 44 (12%) enquiries were received from outside our region.



Comparative Data

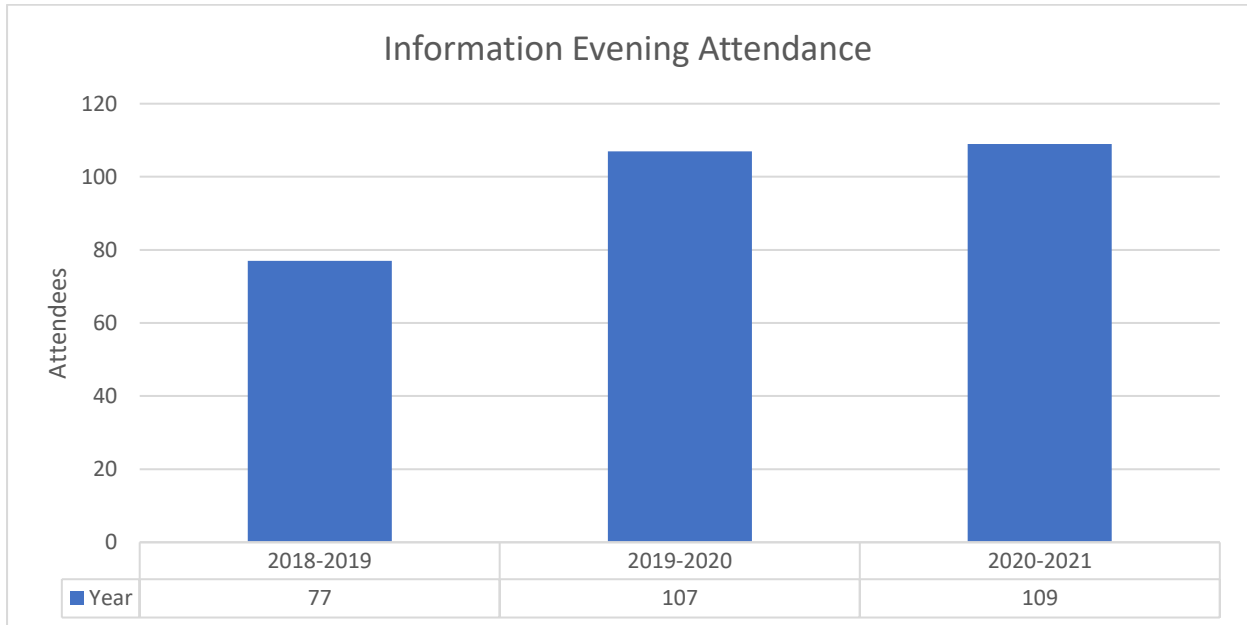
Over the past three years, the service has seen a 46% increase in the number of enquiries.



Information Evenings

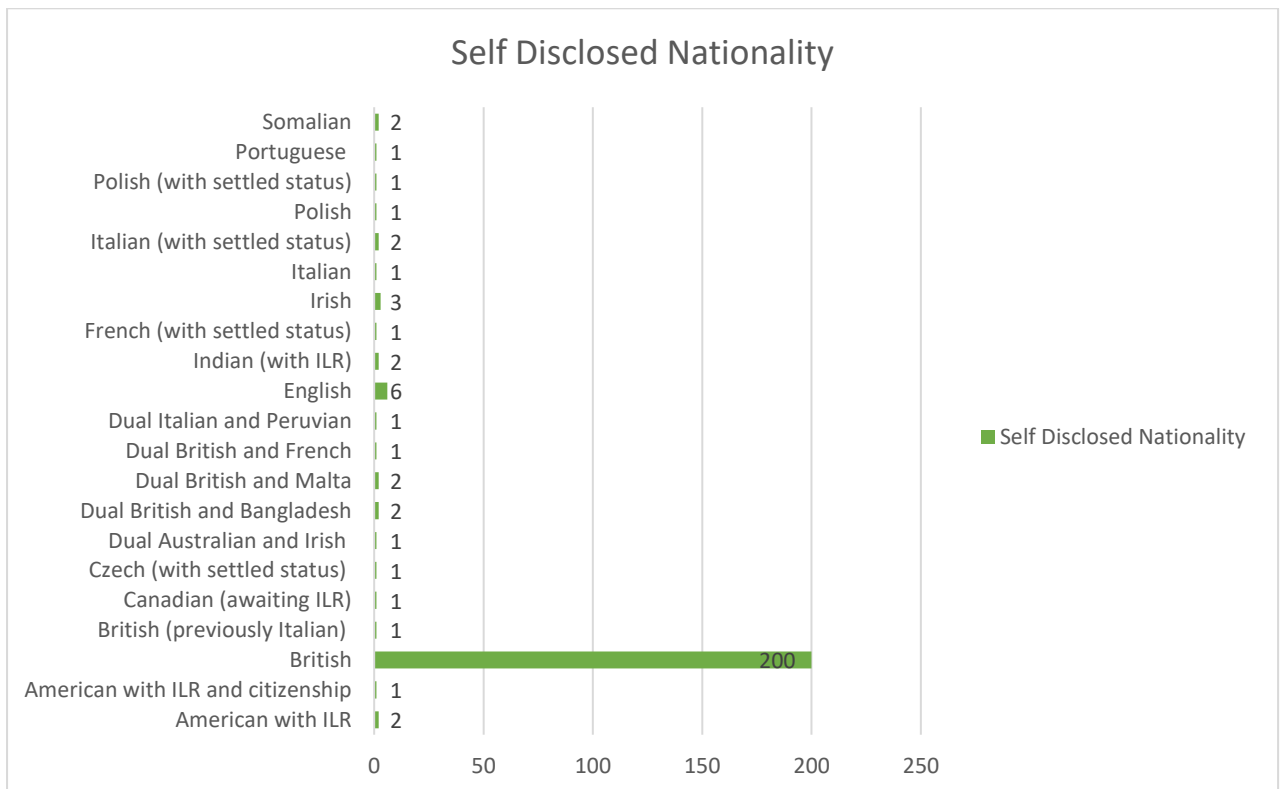
Comparative Data

Year on year, the service continues to see an increase in attendance at Information Evenings.

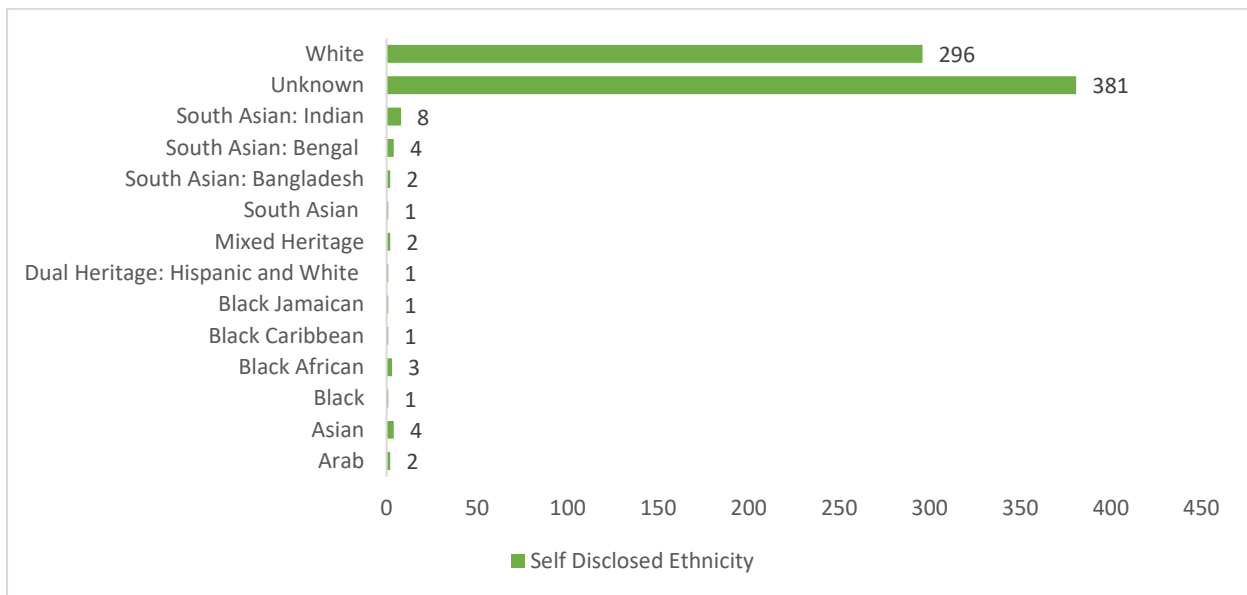


Demographics of Initial Enquiries

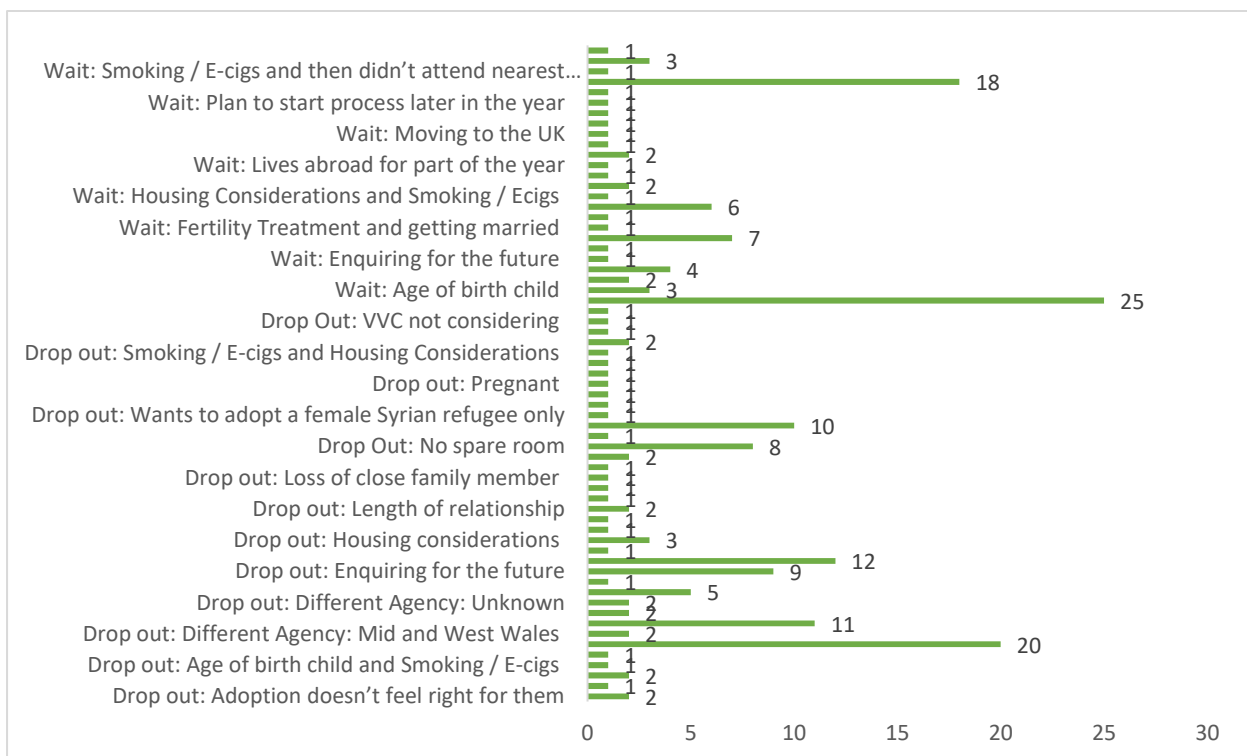
Self-disclosed Nationality



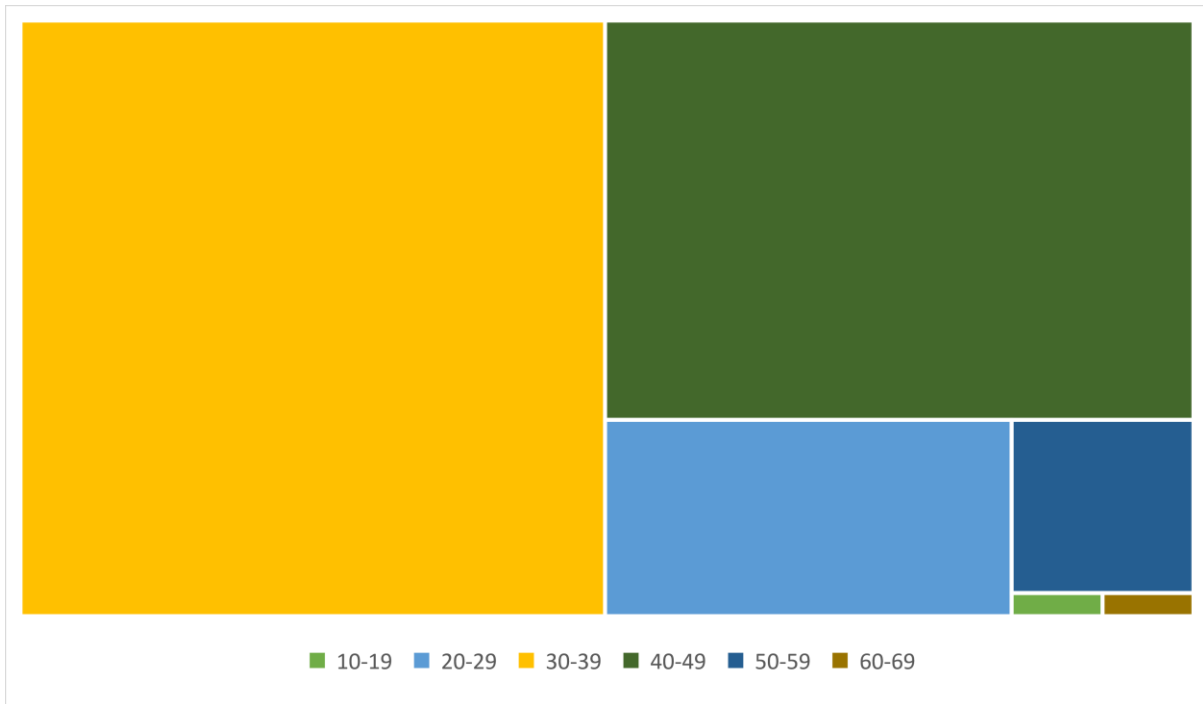
Self-disclosed ethnicity



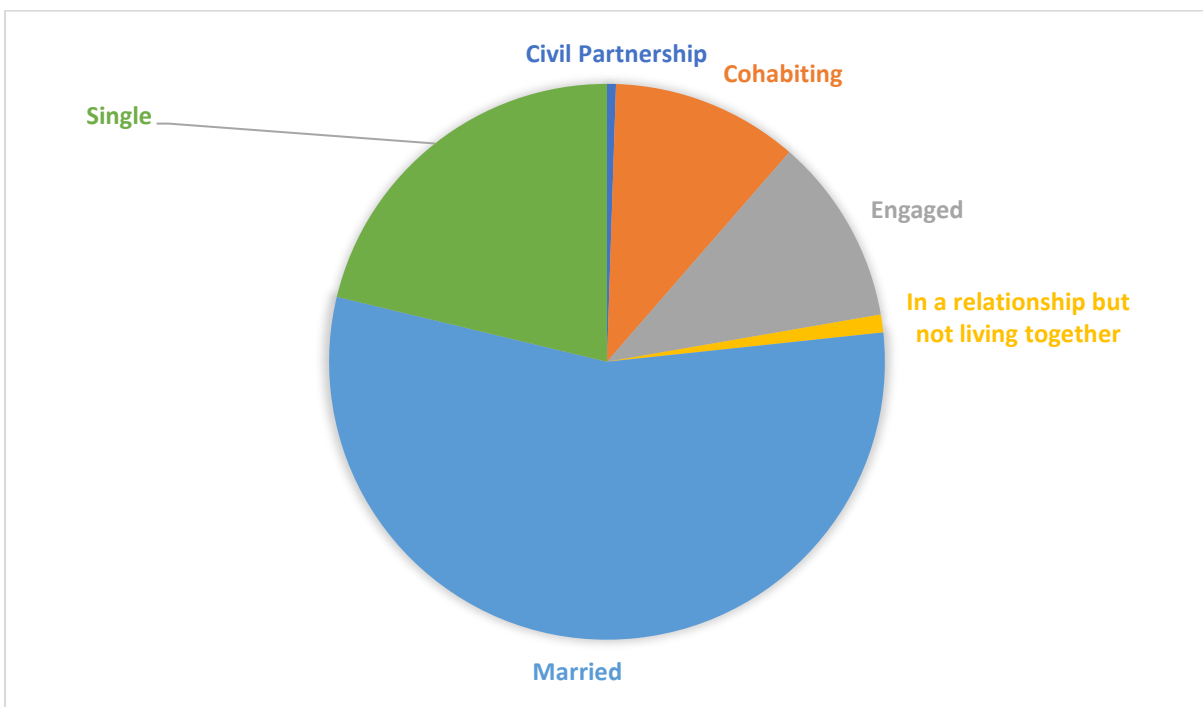
Self-disclosed Follow up - reasons for delay or withdrawal from adoption process before Information Evening April 2020 – March 2021:



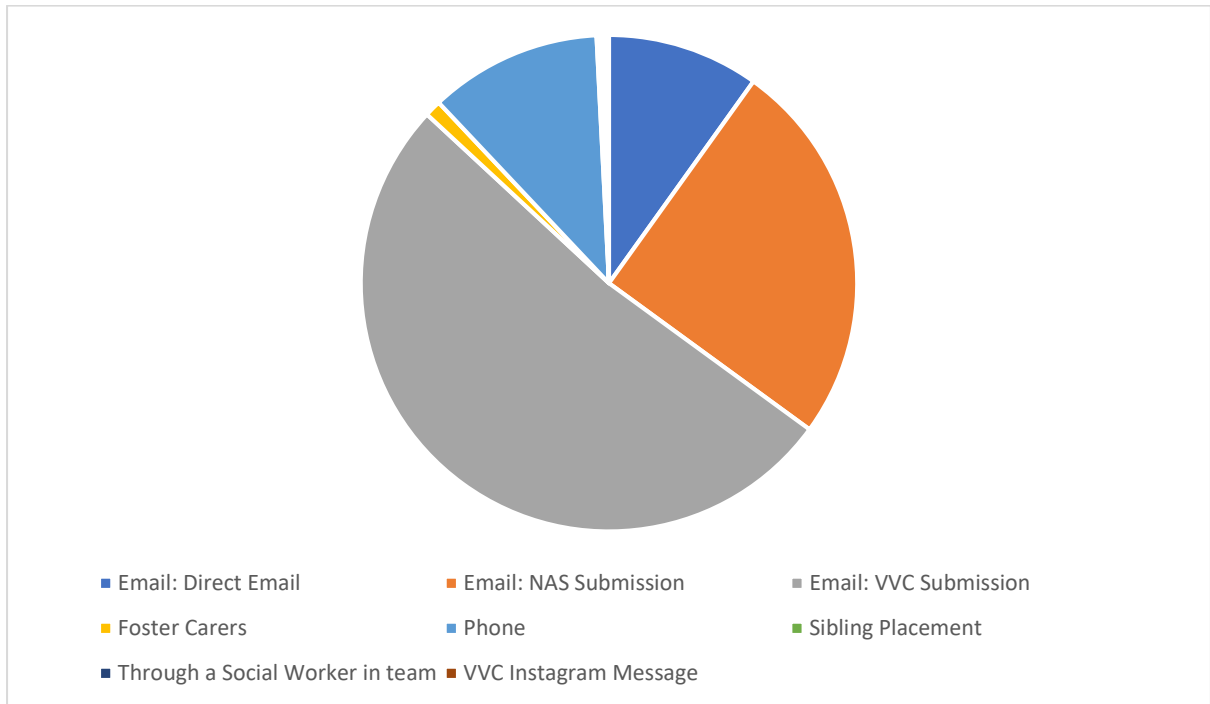
Age of Applicants



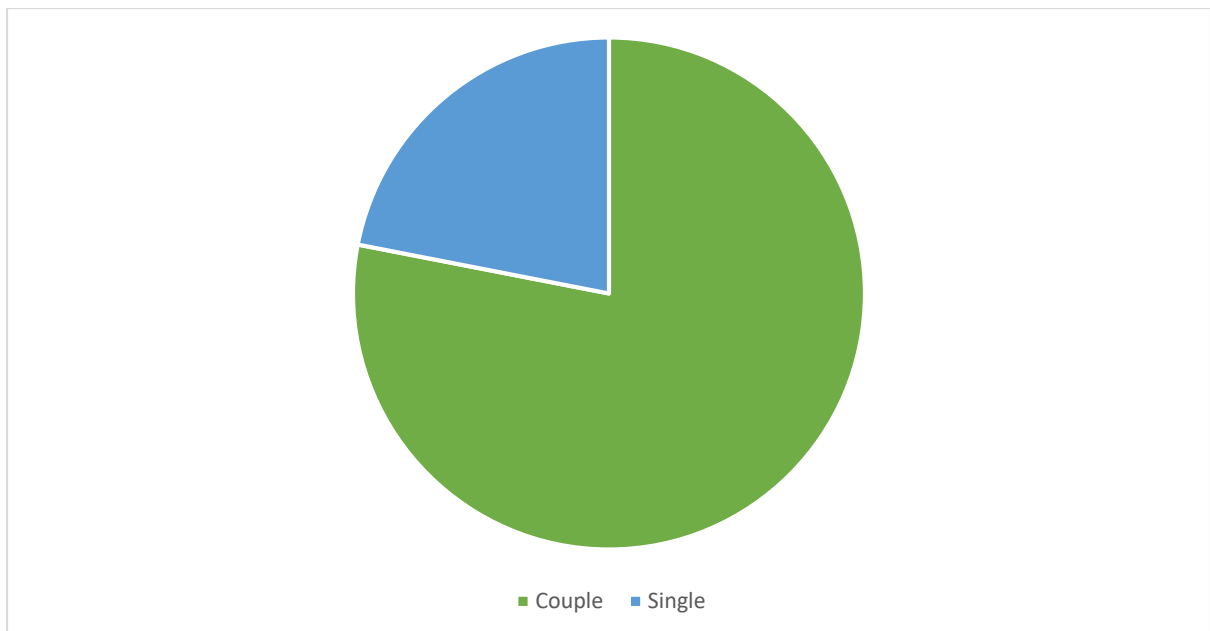
Relationship Status



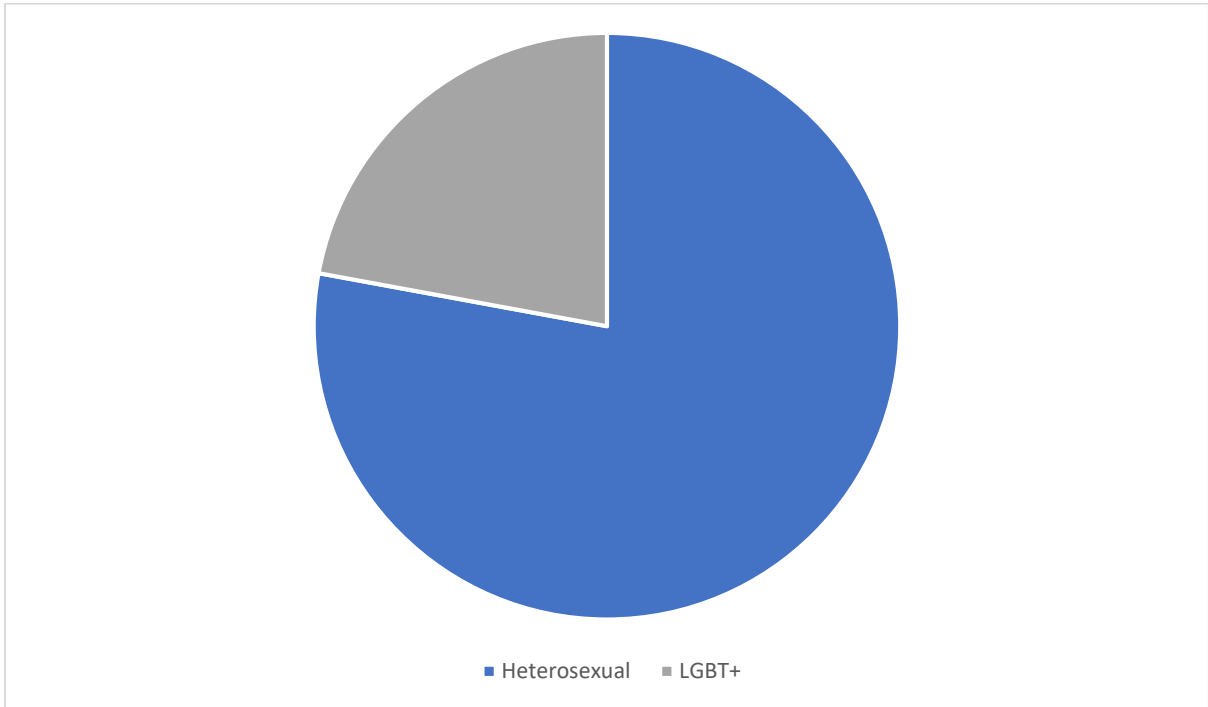
How they contacted us



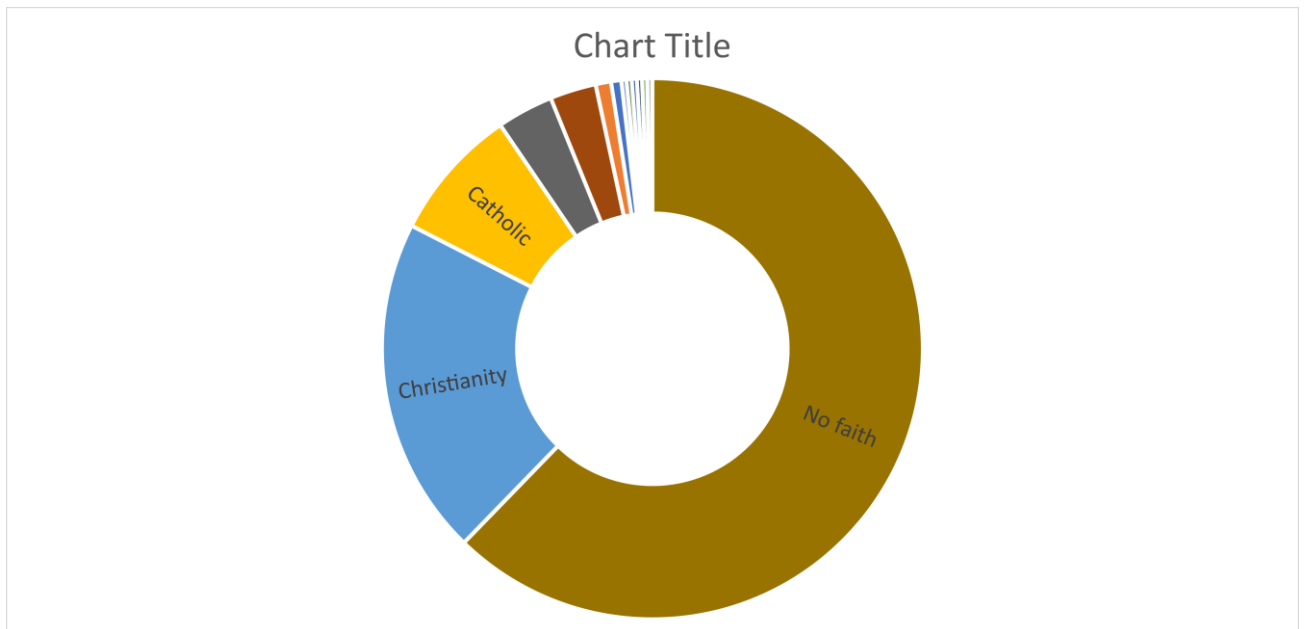
Couples and Singles



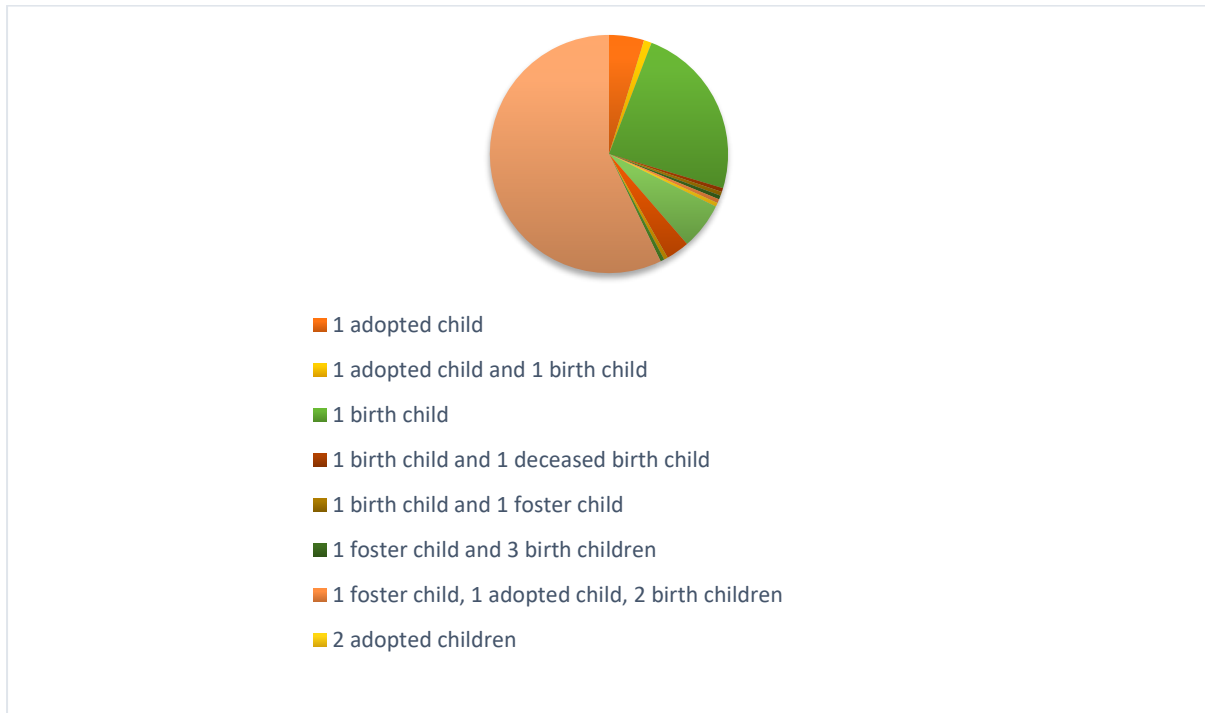
Couples – self-reported LGBT+ and Heterosexual



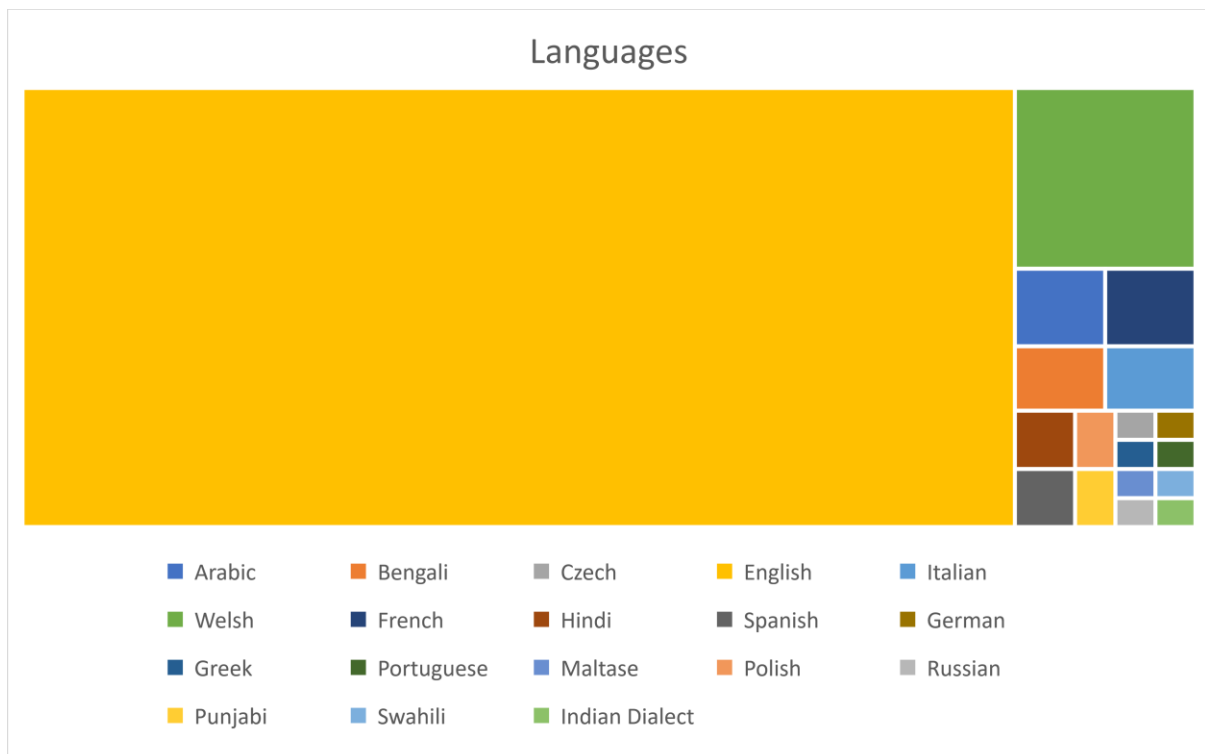
Self-reported faith



Adopting with children already in the household

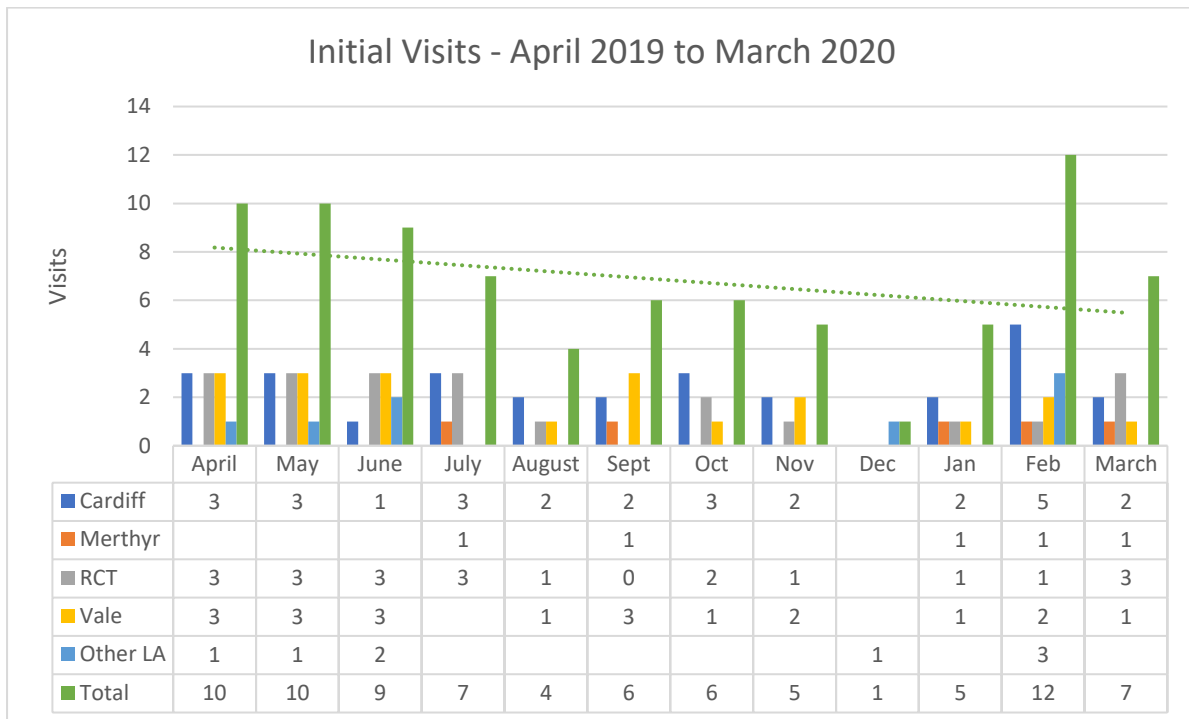


Languages spoken in the household



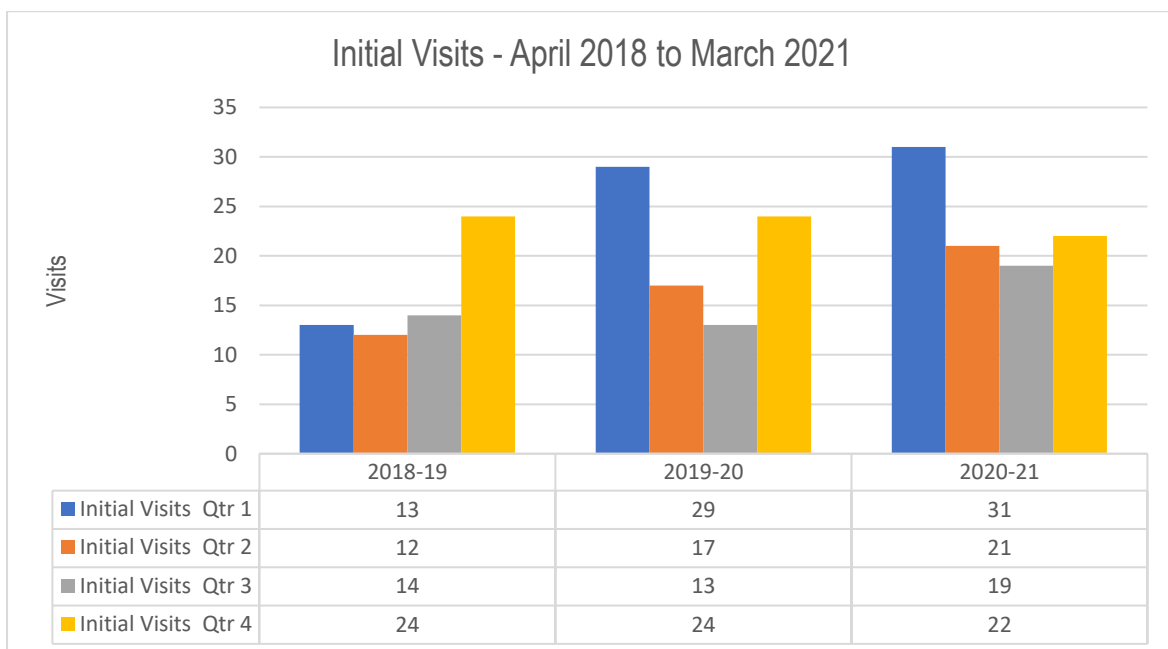
Initial Visits

82 initial visits took place during the reporting period.



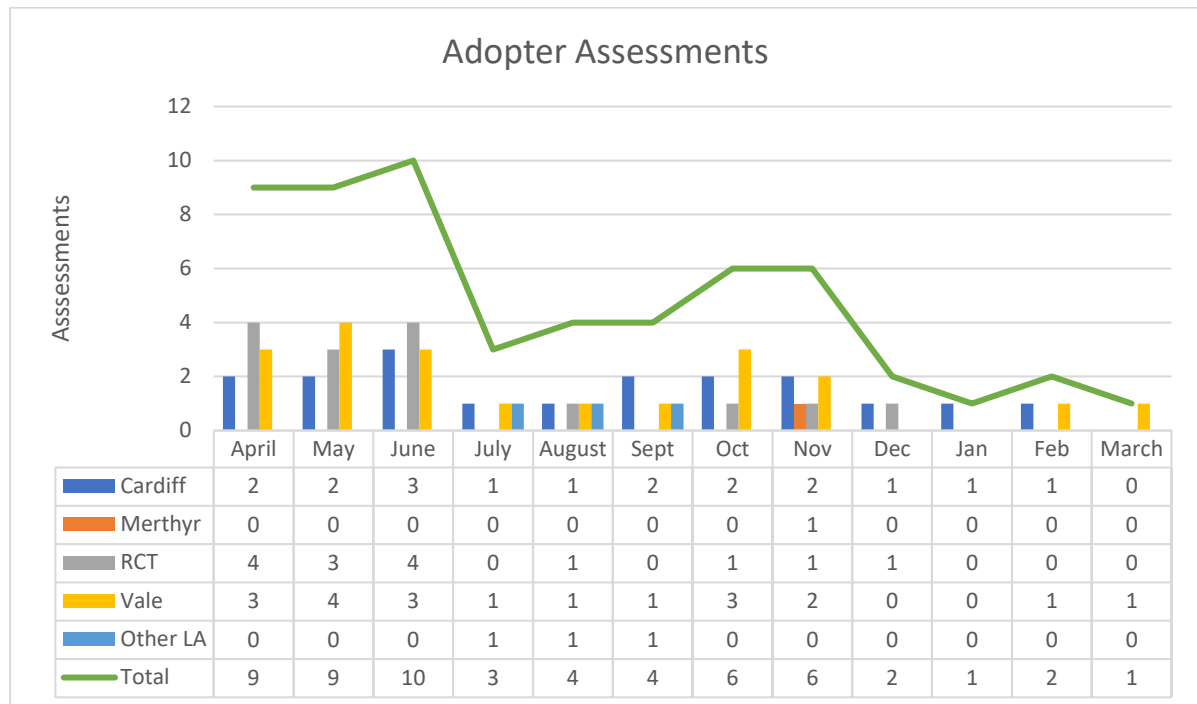
Comparative Data

Over the past three years, the service has noted a 48% increase in the number of initial visits being carried out.



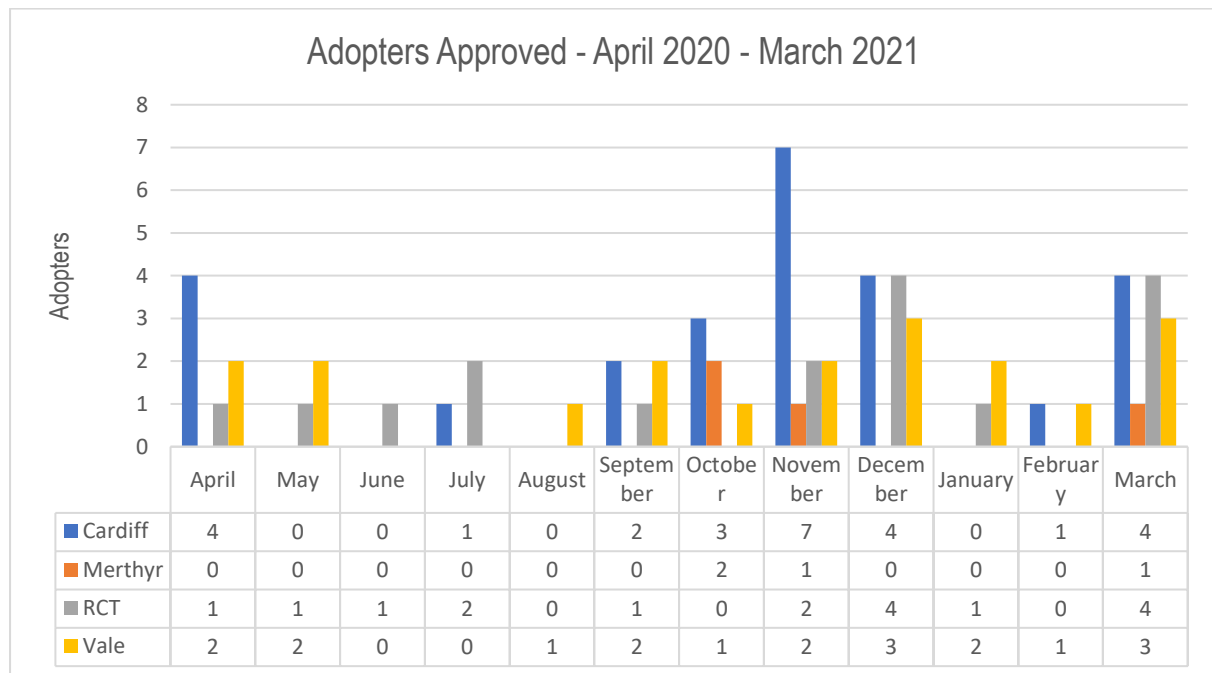
Adopter Assessments

57 adopter assessments were carried out during the reporting period.



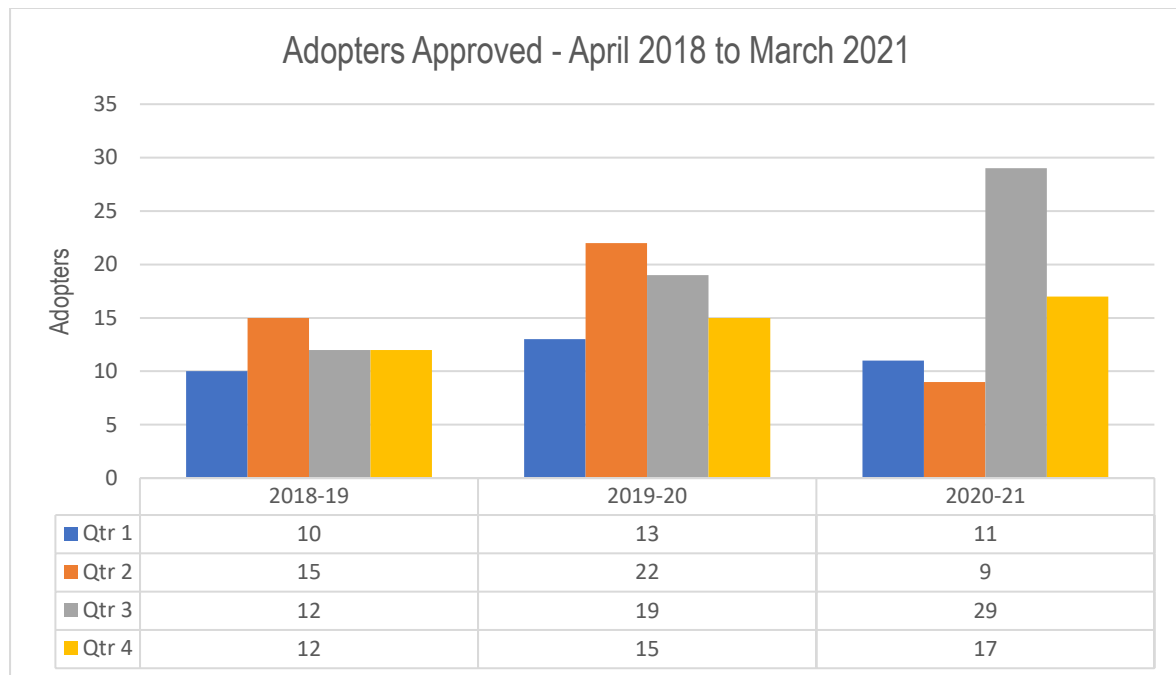
Adopter Approvals

67 adopter approvals were presented to the adoption panel, of these 66 adopter approvals were ratified during the reporting period.



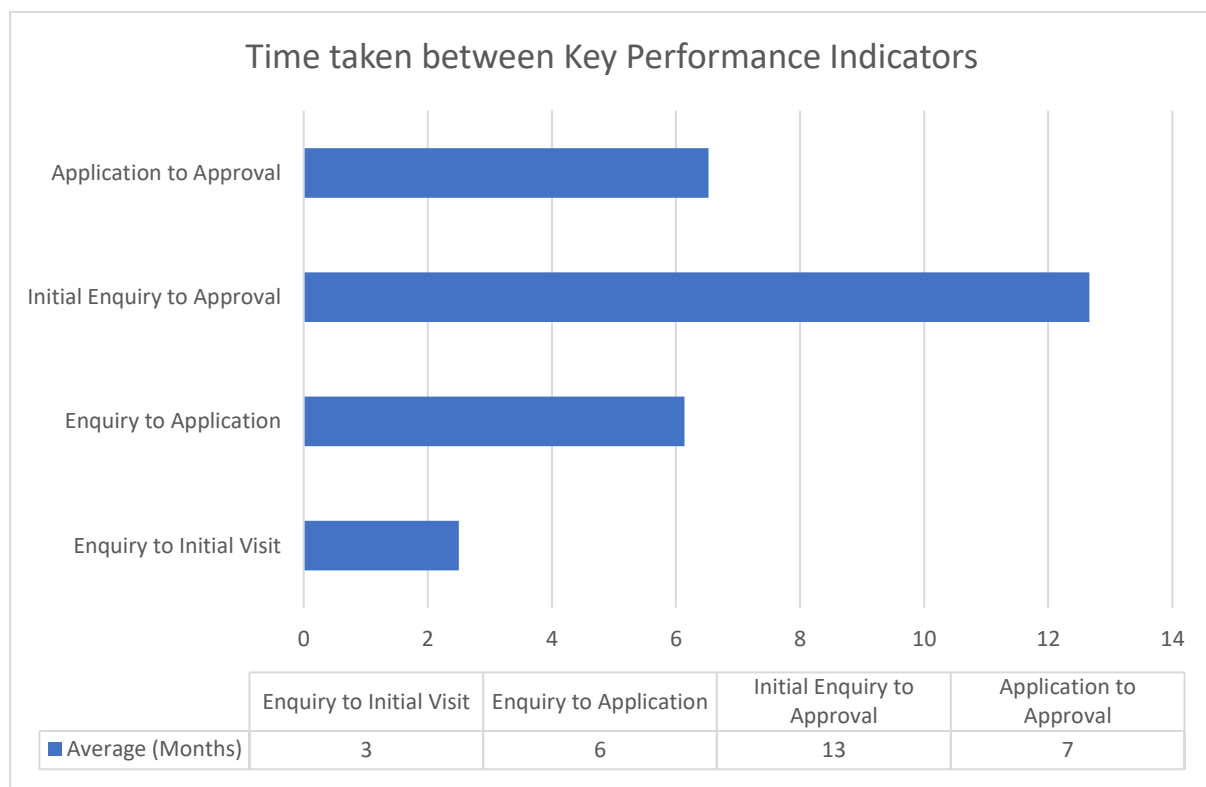
Comparative Data

A 35% increase in the number of adopters approved has been observed during the three-year period.

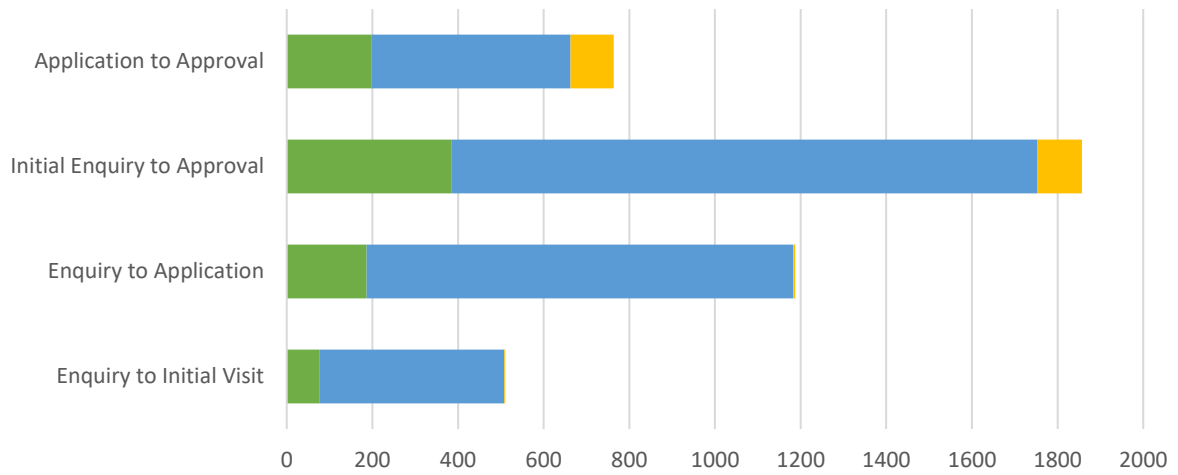


Conversions

The Service continues to demonstrate its commitment to process applications within NAS guidelines. In respect of initial enquiry to approval (see graph below), the time scale was extended because 6 adopters' assessments were protracted due to a variety of reasons.



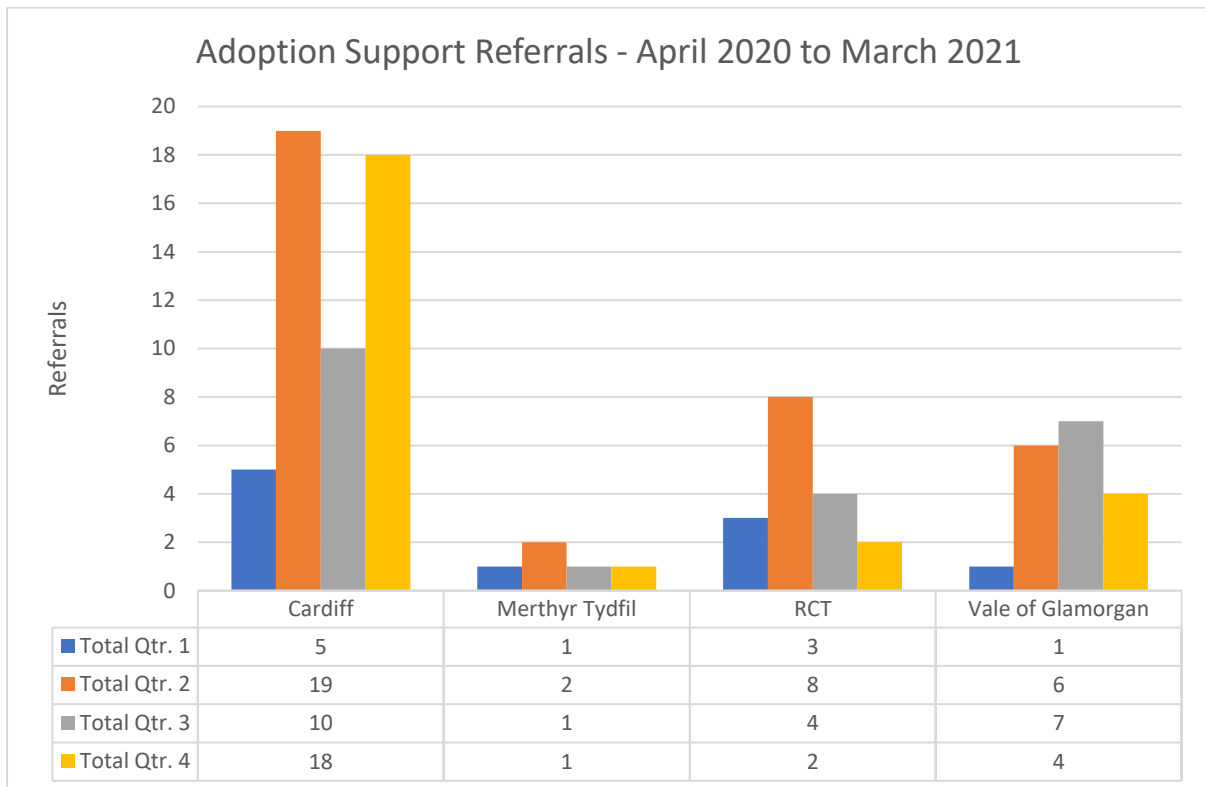
Conversion Rates April 2020 - March 2021



	Enquiry to Initial Visit	Enquiry to Application	Initial Enquiry to Approval	Application to Approval
■ Average	76.05	186.65	385.13	198.47
■ Longest	432	996	1368	464
■ Shortest	2	5	104	101

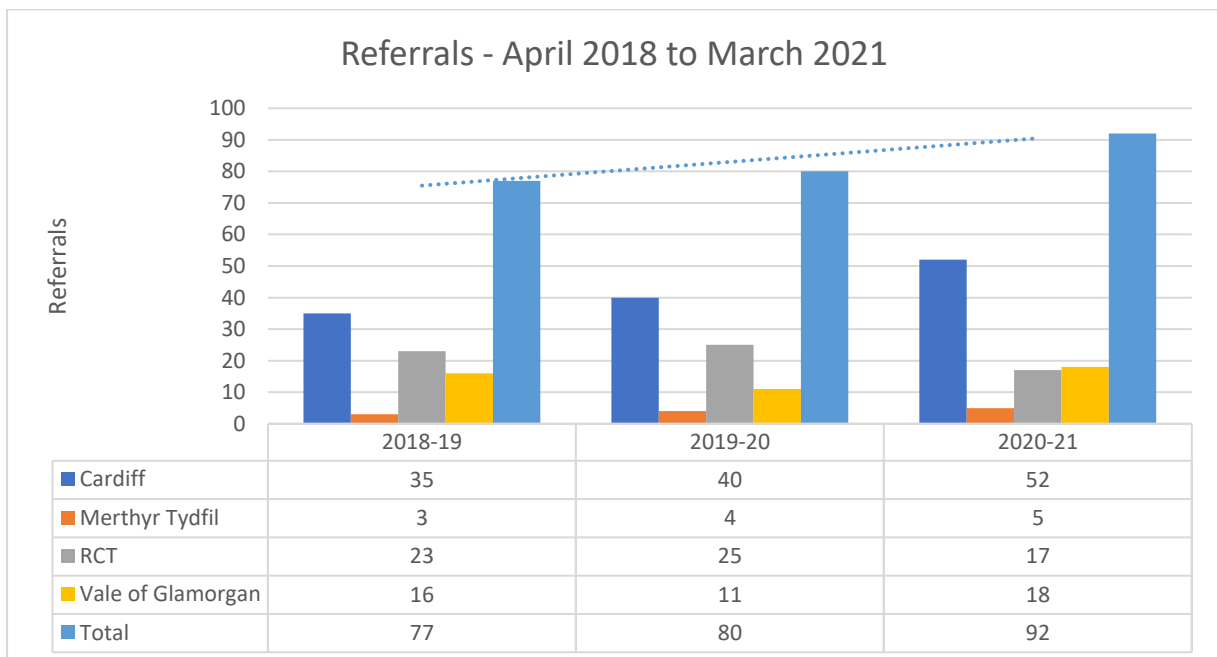
Appendix 4 – Adoption Support

Referrals



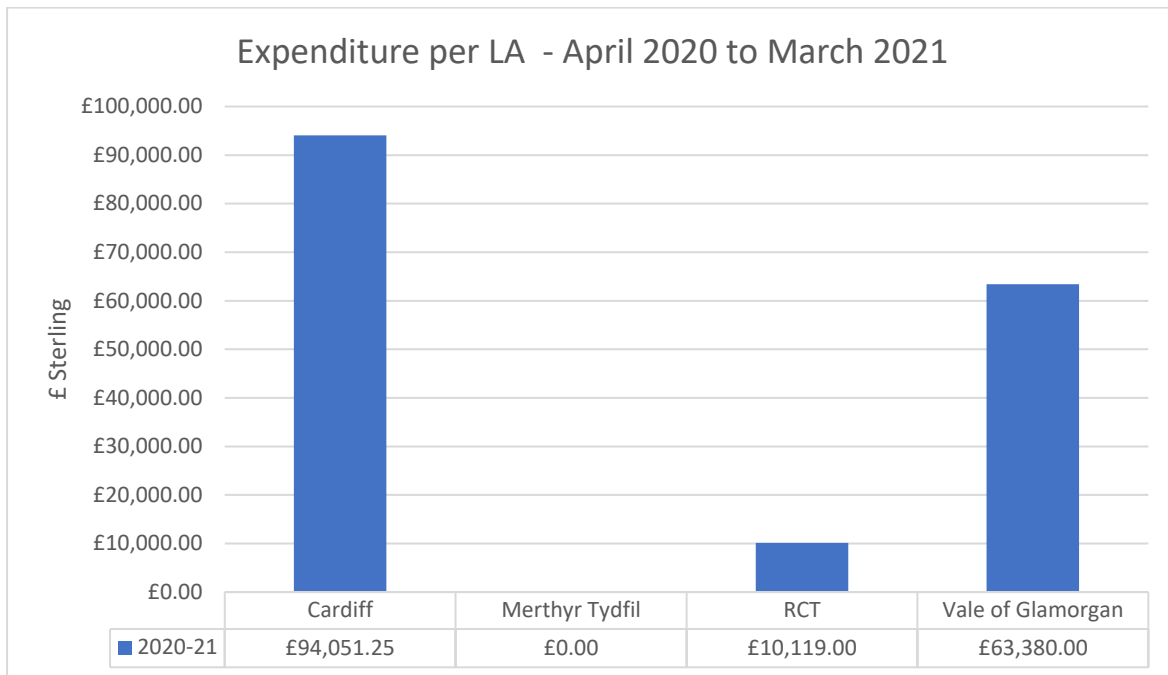
Comparative Data

Over the past three years, referrals for post adoption support have increased by 19.4%

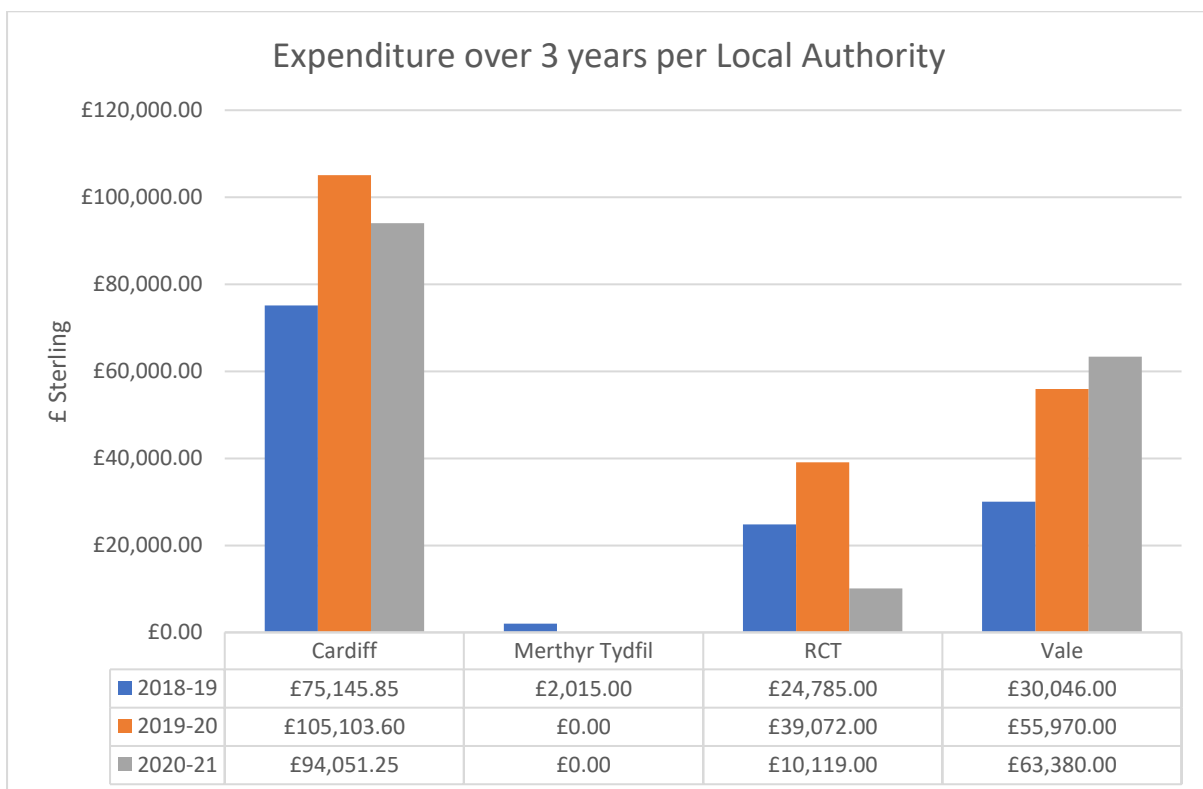


Expenditure per Local Authority

64 children have received local authority funding during the year.

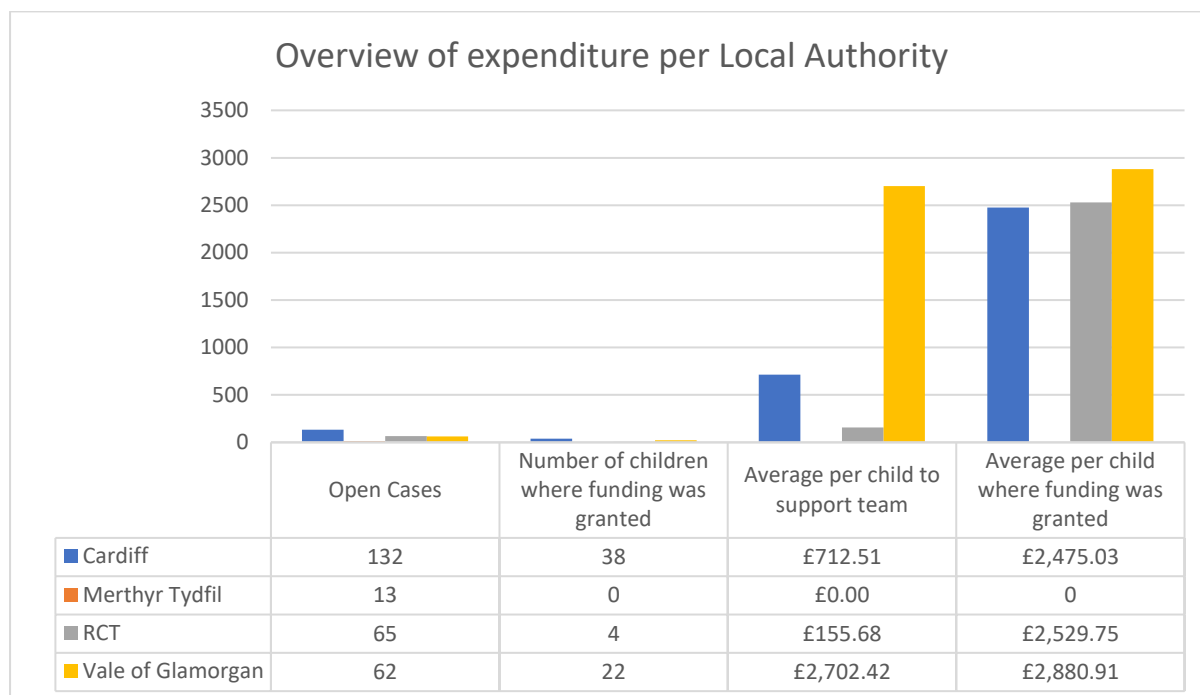


3-year comparative data - Expenditure per Local Authority



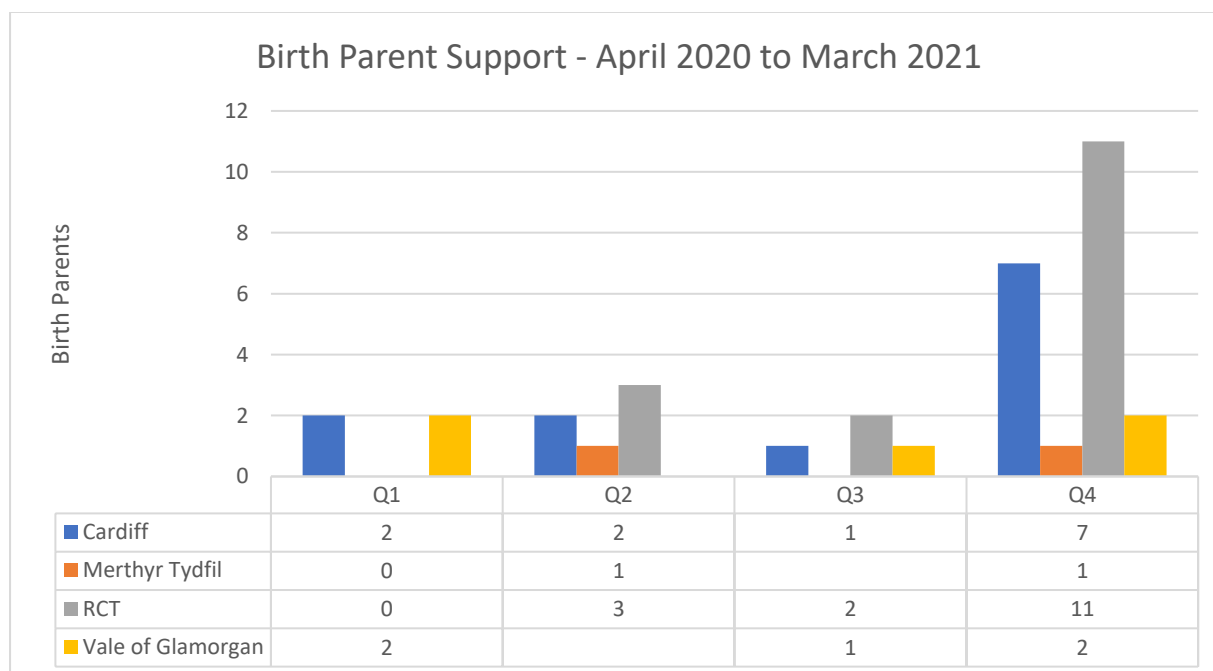
Overview of average expenditure per Local Authority

The service has 272 open cases for adoption support. 49% are for Cardiff families, 24% and 23% are for RCT and Vale of Glamorgan families respectively. The remaining 4% of open cases for Merthyr Tydfil are supported by the Adoption Support team.

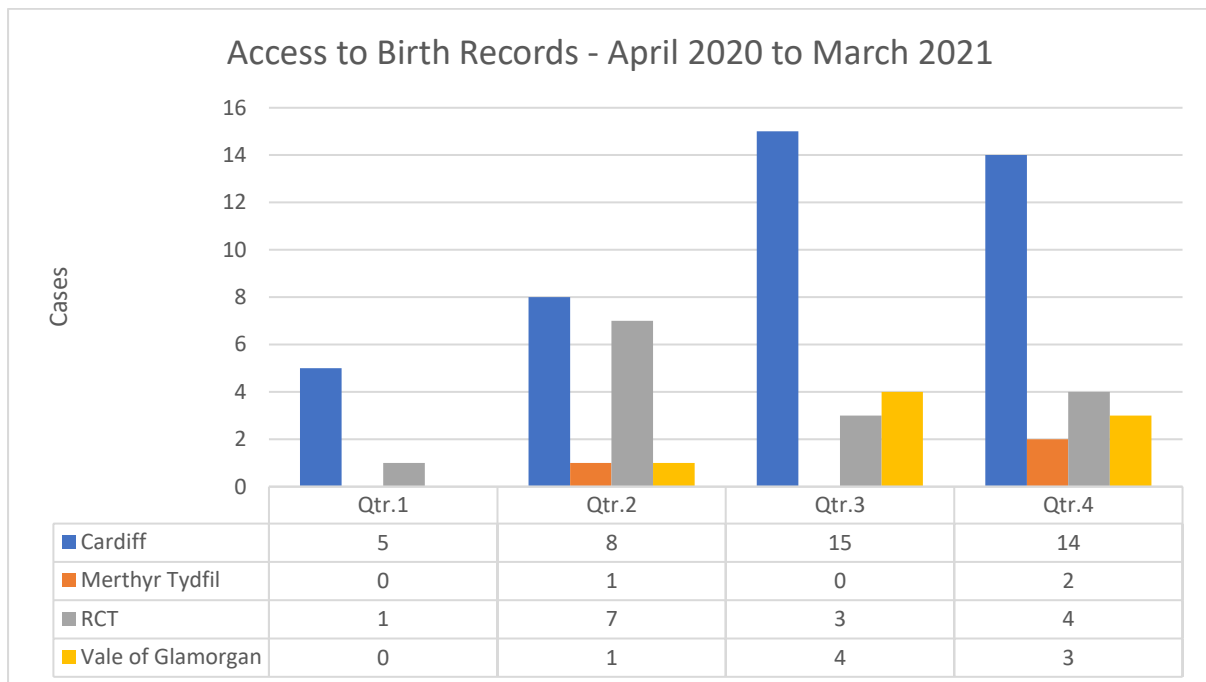


Birth Parent Services

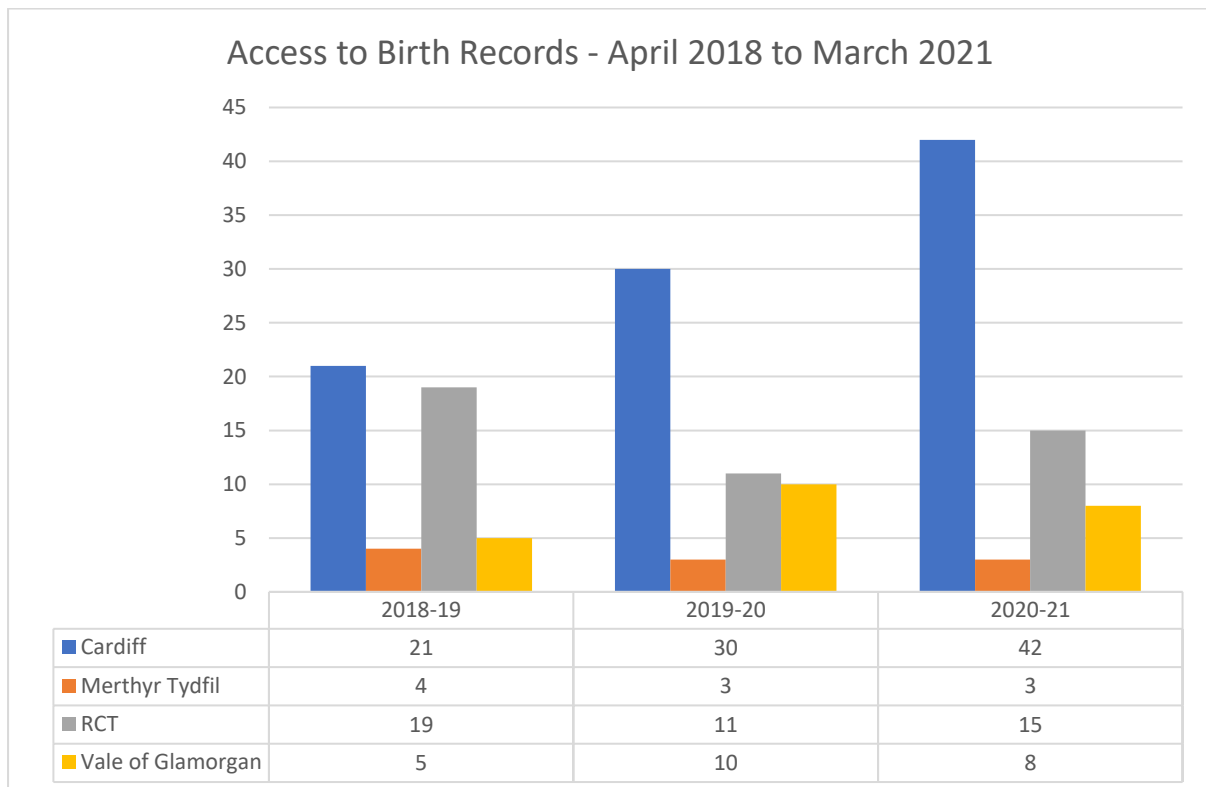
A significant increase (60%) in services offered to birth parents is observed in Quarter 4. This follows the recruitment of a permanent birth parent adviser and reduction in lockdown restrictions.



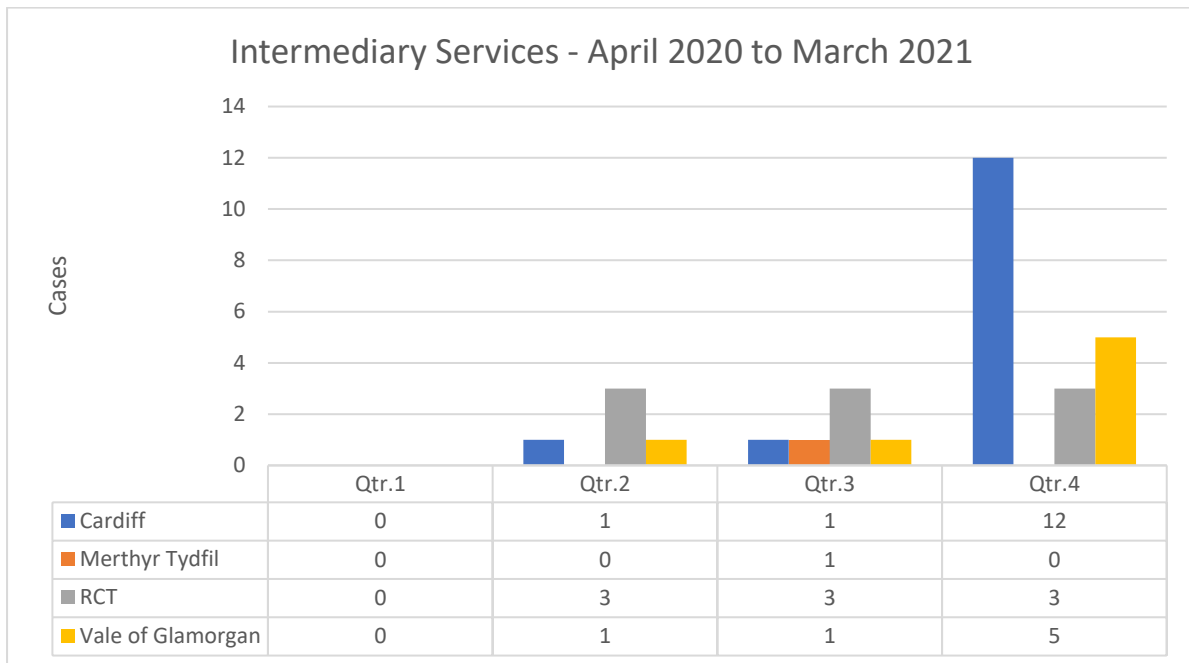
Access to Birth Records



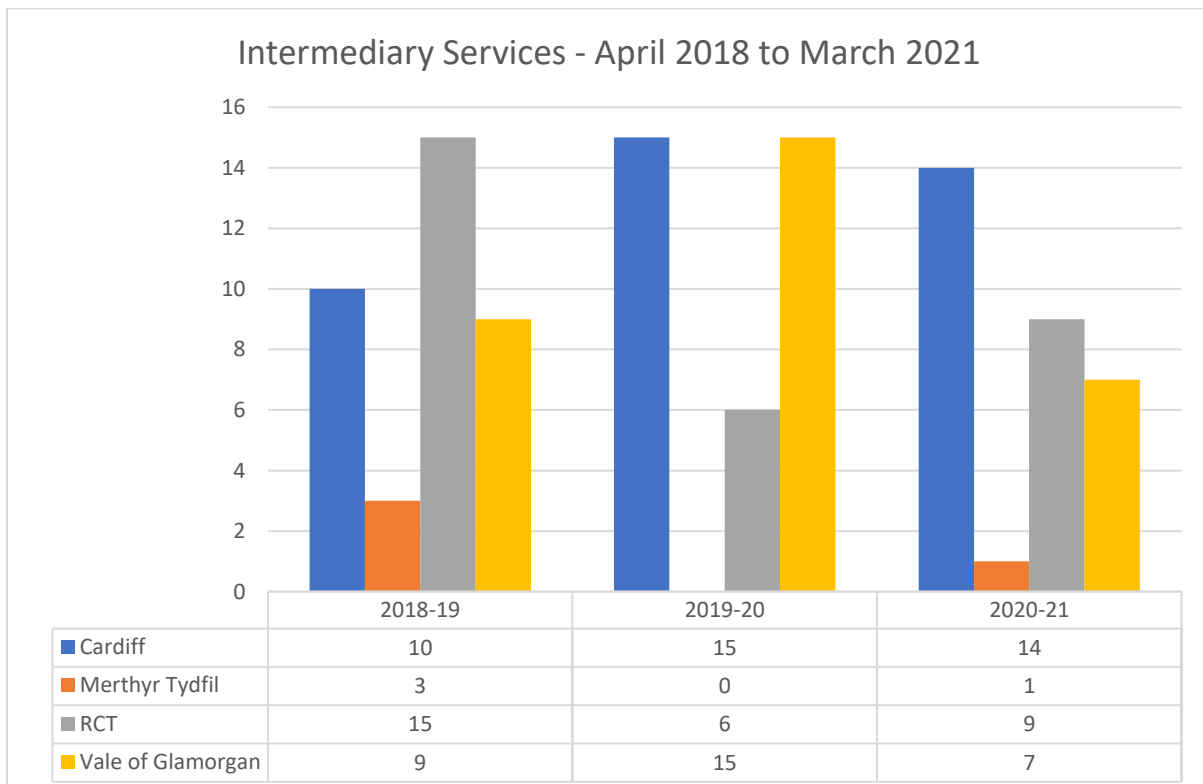
3-year comparative data – Access to Birth Records



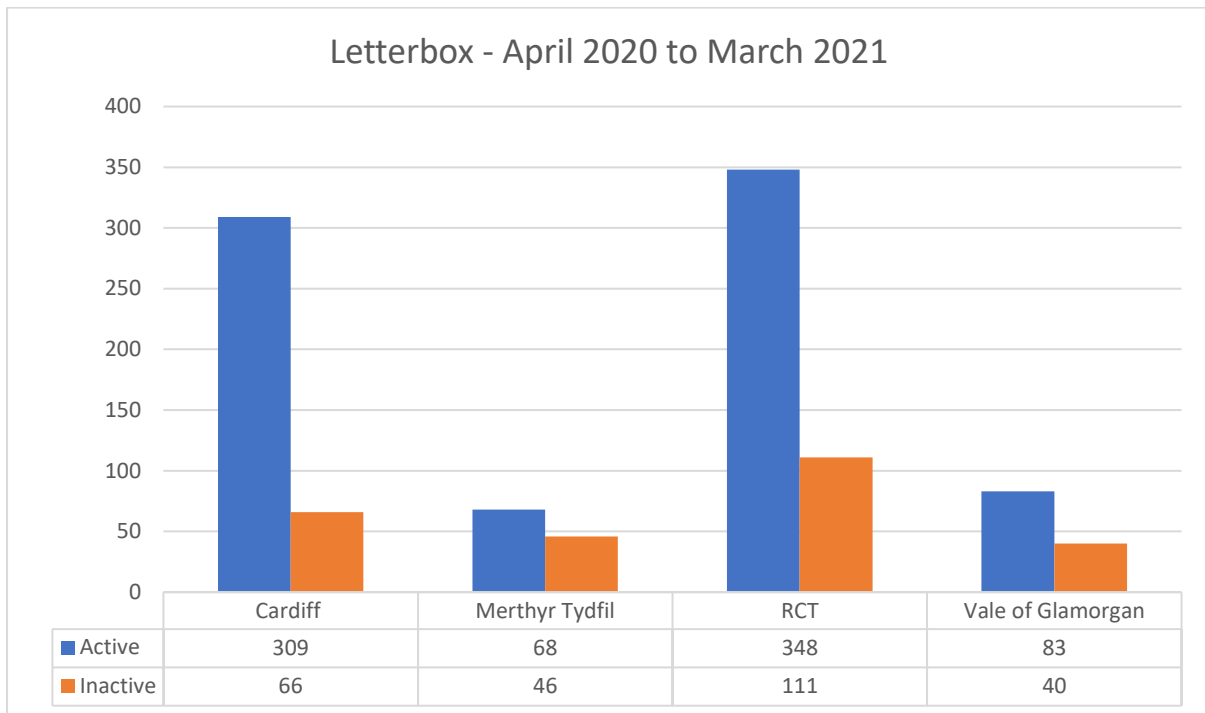
Intermediary Services



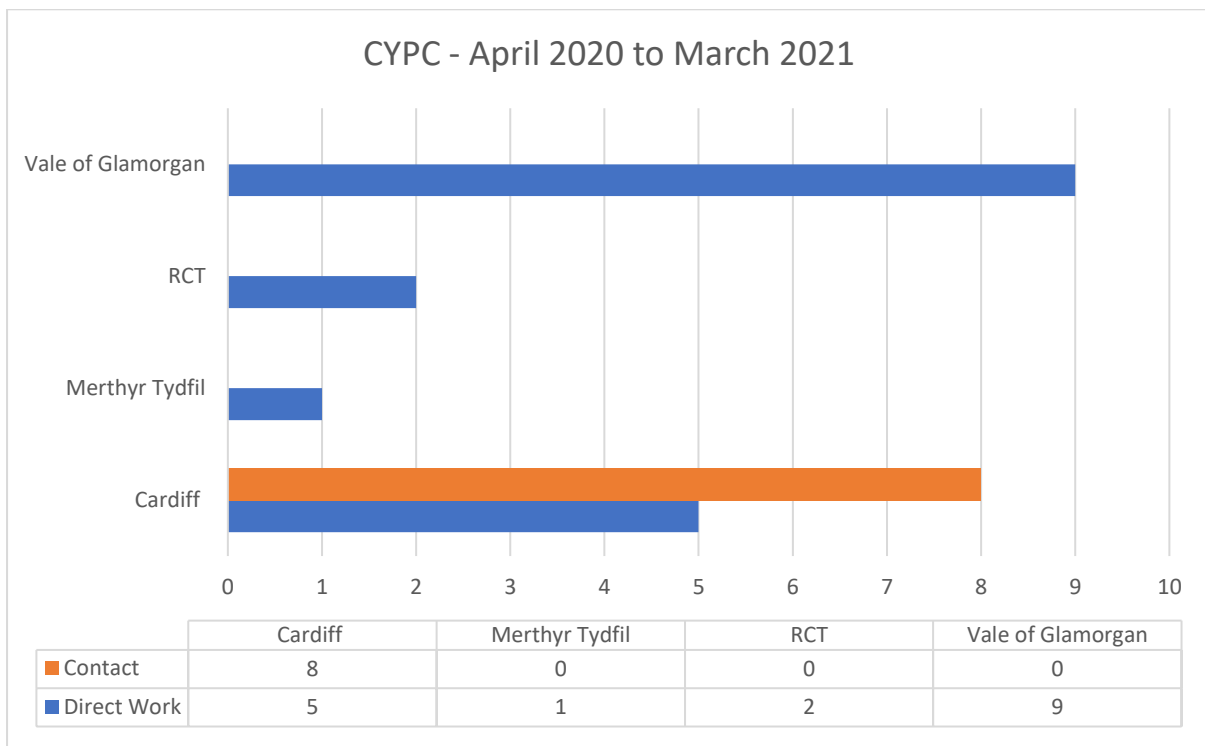
3-year comparative data – Intermediary Services



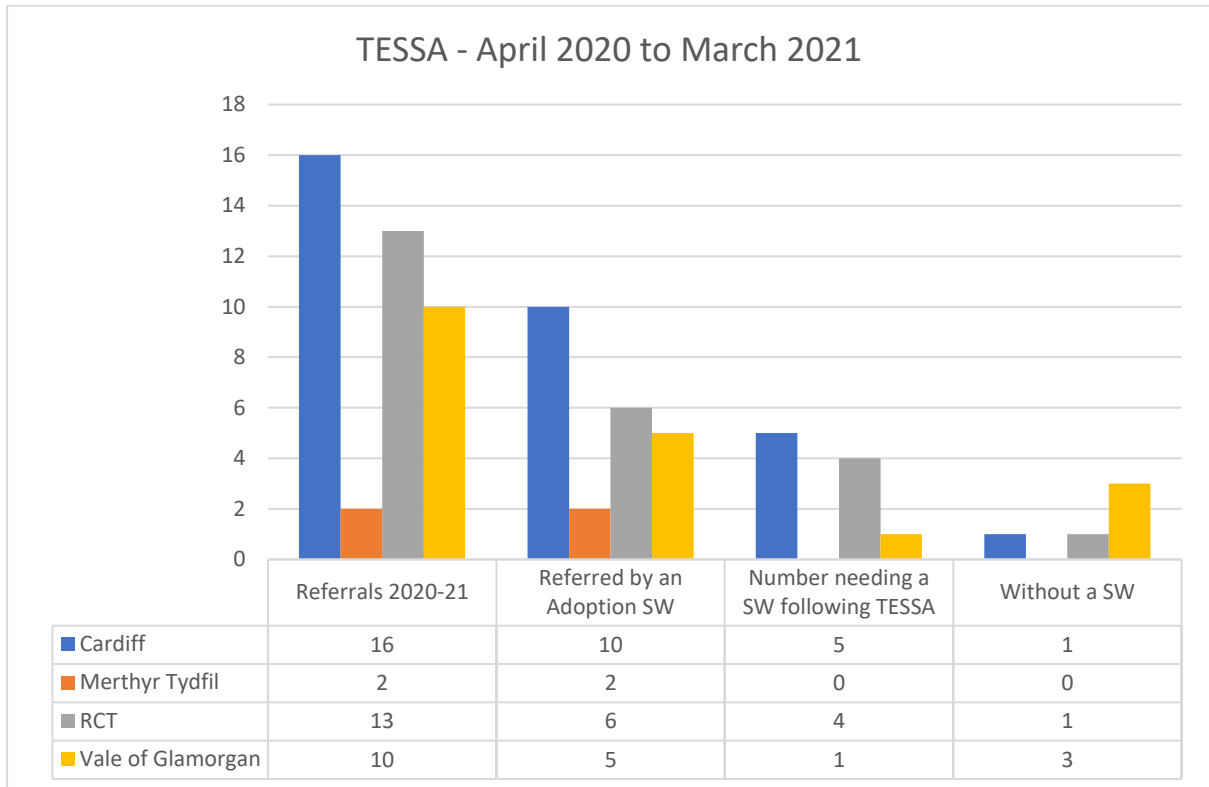
Letterbox



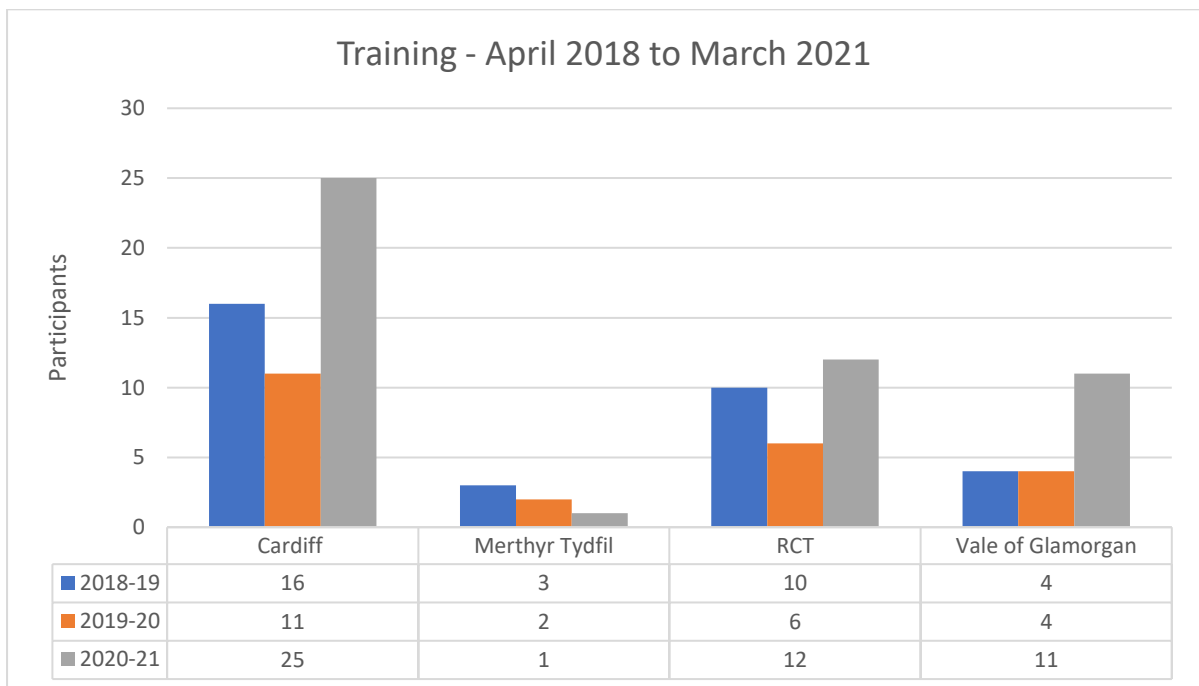
Children and Young People's Service



TESSA



Training

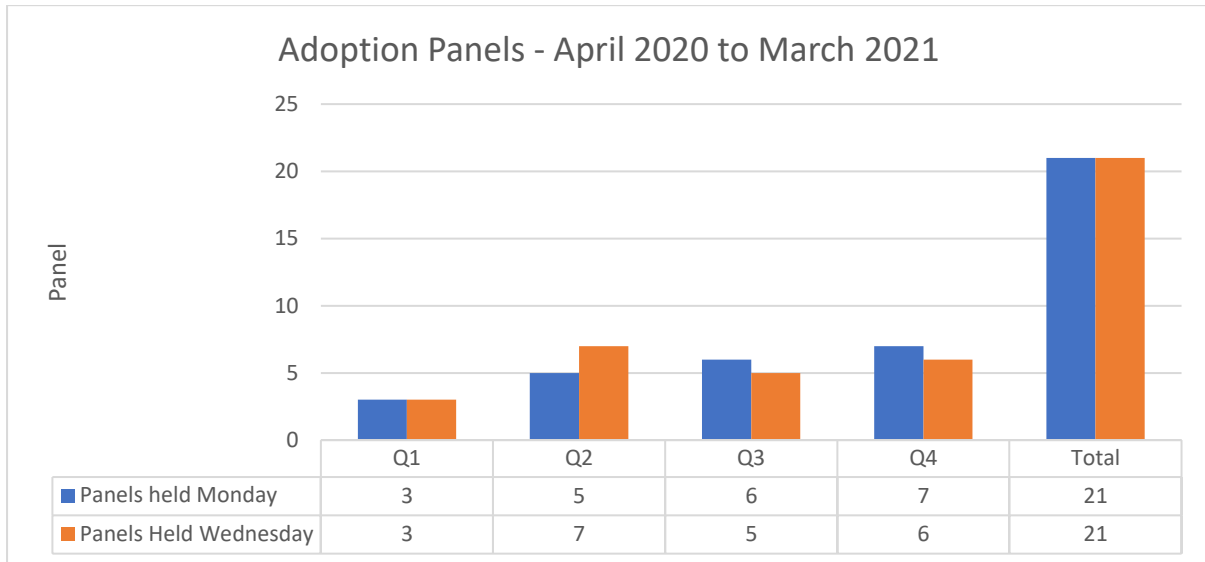


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Appendix 5 – Adoption Panel

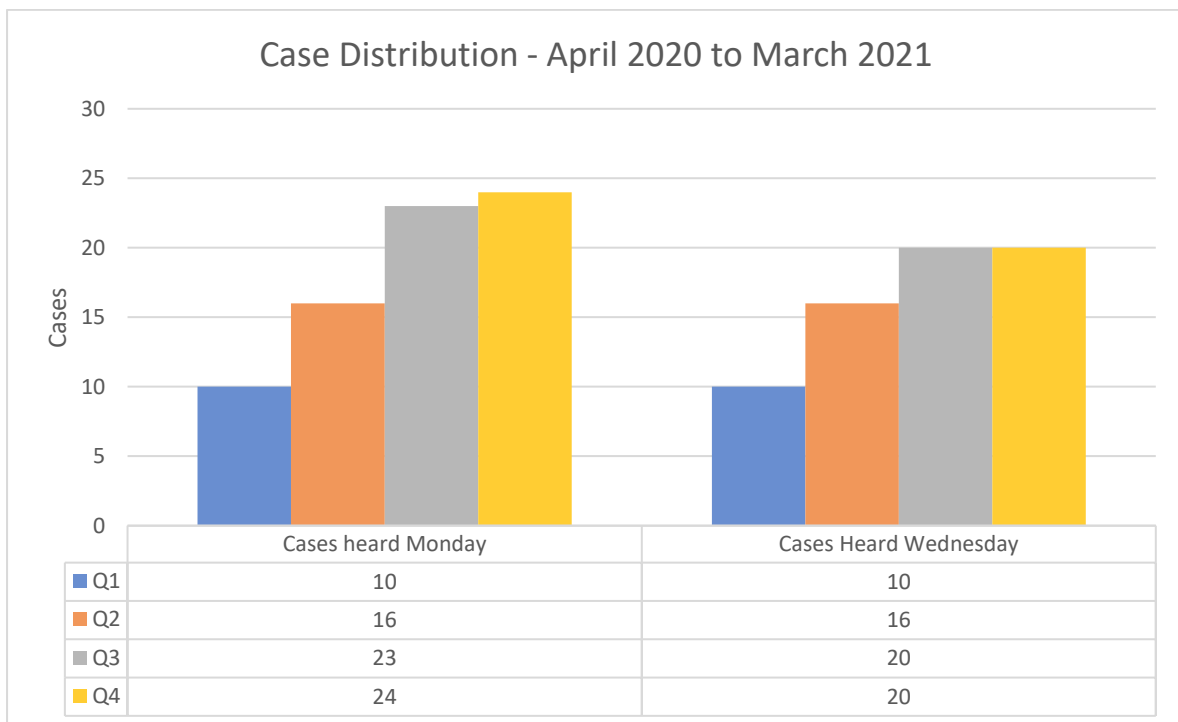
Panels convened

42 adoption panels were convened during the reporting period and is consistent with previous years. As a result of COVID-19 lockdown, adoption panels were moved from face-to-face meetings to virtual meetings held using video conferencing software.



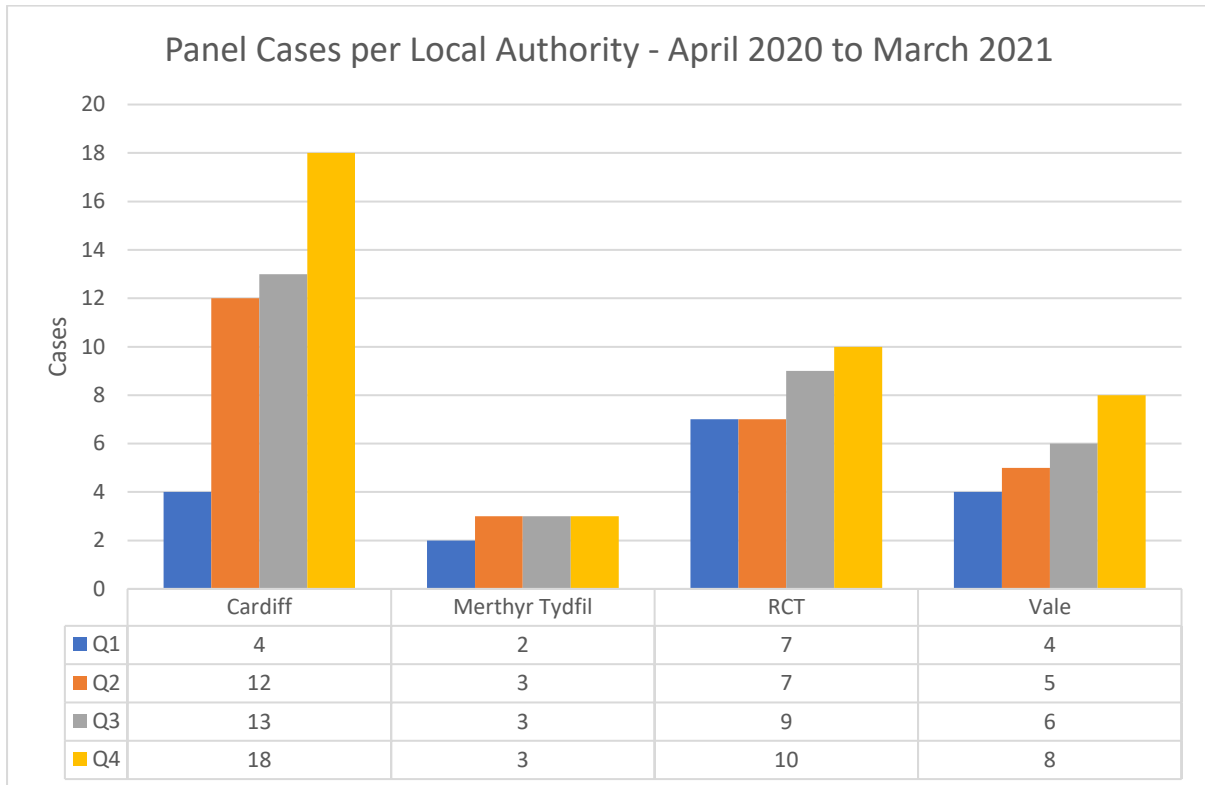
Case Distribution

Cases are evenly distributed across the two panel days.



Cases per Local Authority

Over the course of the year, panel activity increased.





RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

31st January 2021

FOSTERING SERVICE QUALITY OF CARE REPORT 2020/21

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

Author(s): Sheryn Edwards, Service Manager

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Corporate Parenting Board members with the Annual Fostering Service Quality of Care Report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

2.1 Acknowledge the information contained within the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 This report provides information about the annual fostering service (2020-21) as is required.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 This report is compiled as required under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016. Regulation 52 of the Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018 also requires the local authority manager to put suitable arrangements in place to establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality of service.



4.2 The report itself is attached and highlights the achievements and developments of the Fostering Service during 2020-21 and has been delayed in presenting it to Corporate parenting Board due to the demands of responding to the Pandemic.

10 CONCLUSION.

10.1 Progress was made during the year in relation to carer support and consultation, foster panel development and working closely with colleagues and partners to provide quality fostering arrangements for children. Priorities for the year ahead were:

Future Planning and Developments for the next year

- **Ongoing Consultations – Improve reporting systems and enhance understanding of foster carers, young people and parents' experiences**
- **A fostering guide to service to be developed for foster carers and children looked after**
- **Foster Carer Profiles – Available for young people in a child friendly format and the social workers to improve the matching process**
- **Health and Education – Improve how data can be collected specifically for children looked after by RCT carers and contribute to the monitoring process**
- **Pioneer Foster Carers – recruit more pioneers to encourage further development and links with education and provide advice and guidance to foster carers.**
- **Parent and Child Training – Encourage existing foster carers to transfer to this provision**
- **Foster Wales Recruitment campaign - Assess and recruit foster carers locally**
- **Kinship care- Monitor the resources available to respond to demand**
- **Foster Panel- Annual training event to support the Quality Assurance role of the foster panel members**
- **Foster Panel – Annual Appraisal of Panel Members**



- Training – review of impact of Learning and Development Framework
- Develop quality assurance and audit work and to take forward lessons learned and actions.
- Further develop systems and processes for monitoring and reviewing quality of service including the functioning of the Fostering Panel in line with The Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018.

10.2 A report covering the period 2021-22 will be provided in July 2022.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

31st January 2022

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



Quality of Care Report 2020/21

This report is compiled as required under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016. Regulation 52 of the Local Authority Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2018 also requires the local authority manager to put suitable arrangements in place to establish and maintain a system for monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality of service.

Service Background

Rhondda-Cynon-Taf fostering service is based at Ty Trevithick, Abercynon, Mountain Ash and is responsible for the recruitment, retention, preparation, assessment, supervision and support of mainstream and Kinship (family and friend) foster carers. The service is located under the leadership of the Head of Children Looked After Services. The registered CIW manager for the local authority is the service manager, Sheryn Edwards.

The overall strategic and day to day management of the fostering service is the responsibility of the Service Manager for Children Looked who was appointed in November 2015, and three Fostering Team Managers in addition to the Regional Development Manager, funded through the National Fostering Framework. All staff are suitably experienced and qualified to operate a Fostering service.

An effective reporting structure is in place to ensure clear accountability for the service operation and includes regular management meetings, team meetings and performance data feedback to the Corporate parenting Board, Senior Management Team and elected members.

In order to ensure that a quality service is provided the following information is monitored but for the purposes of this report only the relevant data is included:

- The numbers and range of foster carers available
- The turnover of foster carers
- The recruitment strategy and timescales for assessment and approval
- Foster Panels
- Timescales for annual reviews/medicals/DBS checks
- Number of placements and vacancies
- Educational attainment of children placed with foster carers, including the number of children excluded from school

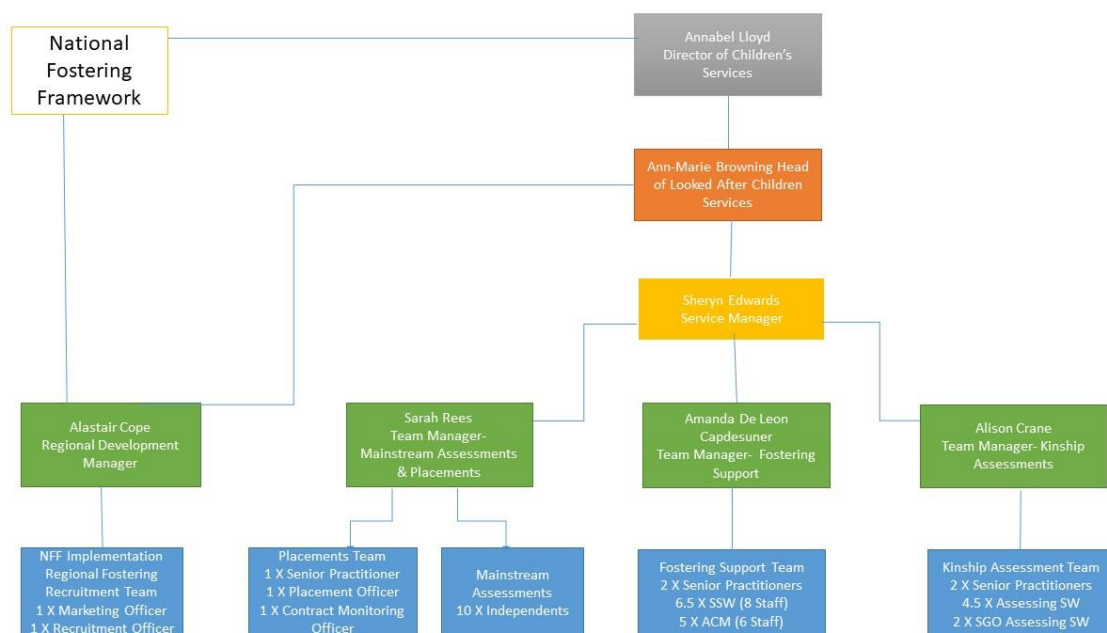
- Training of carers and staff
- Compliance with foster placement agreements
- Accidents, illnesses and injuries
- Complaints
- Allegations against foster carers
- Unauthorised absences from the foster carer home

Staffing

The fostering service are currently configured into four teams. These include the following:

- Regional Recruitment Team- Responsibility for recruitment of mainstream foster carers.
- Placements and Assessments Team - Responsibility for assessment of mainstream carers and placement finding.
- Kinship Assessment Team- Responsibility for initial viabilities and assessment of all kinship carers
- Fostering Support Team- Responsibility for fostering supervision and support for mainstream and kinship foster carers

The full-service structure is below:



All staff are suitably qualified for their roles and all have up to date DBS checks. Social workers are registered with Social Care Wales.

Training is actively encouraged for all team members with a comprehensive annual programme available to all staff. Training is identified via supervision and at each staff member's annual appraisal.

Each of our foster carers are actively encouraged to participate in the available learning and development opportunities. This is raised through supervision and annual review between the carer and supervising social worker and logged onto their personal development record and plan.

The Purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the quality of service provided across the fostering teams and outlines areas for development during the forthcoming year. This will be detailed in the following 4 sections.

1. People feel their voices are heard, they have choice about their care and support and opportunities are made available to them.

What we do well and the evidence for it, summary of arrangement in place and methods used to involve children and young people in their care and support.

Summary of the views received from children who use the service, family members, and other professionals. Summary of how the rights of people who use the service are being met.

The fostering service in RCT ordinarily undertakes consultation events with both mainstream and kinship foster carers three times per year. Unfortunately, face to face sessions have not been possible due to the coronavirus pandemic, nevertheless over this reporting period RCT fostering service has continued to consult with foster carers and children in order to gain their views and experiences to improve the ways in which we provide our services.

During this reporting period, consultation questionnaires were sent via email to ten foster carers that had been identified as being newly approved. The aim was to assist carers to express their feelings and views on the ways in which the service could improve its recruitment and assessment process with a particular focus on:

- The assessment processes
- Attendance at Fostering Panel
- Training
- Post-approval support

Overall, feedback given for the assessment process was positive with carers commenting on understanding the need for such a thorough assessment. Applicants valued forming a positive relationship with the assessor over the assessment period. One carer expressed that she felt it was useful to reflect on her life experiences and consider how these have influenced her self-development. Another expressed that it was reassuring to be informed about the support available when approved as a foster carer.

The majority of Fostering Panels were held remotely via Zoom or Teams due to current covid guidelines. Most of the carers expressed feeling nervous about attending panel however then stated that they were made to feel more comfortable and relaxed by the panel members and valued the assessor supporting them in the panel. The majority felt they were well prepared for what would happen during the panel beforehand by the assessor. One applicant stated that she liked hearing the positive feedback from panel members. Most of the carers expressed that they were happy with the quality and variety

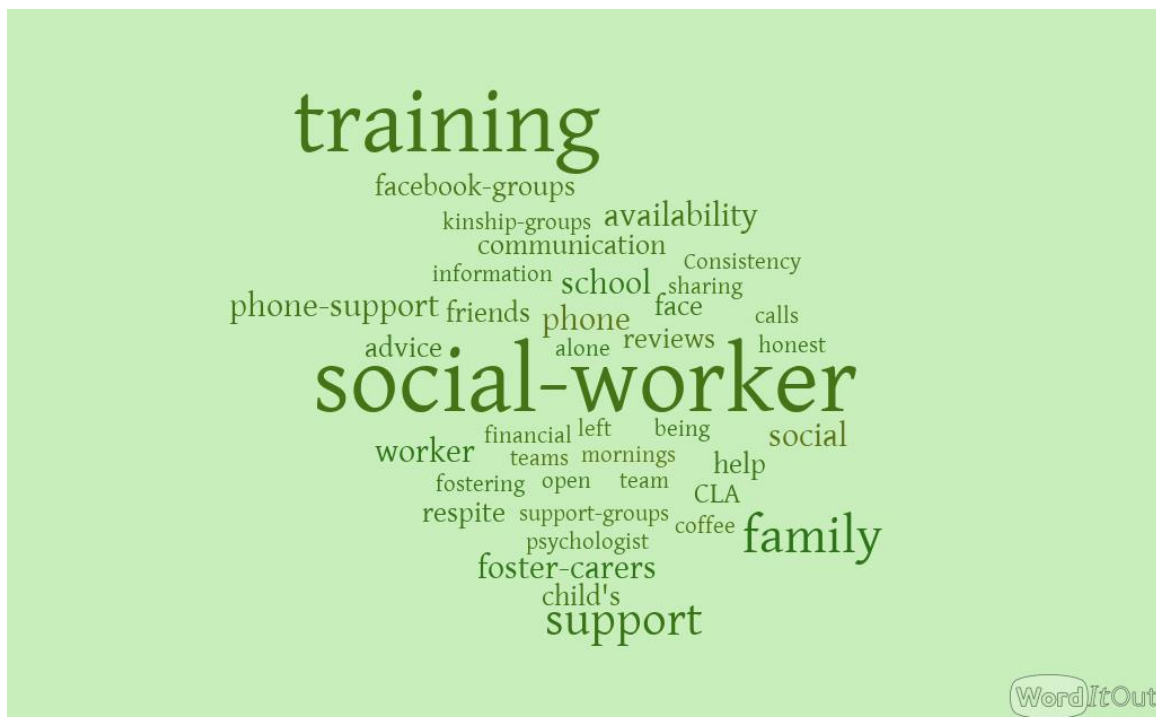
of training being offered and also identified areas they would like more training on going forward.

Positive comments were given by the carers in relation to feeling well supported by their supervising social worker with good communication and that queries were dealt with quickly when they contacted their social workers. One carer commented on there being a need for improvement in co-ordination between fostering and children's services.

Areas for further development of the service identified from the consultation include avoiding duplication in the rare event there is a change of assessor during the assessment process and limiting the number of people sitting on the panel to the absolute minimum for the applicants to feel less anxious about attending. Feedback in relation to training included offering evening courses or recordings of daytime courses for carers to access at a more convenient time. Additionally, offering access to the courses identified as being of an area of interest by the foster carers.

During March 2021, RCT Fostering Service undertook a consultation exercise with connected persons (Kinship) foster carers to find out their thoughts and feelings in relation to the assessment and support provided by the service, in order to identify where improvements could be made.

The carers were asked to comment on the 3 things that you feel work well and support you in your role as a Kinship foster carer? Below is a summary of comments from foster carers with the most common responses in larger/bolder print.



Additionally, carers commented on 3 things that you feel don't work well and the fostering support team and children's services could improve on? Below is a summary of comments from foster carers with the most common responses in larger/bolder print.



On the whole feedback from Connected Persons (Kinship) foster carers was positive. We have been able to ascertain how the service is performing in relation to the assessment, support and ongoing development of Connected Persons (kinship) foster carers and have had strong feedback which we can use to further develop the service. To have had 77 responses is extremely positive and shows the engagement we have with foster carers across the service. A summary of positives and areas for development, as highlighted by respondents can be found below:

Positives	Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough explanation and support from assessing social workers • Support from supervising social workers • Availability of support • Responsiveness of fostering teams • Training opportunities • Panel Experiences • Continuation of services through the pandemic • Facebook Group • Respite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment process often seems rushed • Staff turnover and absence • Timely information sharing • Panel can sometimes be intimidating • Peer support • Specific support groups • Specific preparation training. • Specific post approval training • ICT skills and equipment

Staff consultation is another area we are currently looking to develop across Children's Services. We are in the early stages of looking at ways to gather staff viewpoints on the service and what could improve wellbeing, staff retention and improve outcomes for both staff and the children in our care. A staff wellbeing survey was conducted during the summer of 2020, and a staff wellbeing week was delivered in December 2020. Staff feedback from these events is informing future planning as to the frequency, content and the way in which these events will be held in future, including when they are held to enable front line staff the capacity to attend.

Consultation with staff in the Fostering Service takes place in regular Team Meetings for each service area. Additionally, the Regional Development Manager for the National Fostering Framework will attend team meetings to discuss the ongoing work programme of the National Fostering Framework. During the forthcoming review period there are plans to facilitate a Fostering and Placement Service Consultation Workshop to seek staff views on the current structure of the service, what works well, current challenges and actions needed to further improve the quality of the service.

Children/Young People's Views

Regular consultation with Children Looked After takes place in the form of CLA forums, reviews and direct work sessions. The Blueprint forum meet monthly with care experienced young people. The primary focus of the Blueprint Forum is to provide looked after young people and care leavers in RCT the opportunities to have their voice heard and to promote their lived experiences at a strategic, policy and legislative level both locally and nationally. The forum link and regularly report to the Corporate Parenting Board. The forum is coordinated by Voices from Care on behalf of RCTCBC.

The Fostering Support Team undertake consultation with children/young people as part of the annual review process for foster carers. Supervising social workers in the team use a range of methods to gain children's views on where they live, and who they live with, including one to one consultation sessions, direct work and observation. The views of other household members and the childcare social worker as also sought as part of the annual review process and feedback is provided to the foster carers to inform future planning and address any issues that may arise regarding the quality of care being provided.

To improve the fostering services to children we have undertaken an exercise to redevelop all the foster carer profiles This includes logging information and photographs of foster carers, their households and properties in order to be able to give relevant and up to date information to childcare social workers and children looked after before a child enters placement. All newly approved foster carers will create their own foster care profiles and the fostering support team will assist current carers in this process.

Parent's views

Building strong supportive relationships is key to the work we undertake with foster carers and parents and this is an area we also want to develop in the forthcoming review period to ensure parents views (where appropriate) are gained as part of the annual review process.

The following are three examples directly from the teams of how a parent's views of the foster care provided have impacted positively on outcomes.

- During a CLA review "L (Mum) stated how very happy she was with the care provided to J. Mum also commented on the good relationship she has with J's carers and is very happy with the progress he is making."
- As part of the annual review process for respite carers providing regular support to a connected persons carer, the grandmother made the following comments: *"I feel very blessed that we have the respite carers and the girls in our lives. Their enthusiasm is plain to see. The care they provide M is first class. So warm and welcoming. M looks forward to every visit and I leave her there knowing she is very well cared for"*.
- Further comments from parents from CLA Review: Mum stated regarding the care given to the children, 'They are brilliant with them, you will never find better foster carers than them' Dad stated. 'They are brilliant, I am really grateful'.

We also work with the IROs who review the care and support plans for all children looked after in RCT. The fostering workers attend all the CLA reviews when invited. This works well in not only supporting the foster carers and child but also building good relationships with parents. IRO's can directly pass on the positive views of parents as part of their consultations.

Compliments

All compliments received about the fostering service are registered with the Complaints department centrally. During this reporting period there has been one compliment received noting many positive comments from a kinship carer relating to her SSW that has really helped her, including putting her on a course, giving advice and always being warm and welcoming. Feedback received directly from the teams as above would suggest that further compliments have been received but not formally noted to the relevant department.

What areas do we need to improve or want to develop further?

Consider areas for improvement identified through analysis of engagement, feedback, and monitoring and CIW reports.

The foster carer consultation events are popular and prove to be useful in developing our support services. Face to face consultation has not been possible in this review period however RCT fostering will look to provide a venue, refreshments, and staff to facilitate these events when restrictions allow.

Additionally, developing a more robust system for ensuring that feedback is given to foster carers following consultation events on any actions taken within the service as a direct result of the consultation to ensure foster carers are aware, they are being listened to and are co-productive in improving the quality of the service.

In the next review period, we will establish improved reporting systems that will enhance our understanding of parent and young people's experience of the service which in turn will be used to make improvements.

What specific action do we need to take to make improvements successful and how will this be measured?

Ongoing consultation with foster carers and staff on the NFF regional work programme. Improvements will be measured and reported on at the NFF Regional Strategic Group Meetings.

Facilitating face to face foster carer consultation events in the next review period when Covid restrictions allow. Ensuring feedback and actions taken by the service following previous consultation events is a standard agenda item at the events.

Development of a quarterly newsletter for foster carers that will include updates on changes and improvements in the service. Improvements will be measured by reporting on improved communication in consultation events.

Review of the current Annual Review process for foster carers that incorporates a system for gaining the views of young people and parents on the service to ensure improved reporting on their experience of the service.

Development of written guides which provide information about the service to be made available to children/young people and fosters carers to ensure that those using the service are fully informed of their rights. Improvement will be monitored via the process for recording compliments and complaints and the foster carers' annual review process.

Foster Carer profiles will be available for placement officers as part of the matching process and by social workers as part of the placement process. Improvement to service will be measured as part of the placement stability and permanence processes that report to CLA QA and as part of the foster carer annual review process.

Summary

The rights of children and young people are at the centre of our work in the fostering service. By ensuring children, foster carers, parents and social workers' views are recognised we are better informed about the way in which we provide fostering services for children looked after.

2. People are happy and supported to maintain their ongoing health, development and overall well-being. This includes intellectual, social and behavioural development

What we do well and what is the evidence for it? Include a summary of arrangements in place including methods for collecting views and a summary of views received from people who use the service and professionals.

In order to provide a robust and responsive fostering service, foster carers must be supported to provide high quality of care for children looked after and work in collaboration with parents, social workers, education, health and other professionals involved in the child's care and support plan.

RCT was fortunate to be part of the Fostering Wellbeing programme and our foster carer, staff and young people participated. The fostering wellbeing project was established as a pilot by the Fostering Network, in order to meet 10 key wellbeing goals. Fostering Wellbeing encourages professionals to work together, with a focus on improving wellbeing outcomes. It creates a shared language for multi-agency professionals, a shared framework from which to operate, and contributes to workforce development.

Specific outcomes include:

- Greater recognition that foster carers are a key part of the team alongside teachers and social workers and play an important role as 'first educators'
- Increased engagement with foster carers and social workers through our integrated activities and the development of a shared approach
- Greater knowledge and confidence displayed by the foster carers in advocating for their child and accessing education support services
- Increased in knowledge and confidence levels amongst foster carers and service staff and greater clarity regarding the role they can play in raising educational attainment of looked after children
- Improved understanding of the links between emotional wellbeing and educational attainment
- Introduction of a range of new theories and approaches as part of standard fostering practice across the region
- Increased access for foster carers to peer support, training and information
- Potential benefits in the recruitment and retention of foster carers through the development of peer support networks and enhanced wellbeing
- Additional local resource to support the fostering community through the introduction of Fostering Wellbeing Champions
- A tested and sustainable model.

Pioneers

After the completion of Master Classes training held by Fostering Network in collaboration with Cardiff University, foster carers were invited for an interview if they wanted to be selected to become RCT Fostering Support Services Pioneers. Initially six Pioneers were recruited but due to their own personal circumstances, only four remained in this reporting period. In April 2020, we had 4 Pioneers who had been trained as part of the Fostering Networks Fostering Wellbeing programme who during the initial lockdown focused on supporting the children they are looking after and their own families due to the Covid 19 restrictions. During the summer of 2020, it was agreed we would utilise their skills more

flexibly, whilst honouring the ethos of the fostering wellbeing programme which was around supporting carers with learning and development and improving outcomes for children. Throughout the year the pioneers have undertaken the following.

- Consultation Event with Kinship Carers
- Day support to both kinship and mainstream carers, mainly at weekends to either prevent placement breakdown or promote placement stability.
- Peer support and mentoring of kinship carers and newly approved carers.
- Facilitating virtual peer support and support the carers' Facebook pages

In the forthcoming review period there are plans to recruit more Pioneers to undertake further development work in the fostering service including supporting carers in working with the children in their care to improve their independent living skills for the roll out of the ASDAN qualifications and supporting carers with the ongoing implementation of the Learning and Development Framework (see below for further detail)

Post Approval Learning and Development Framework

RCT Fostering Service is committed to ensuring all our accommodation supports the personal achievement and wellbeing of the children in our care by our continued commitment to the post approval learning and development framework for foster carers. The framework was developed as part of the National Fostering Framework and was launched to social workers, foster carers, panel members, training leads and team managers during a joint regional launch with Merthyr Tydfil CBC and Bridgend CBC in November 2019. The learning and development framework aims to:

- Provide a consistent approach to post-approval learning and development for foster carers in Wales
- Provide guidance on how the Learning and Development Framework and the Social Care Wales' All Wales Induction Framework for Health and Social Care Workers fit together
- Create a mechanism for collating and reviewing of the learning and development achievements of foster carers as well as the identification of future needs
- Create a clear pathway for foster carers to map their own professional development
- Provide a resource for supervising social workers to discuss with foster carers their learning and development needs
- Promote a range of learning and development opportunities
- Place an expectation upon foster carers to take greater ownership of their own learning and development
- It creates clear and transparent standards to strive to achieve

RCT Fostering Service has actively signed up to ensuring this new framework is effectively rolled out and is committed to every foster carer using the new learning and development plan as standard by including this as part of their supervision and annual review paperwork. It is anticipated that this will improve knowledge within each fostering household and therefore outcomes for children and young people in our care. A review of the implementation of the framework and its impact will be undertaken in the next review period.

Health

All children and young people placed with foster carers should be registered with a GP, dentist and optician local and/or accessible to the foster placement. Registration of children with GP, health and optician is monitored through Foster Carer Supervision, contact from the CLA nurse and through the statutory CLA review process.

RCT foster carers receive training on meeting the health needs of children and young people in foster care. Foster carers also receive training on first aid for children. There continues to be links with the Cwm Taf Specialist Children Looked After Nursing team who are available to discuss health concerns and offer advice to foster carers. Health promotion is also discussed e.g. smoking, healthy eating, drugs, safety and safer sex. Issues are discussed as a part of the supervising social workers four weekly visits to foster carers and recorded in the supervision records. Any medication prescribed to children is recorded by the foster carer and provided to the supervising social worker and the child's allocated social worker.

The issue of children having access to a dentist and being registered with a GP are addressed as part of the CLA review process and escalated as part of the IRO process on a case-by-case basis. This process includes the IRO manager, the team manager and senior managers if required.

Education, employment and leisure activities

Foster cares are fully aware of RCT's commitment to promote the leisure activities of children placed with them. All fostering households in RCT have access to a leisure pass enabling to access free leisure activities within the borough when restrictions have allowed this during this review period. This includes foster children, foster parents and other children within the household. The Local Authority have several healthy living initiatives that take place within the Borough and these are promoted to foster carers through various communication channels.

The Fostering service has close working relationships with the CLA education team who work collaboratively with foster carers to achieve best outcomes for children looked after. This has been strengthened by participating in the fostering wellbeing programme.

The senior education psychologist provided the data with regards to school exclusions for this reporting period.

Table 1 Incidents of Fixed Term (FT) and permanent exclusions in the academic year 2020/21 involving RCT Children who are Looked After.

The data shows that RCT CLA pupils (approximately 1.5 % of the RCT school population) received a higher percentage of fixed term exclusions than non CLA students. As previously reported this data should be viewed in the context of the disproportionately high numbers of pupils with severe and persistent special educational needs, including social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

Exclusions for school population - Academic year 2020 - 21

Number of students	CLA	Non CLA

Fixed term	26	847
Percentage of students who received a FT exclusion from cohort group.	7.1 % of CLA pupils	2.4 % of Non CLA pupils
Perm	1	9

As at the 31st March 2021 there were 455 children of compulsory school age who were looked after at 31/03/2021. During this review period, 38 children had a school move that wasn't transitional between April 2020 to March 2021. Some of the reasons for these school moves included children moving care address and the school not meeting the child's needs. We must note that this figure relates to all children looked after and is not specific to children in RCT Local Authority Foster Care. This is a Welsh government indicator which is reported on Quarterly and the target for 2019/20 was 12%. Performance has improved since Quarter 3 2020/21 and we achieved 8.4% at year end.

Attendance Figures for Children who are Looked After (CLA)

Table 2 highlights that the attendance levels of children and young people who are looked after and compares to the attendance of the general population of children in schools. This data shows that CLA attendance is similar and better in certain school types when compared with non CLA pupils.

Table 2: Attendance Levels of statutory school aged children between 02/09/2020 and 20/07/2021 who are Looked compared with Non CLA

Overall attendance in RCT schools	
CLA pupils	Non CLA pupils
89.9%	87%
Primary school attendance	
93.1%	91.1%
Secondary school attendance	
86.6%	85.4%

In response to the disrupted educational experience due to COVID -19, PDG LAC money has provided an offer of online tuition in Maths or English for all Key Stage 4 pupils taking exams.

It began in October 2020 and will continue until courses are completed this year.

Table 3: Pupils who have engaged with tuition in Years 10 and 11 in 20 -21

Year group	No of pupils participating
10	23 out of 31 eligible pupils
11	16 out of 25 eligible pupils

We have evaluated this initiative and currently arranging tuition for year 10 and 11 CLA pupils in mainstream to start an hour tuition per week in October and for Year 6 to start in January 2022.

The CLA Education Team promotes and encourages schools across RCT to achieve the CLA Friendly Schools Quality Mark. To date 35 schools have been successful in achieving the quality mark with 14 schools attaining gold and 21 schools attaining platinum awards. 10 schools completed the quality mark in 2021. There will continue to be a focus on the roll out of our CLA friendly school process focusing on the 44 key indicators that will support pupils to engage with education. The related training provides a whole school approach that will support the understanding of the needs of children who are looked after and help shape interventions that promote their engagement.

Links between the CLA Education Team and the Fostering Pioneers will continue to be developed over the next 12 months and the team are supporting their journey to develop stronger links with schools. All Fostering Pioneers have attended the CLA Friendly Schools Level 1/CLA Designated Person training delivered by the CLA Education Coordinator.

Employment and Training for CLA

One of the key areas of activity in Wales for Welsh Government is to support improving outcomes for children and young people including Supporting Care experienced people to achieve successful futures and independent living.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales advocates that Local Authorities, as Corporate Parents for the children in their care, should offer work and training places to Care experienced young people as any other parent would do within their own family.

RCTCBC offer two programmes dedicated to supporting Children Looked After into further employment, education and training: Step in The Right Direction and Care2Work. Both programmes sit within The Employment, Education and Training Team and in line with its Corporate duty, seeks to ensure that Care experienced Young People and Young People with Care and Support needs are provided with the right practical and emotional support so that they are able to access opportunities in Education, Employment and Training that meets their individual needs and wishes.

We strongly believe that every Care experienced Young Person receiving support via the Local Authority deserves the same and worthwhile opportunities afforded to their peers and non-care experienced young people within their Community. The team are also committed to enhancing the aspirations and ambitions of Care experienced young people to enable them to recognise their self-worth and individual potential in terms of Employment, Education and Training. The ultimate objective being to close the gap

between Care experienced young people and their non-care experienced peers in terms of accessing but also sustaining positive and worthwhile Employment, Education and Training experiences within their community.

Step in The Right Direction programme is a two-year paid traineeship for young people aged 16-25 living in and leaving care in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Trainees are given work opportunities within a variety of Council departments and are managed by the Traineeship Coordinator, supported by an allocated 16+ Worker and overseen day to day by a Placement Manager. These young people have all the support needed to gain the work experience and training required to help them gain full time employment at the end of the programme.

Outcomes:

1st Apr 2020 – 31st March 2021

Trainees recruited – 5

Placements included:

- Older People Residential
- Playground
- Parks
- ICT

Care2Work was introduced in 2010 and offers Care experienced young people aged 16-25 years who are NEET opportunities that include one to one Careers Advice and guidance including mentoring and long-term support whether this be through individual sessions, employability courses, Sector specific training and work experience placements.

Outcomes:

1st Apr 2020 – 31st March 2021

Referrals – 52

Further Education and Training Outcomes – 18

Employment Outcomes – 9

Remain engaged with C2W - 15

In order to promote a partnership approach with the Fostering Teams, Care2work attend Fostering team meetings to raise the profile of Step in the Right Direction and Care2work and meet new members of the Fostering teams.

Specific Support for Connected Persons (Kinship Carers)

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.

At the end of this reporting period, RCT have 235 children placed with Relative Carers. This figure includes approved and non-approved kinship carers. The number has increased by 4 when compared to the same time last year. 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.

The Fostering Service has been working closely with a local project provided by Kinship Cymru, the project is called Kinship Connected and provides support to kinship carers regardless of their legal order. The model of support is designed on an asset-based approach which views the skills, knowledge and resources available in individuals and communities as a means of finding solutions to the issues people face. Kinship Connected works with the concept of social action: building resilience through peer-to-peer volunteering led by kinship carers.

The support provided by the Kinship Connected Programme in RCT includes the following:

One to one support from project worker:

- Advocacy support in meetings
- Emotional support
- Supporting the carers to attend a peer support group
- Liaising with local organisations that might be able to offer specialised support and training
- Liaising with schools or other organisations
- Supporting kinship carers with the behaviour of the child/children in their care

Peer Support:

- Virtual Support Groups (monthly)
- Someone Like Me – a telephone peer support service run by trained volunteers who are or have been kinship carers themselves
- Facebook group and WhatsApp group

Additionally, support is given to Kinship Carers for accessing grants from partner grant giving bodies and there is also an Independent Advice Service run by a specialist bi-lingual advisor for Wales. Advice can be accessed by kinship carers and professionals on issues such as, welfare benefits, housing, employment, legal options etc.

The pilot commenced in February 2021, and referral routes and awareness raising has been achieved. The impact of the project will be reviewed during the forthcoming review period.

Foster Carer Training

All foster carers (including connected person carers) are able to access the Local Authority training programme specifically tailored for them and have support to access training from a dedicated training officer. During the global pandemic from March 2020 until Sept 2020, some of our foster carers continued their learning with our E-learning

KCA suite which holds over 60 different courses relevant to fostering. Then in September 2020 we delivered a blended approach of face to face and online (via zoom) learning up until lockdown in December 2020. Then in January 2021 we moved all the courses online via zoom.

The following courses were available to our foster carers from September 2020- April 2021

Life Journey Work	Developing a secure base and promoting attachment.	Moving and Handling
Child Development	Supporting children to stay safe online (Digital safeguarding).	Heart Start (First Aid)
Child Protection and Safer Caring	Supporting education and development.	Basic I.T Skills
ELSA Sessions	Raising awareness of domestic abuse and the effects on children and young people.	Reduction of suicide and self-harm.
Advocacy and children's rights.	Bereavement and loss.	Fire awareness.
Substance misuse.	Communication skills.	
Foetal Alcohol awareness.	Preparation for Adoption.	Therapeutic parenting.

In addition, bespoke training was delivered by trainers who were previously children looked after following feedback from carers asking for more real life experiences.

During the initial lockdown of the global pandemic, the Skills to Foster preparatory training was cancelled as assessments were delayed until the service development a robust system for the assessments to continue with some virtual sessions. The training was then reinstated following guidance from the fostering network around virtual delivery and the first virtual Skills to Foster training was facilitated in July 2020 and it has been running virtually ever since every 6 weeks or so since this time.

What areas do we need to improve or want to develop further? Consider areas for improvement identified through analysis of feedback, monitoring, CIW, any identified non-compliance and outstanding actions.

The fostering service will continue to work in partnership with the specialist CLA colleagues in education and health in order to ensure that the care and support plans in place can be implemented in a timely manner.

Further recruitment of Pioneers will be undertaken to encourage their development and links with education and promote their work with current foster cares.

The data from education and health to be presented to the Children Looked After Quality Assurance Group chaired by the Service Director. This will directly relate to the children looked after in foster care and contribute to the monitoring and reviewing process.

What specific action do we need to take to make the improvements/developments successful and how will this be measured? Include an action plan setting out the specific outcome-focussed actions needed to improve, timescales, lead officer and performance indicators to measure improvement.

Health and education specialists to attend CLAQA to report on children looked after, specifically, children excluded and GCSE attainments along with provision of annual health assessments, dental appointments and registration with GP.

Review of the current Annual Review to process to incorporate consultation with health and education professionals involved in progressing the child's care and support plan.

Review of the Kinship Connected pilot project.

Summary

RCT fostering services will continue to work closely with specialist agencies for children looked after to ensure that fostering can be part of good practice, research and developments.

3. People feel safe and protected from abuse and neglect

What we do well and the evidence for it? Consider a summary of arrangements in place, views of the people who use the service, number of referrals etc.

The following sections relate to the performance data and activity of the fostering team with regards support and kinship assessment.

1. Compliance in relation to each child

All children placed with RCT Foster carers are placed by the Child Care social worker with the supervising social worker or the Fostering team's duty worker, thus ensuring that all relevant information required to enable the carer to offer suitable care is provided to the foster carer. Where the placement is made in an emergency the supervising social worker or the fostering duty worker will follow up during the next working day. At the point of placement, the Placement Agreement is completed and signed, if the placement is an emergency and the full documentation is unavailable, this will be provided to the carers the next working day.

2. All accidents, injuries and illnesses of children placed with foster parents

All accidents and injuries are reported by the carers to their supervising social worker or duty worker as soon as possible following the incident, the allocated supervising social worker then takes responsibility for completing a report that is then passed to the Team Manager for any further action that may be required. This information is electronically stored on the child's file, the foster carer's file and the original is stored by the Manager. If the notification is significant, the Service Manager will be informed who will update the Head of Children's Services.

3. Complaints in relation to children placed with foster carers and their outcomes.

All complaints received are registered with the Complaints department centrally. The designated Complaints Officer co-ordinates the response to all formal complaints made in relation to children placed with foster carers, and the outcomes of these complaints are provided within quarterly and annual reports to the Senior Management Team and the Corporate Parenting Board. Robust complaints procedures are in place and all staff and carers are made aware of the complaints process on becoming a foster carer or an employee of RCT CBC.

Information is provided to foster carers on how to complain via the fostering policies. Children receive information on how to complain via their allocated social worker and a referral is made to the advocacy service with the child/young person's consent. All children receive an active offer of advocacy which is commissioned from Tros Gynnal. Activity is reported to Senior Managers and Corporate Parenting Board. The annual review process for foster carers considers any complaints made and their outcomes and where necessary the annual review is brought forward and referred to Foster Panel for consideration.

During 2020/21 there were 0 formal complaints and 1 contact recorded for the fostering service in RCT. There were no formal or serious complaints recorded.

4. Any allegations or suspicions of abuse in respect of children placed with foster parents and the outcome of any investigations

Any allegations made against a foster carer by children placed, children known to the carer or any member of the foster carer's household is referred to the safeguarding

manager and child protection procedures are followed. All professional abuse strategy meetings are chaired by the safeguarding manager in the area in which the carer resides. An initial assessment is completed by the child's social worker and the meeting makes the decision about whether a Section 47 investigation should be carried out. CIW are informed of any allegations. All children looked after receive an active offer to the advocacy service and carers are offered independent Social Work support via The Fostering Network. Written advice and guidance are given to any carer subject of an investigation. The process is outlined in the Foster Carers handbook.

During the current year there have been the following matters or concern that have required professional strategy meetings: -

Total Number	Substantiated	Unsubstantiated	Ongoing
6	3	1	2

Of the six allegations made, 4 related to physical abuse, 1 related to historical sexual abuse and 1 related to emotional abuse. Two investigations are currently ongoing. One carer has been de-registered at fostering panel and one carer resigned however the professional concerns and fostering panel processes continued.

5. Staff Recruitment records and conduct of required checks for new workers.

Within RCT CBC, the responsibility for completing checks on newly appointed staff lies with the Human Resources department. Managers within the fostering service are informed of any issues arising for consideration in relation to DBS checks and references. All new staff working within RCT's Fostering Service are required to have:

- an up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service Check (renewed every 3 years)
- employment history that details the reason for any gaps in employment
- references from previous employers
- evidence of eligibility to work in the UK
- evidence of qualifications
- registration with Social Care Wales (where required)
- satisfactory Health assessment

During the year we had 2 staff members who left the service for promotion. We have inducted two new starters to the service including a new Team Manager for the Fostering Support Service. As at 31.3.21 the service had 2.5 vacancies.

6. Any unauthorised absences from the foster home of a child accommodated there

The expectations of foster carers when a child goes missing from a foster home is that they inform children's services and if the absence occurs out of hours, the Emergency Duty Team (EDT). When a child/young person is absent from a foster placement without authority, the matter is reported to the police and shared with the relevant childcare social worker. If the Child is still absent from placement at the end of the working day an alert is sent to EDT to follow-up out of hours.

Procedures for Foster Carers when a child does not return to placement at the expected time, are clearly explained in the foster carer's handbook. Foster carers are aware of the All Wales Missing Persons protocol for managing children who go missing and follow this process. If a child has a history of absconding or going missing, this will be fully addressed

at the time of the Initial Placement Meeting and a risk assessment completed. Foster Carers are expected to keep a record of all absences from placement.

RCT Children's Services have a joint protocol with the Police 'children missing from care' and each incident is responded to in accordance with this protocol. Information is shared with police and social services to reduce the risk of reported episodes and to gather intelligence in respect to exploitation. When a child goes missing repeatedly a Risk Management meeting may be arranged, which foster carers should attend. Every unauthorised absence triggers a notification to the Team Manager and is updated accordingly. Where the missing episodes involves the child being missing overnight or where the risks are high the Service Manager is alerted and is responsible for informing and updating the Head of Service.

Between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021, the number of children missing from placement episodes was 3 episodes relating to 3 children. We must note that this figure relates to all children looked after and is not specific to children in Local Authority Foster Care.

7. Use of any measures of control, restraint or discipline in respect of children accommodated in a foster home

Foster carers are provided with behaviour management guidance through the foster carer handbook and through the Skills to Foster preparation training to prevent any inappropriate use of discipline. Issues with managing the behaviour of children in foster placements is discussed during supervision visits and recorded within the supervision template. Further training is being developed to response to carers telling the Fostering Service that they need to develop their skills in managing behaviour that poses challenge. This need has also been identified through analysis of placement breakdowns and for when placement matching has proven difficult.

All foster carers sign a foster carer agreement not to use any form of corporal punishment with children. Supervising social workers continually support foster carers on appropriate methods of behaviour management.

8. Medication, Medical treatment and First Aid administered to any child placed with foster parents

All foster carers are provided with advice and guidance within the Foster Carer Handbook and through pre-approval training regarding first aid and the safe storage and provision of medication. Carers complete a record of any medication given to children placed. Any regular medication required and administered to a child placed should be contained within their care and support plan in line with their specific health needs and recorded on the minutes from the initial placement meeting. If a child placed requires emergency treatment foster carers are aware that they should notify children's services or EDT as soon as possible, the relevant Service Manager can then be contacted to provide consent. Wherever possible, birth parents are consulted. All foster carers receive First Aid training which is renewed on a regular basis to ensure awareness of first aid processes.

9. Where applicable, the standard of any education provision provided by the fostering service.

RCT Fostering Service do not provide formal education provision, however, we work closely with RCT Education services to ensure all children are receiving appropriate education as outlined in their care and support plans.

10. Records of Assessments

All records of assessment completed by the Fostering service are stored securely within WCCIS electronic data base. These can be shared with the subject after they have been quality assured by the Team Manager. All assessments are shared with the applicants prior to presentation to the foster panel.

11. Records of Fostering Panel meetings

The panel consists of:

- Chair - Independent previously registered Social Worker and Senior Manager,
- Vice Chair – Retired Social Worker/Teacher
- Cabinet member for Children’s Services
- Foster Carer
- Independent Social Worker
- 2 Experienced and qualified social workers
- Community Medical Advisor (available for advice),
- Legal Advisor (available for advice)
- Panel Advisor – Team Manager, Fostering/ Kinship/Assessments and Placements
- Agency Decision Maker – Director of Children’s Services.

In this review period, swift arrangements were made for the fostering panel to continue to operate as a virtual panel during the global pandemic resulting in their being only one less panel held than the previous review period. Attendance from members of the panel is very strong which has enabled the panel to be quorate and proceed when scheduled. One of the benefits of a virtual panel felt by panel members was the increase in attendances from the child’s social worker, as they didn’t have to travel to panel.

Annual training was arranged for panel members who attended training on the quality assurance role of the fostering panel and its functions.

In the year 2020-2021 the foster panel has met and made recommendations on:

April 2020-March 2021

Number of Panels	26
Approvals-mainstream carers	9
Immediate Placements (connected persons under Section 76 SSWBA (W) 2014)	15 (Reg 26 placements)
Annual foster carer reviews	57
Change of approval status	6

Terminations of approval-mainstream	15
Connected persons/ Kinship approvals	39
Terminations of approved kinship carers	24

12. Duty rosters of persons working for the fostering agency, as arranged and worked

The staff of the Fostering Service work flexi arrangements in line with the HR policies of RCT CBC. This includes agile working, which was rolled out in September 2018. Many staff do not have a permanent desk but utilise hot desks within Ty Trevithick and are able to operate out of other Council premises as well as other locations through a laptop and mobile phone which is provided to them. During the global pandemic, staff have predominately worked from home and/or hybrid models of working. The hours worked and any annual leave or sickness are monitored by the line manager of each staff member through an internal flexi spreadsheet and the Vision System, which is able to log any hours worked/ missed.

A duty officer is available to offer support and advice between office hours with support available to carers out of hours through the Emergency Duty Team.

13. Minutes of staff meetings

All minutes of staff minutes are securely stored electronically and are easily available to the staff team and managers. Staff meetings occur weekly to offer the team chance to 'catch up' with:

- changes in placements
- vacancies and potential matching considerations
- placements stability concerns
- carers that are likely to need additional support in the coming week

Monthly the team meet to provide opportunity to have updates on changes in legislation, research, regional and local services.

There are Staff Briefings at intervals through the year which are led by the Head of Service and allow staff to receive updates and raise any questions or challenges. The Fostering Service is represented at these briefings. The Head of Service and Director offer an open-door policy and will always respond to invitations to attend team meetings.

What areas do we need to improve or want to develop further? Consider areas for improvement identified through analysis of feedback, monitoring, CIW and any identified non-compliance and outstanding actions

The Fostering Teams will continue to provide support to foster panel members by ensuring relevant training takes place on at least an annual basis for all members including, chair, vice chair and panel advisers.

Annual appraisals with fostering panel members need to be undertaken in a timelier manner.

A dedicated Business Support service will be available to ensure that panel functions are timely, and the collecting of data is robust.

Further develop systems and processes for monitoring and reviewing quality of service including the functioning of the Fostering Panel in line with The Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018.

What specific action do we need to take to make the improvements/developments successful and how will this be measured? Include an action plan setting out the specific outcome-focussed actions needed to improve, timescales identified, lead officer and the performance indicators to measure improvement.

Support the fostering panel and provide a relevant training event for panel members in this review period.

Undertake annual appraisals with foster panel members in this review period to inform future planning.

The service needs to further develop its quality assurance and audit work and to take forward lessons learned and actions.

Further develop systems and processes for monitoring and reviewing quality of service including the functioning of the Fostering Panel in line with The Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018.

Summary

This is a large and busy fostering service that is part of the wider children's services department. The Service Delivery Plan outlines overall outcomes, so they are clear with actions, timescales and lead officers, and is monitored by the HOS.

4. People live in accommodation that best supports their well-being and achievement of their personal outcomes.

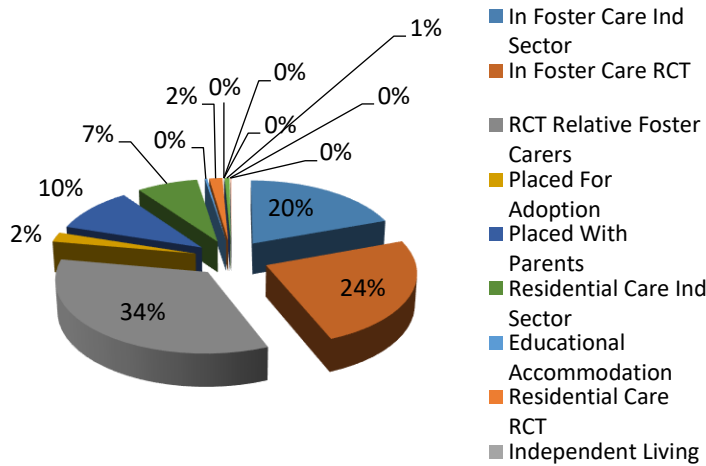
What we do well and the evidence for it? Consider a summary of arrangements in place including access to the local community; how privacy, dignity and confidentiality is maintained, and a summary of views obtained on any changes to the environment

The following headings summarise the arrangements in place to ensure fostering accommodation for children looked after meets their identified needs and outcomes in the local community.

The number of children who need to be looked after by RCT has been decreasing gradually since January 2021 and there currently 693 children looked after which is 23 less children looked after than at the same period last year.

Placements:

Children Looked after by placement type as at 15/04/2021



Based on current children looked after numbers, we have the most children placed with Relative Carers (34%). This figure includes approved and non-approved kinship carers. The number has increased by 4 when compared to the same time last year.

In House Foster Care placements continue to be higher than Independent Sector Foster Care. The number of Independent Foster Care placements has decreased by 11% when compared to last year.

The number of children placed in external residential placements has decreased by 1 when compared to last year. 51 placements in Apr 21 compared to 52 in Apr 20.

The number of Mother and Baby placements has decreased from 8 to 4 over the last 12 months.

The number of children placed with parents has decreased by 1 when compared to last year. 70 placements in Apr 21 compared to 71 in Apr 20.

Placement Stability:

33 children who were looked after in 2020/21 experienced 3 or more changes of placement. Performance has improved since Quarter 3 2020/21 and we achieved 4.8% at year end. Children move placement for a variety of different reasons & some of the 3rd placements will relate to children's moves to a permanent long-term placement. Performance can also be affected by the continued high number of children looked after which can put pressure on placement availability.

Stability of children in placement remains a priority for RCT as is maintaining children within the Rhondda Cynon Taff Local Authority area. In the forthcoming review period it is anticipated that performance in this area will be further support by the revision of the Placement Stability Policy (formally Disruptions Policy)

Foster Carer Profile:

Approvals and Terminations of Approval	Mainstream Foster Care		Connected Persons Foster Care	
	Households	Placements	Households	Placements
Number as at 1st April 2020	104	177	133	235
Number of approvals/changes between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021	9	15	44	76
Number that left the service between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021	15	26	31	47
Number of fostering households/placements as at 31st March 2021	98	166	146	264

There have been 15 mainstream foster carers who had their approvals terminated between April 2020 and March 2021. The highest number of approvals that ended relate to carers retiring. There was one resignation relating to fostering not meeting expectations that relates to a carers that had a placement breakdown and resigned as a result. There was also one resignation relating to concerns, complaints and allegations relating to a carer who was not meeting fostering competencies.

There have been 31 kinship foster carers de-registered between April 2020 and March 2021. The highest number of approvals that ended relate to placements that are no longer required following assessment followed by the children returning home to parents and 6 carers converting to being SGO Carers

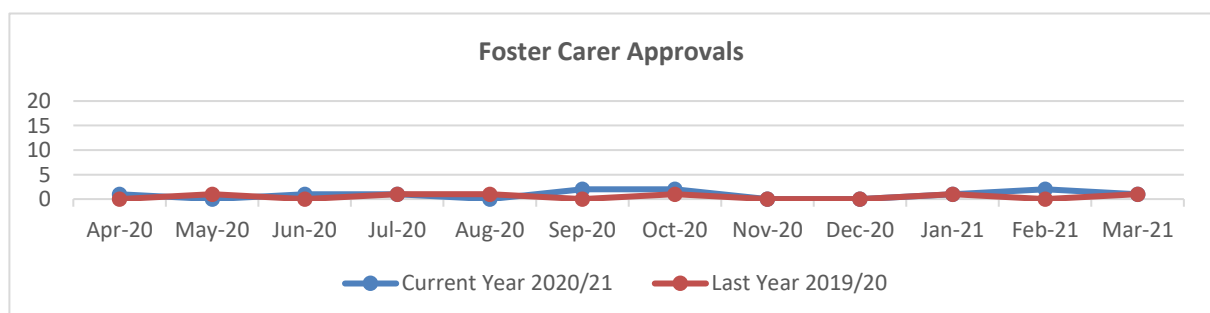
Marketing and Recruitment:

From 1st April 2019, we have been working in collaboration with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to operate a Regional Front Door for fostering recruitment. The team consists of a Regional Development Manager, Regional Recruitment Officer and Regional Communications and Marketing Officer. The Regional Front door team work closely with the fostering service managers in each local authority to ensure a seamless approach to the recruitment and retention of foster carers. In RCT the service is overseen by the Head of Service Children Looked After and performance of the regional service is monitored by the regional management board consisting of Head of Children Services in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and Director of Children's Services Rhondda-Cynon-Taff County Borough Council.

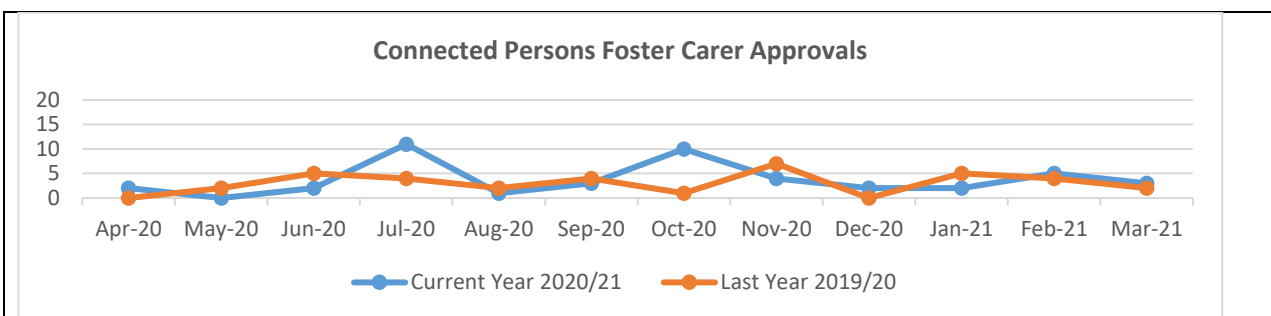
The recruitment team facilitates all enquiries, recruitment calls, marketing activity and initial visits up to the point of assessment for both RCT and Merthyr. Once at the point of assessment each Local Authority has a dedicated team manager who allocates assessments. In RCT the Team Manager is responsible for allocation of assessments to independent social workers.

In the last two financial years, an inbound approach was taken to marketing which better suited our budgets and needs. This means that instead of spending money to reach a large number of people, we focused instead on serving relevant content to a smaller pool of those more likely to be ready to consider being foster carers.

At the heart of our inbound marketing strategy was content; content developed specifically for those people who are interested in fostering and at one of the relevant stages in their decision-making process. The two main distribution channels for our content this year have been the Fostering RCT Facebook page and our regional website – fostercwmtaf.co.uk.



There were 11 newly approved mainstream foster carers in this review period, an increase of 5 carer households compared to the previous review period.



There were 45 Kinship Carer approvals in this review period, an increase of 9 carer households compared to the previous review period.

Future Developments

This year we are looking to build on our success with inbound marketing, whilst knowing that we should get a boost to our reach to new people when the Foster Wales national brand launches later this year. We have structured a marketing plan which sees maintenance of inbound activity in Q1 and Q2 with key campaign times such as Foster Care Fortnight and 'Empty Nesters' highlighted. This will feed into the national brand launch when we will dial down our inbound marketing in Q3 when we hope our key retention events will happen. We shall then hope to return in Q4 to capitalise on the increased awareness of Local Authority Fostering and round off what we hope will be a successful year.

RCT fostering service has a supportive and flexible foster care provision which ranges from 0 to 18 years with experienced foster carers who have short- and long-term placement availability and newly approved carers who are fully supported in their fostering journey. There are currently foster carers who offer short break provisions and carers who specialise in providing baby care and others who provide a home to the teenagers.

What areas do we need to improve or want to develop further? Consider areas for improvement identified through analysis of feedback, monitoring, CIW and any identified non-compliance and outstanding actions

In terms of service need, we have an identified gap in our mainstream foster carer resources is in respect of foster carers who are prepared to foster older, more complex children or larger sibling groups and parent and child placements. Recruitment and successful retention of such carers would be positive for RCT as it would reduce our dependence on potential future placements with Independent Fostering Agencies which are often high cost and situated outside of RCT.

The changes in the Public Law Outline continues to show a significant increase in the number of Immediate Placements under Section 76 (SSWB (Wales) Act 2014) with family or friends and therefore an increase in requests for unified /connected person's assessments to be completed. While these are undeniably positive arrangements for children and young people it does impact staffing pressures within the service, particularly around timescales and assessment capacity.

Whilst the establishment of a kinship assessment team has gone a long way to relieving some of the staff pressure, the rise in Kinship care continues to impact on the resources available in the support team.

What specific action do we need to take to make the improvements/developments successful and how will this be measured? Include an action plan setting out the specific outcome-focussed actions needed to improve, timescales identified, lead officer and the performance indicators to measure improvement.

To improve our foster care provision an overall recruitment campaign is in place that addresses the specific needs including training.

A working group will be established to address in house at the parent and child provision.

A HOS led service Fostering Delivery plan is in place.

Summary

RCT Childrens Services are working continually to ensure a robust, fit for purpose and child-centred Fostering Service exists. The Statement of Purpose and the Fostering Service Delivery Plan sets out our core goals and our steps to achieve them.

This Quality-of-Care report will assist in planning for the future and delivering quality care to children looked after.

The following bullet points are the goals to implemented over the coming year.

Future Planning and Developments

- **Consultations – Improve reporting systems and enhance understanding of foster carers, young people and parents’ experiences**
- **A guide to service to be developed for foster carers and children looked after**
- **Foster Carer Profiles – Available for young people in a child friendly format and the social workers to improve the matching process**
- **Health and Education – Improve how data can be collected specifically for children looked after by RCT carers and contribute to the monitoring process**
- **Pioneer Foster Carers – recruit more pioneers to encourage further development and links with education and provide advice and guidance to foster carers.**
- **Parent and Child Training – Encourage existing foster carers to transfer to this provision**
- **Foster Wales Recruitment campaign - Assess and recruit foster carers locally**

- **Kinship care- Monitor the resources available to respond to demand**
- **Foster Panel- Annual training event to support the Quality Assurance role of the foster panel members**
- **Foster Panel – Annual Appraisal of Panel Members**
- **Training – review of impact of Learning and Development Framework**
- **The service needs to further develop its quality assurance and audit work and to take forward lessons learned and actions.**
- **Further develop systems and processes for monitoring and reviewing quality of service including the functioning of the Fostering Panel in line with The Fostering Panels (Establishment and Functions) (Wales) Regulations 2018.**

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

31st JANUARY 2022

CWM TAF REGIONAL FRONT DOOR

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

Author(s): Alistair Cope, Regional Development Manager- Fostering Services

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Corporate Parenting Board Members with the Cwm Taf Regional Front Door Report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Acknowledge the information contained within the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 This is an information report.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 This is an information report.

5. CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 This is an information report.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO ECONOMIC DUTY

6.1 This is an information report.

7. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

7.1 This is an information report.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

8.1 There are no direct financial implications aligned to this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

9.1 The legal requirements for children and young people are set down within the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

10. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

11. CONCLUSION

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

31st JANUARY 2022

REPORT OF DIRECTOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Background Papers

Item:

Officer to contact: Alistair Cope

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Cwm Taf Regional Front Door
RCT Corporate Parenting Board Report
05/01/2022

Introduction

The Regional front door for Fostering recruitment was established in April 2019 as a joint collaboration between Merthyr and RCT to address some of the concerns about the numbers of foster carers recruited, the speediness of responses and the quality of recruitment work being undertaken. The team consists of a Regional Development Manager leading on the project, a Regional Marketing Officer and a Regional recruitment Officer.

In March 2021 it was agreed that Bridgend CBC would join the regional collaboration and become part of the new regional fostering recruitment service and this came into operation on the 1st April 2021.

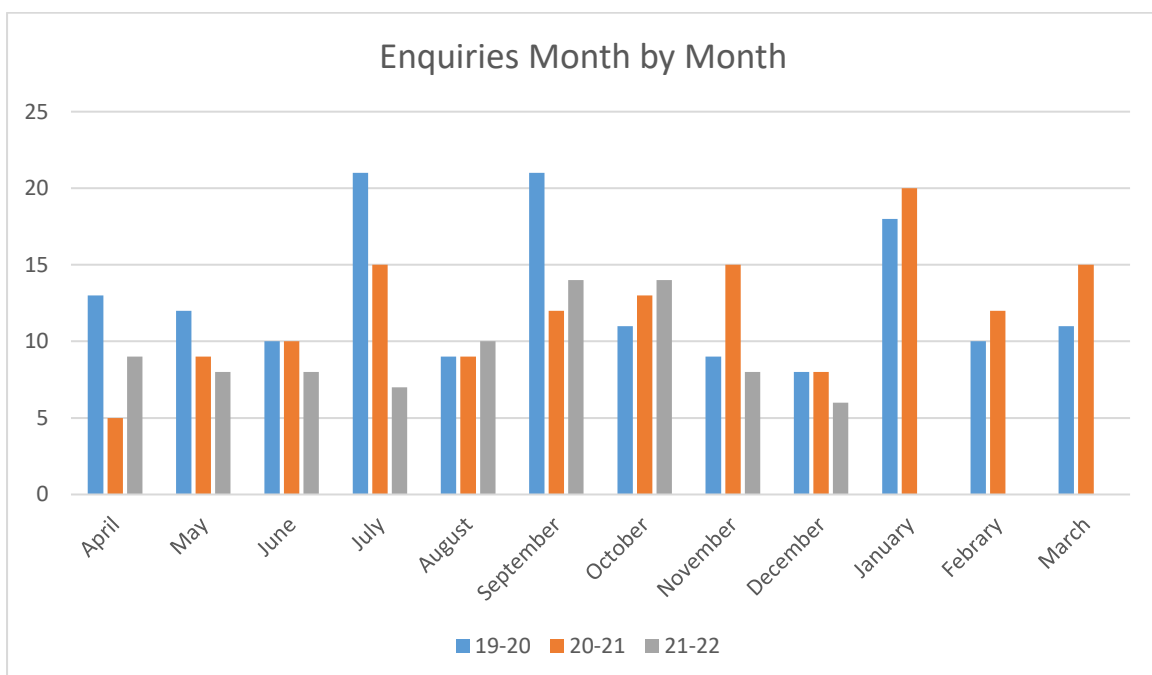
Performance Data- Year on Year

Year	Enquiries	Initial Visits	Assessments Allocated	Approvals
2018-19	146	24	17	13
2019-20	140	34	24	4
2020/21	143	59	29	9
2021/22 (to Q3 only)	84	26	20	8

Performance Data- Cumulative Q1, Q2 & Q3 2021-22

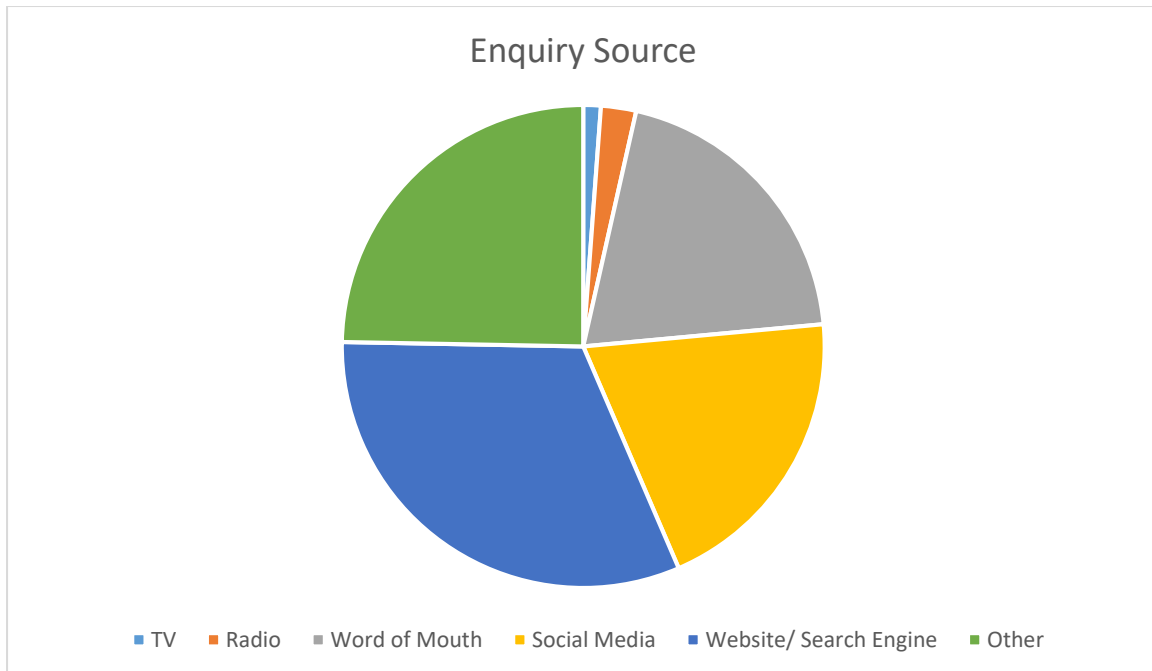
Enquiry to Assessment Numbers

2021/22	Enquiries	Initial Visits	Assessments Allocated	Approvals
Number	84	26	20	8
Conversation rate from Previous Stage	NA	40%	76.9%	40%
Conversion rate from Initial Enquiry	NA	40%	23.8%	9.5%
2020/21				
Number	93	38	16	6
Conversation rate from Previous Stage	NA	40.9%	42.1%	37.5%
Conversion rate from Initial Enquiry	NA	40.9%	17.2%	6.5%
+/-	-9	-12	+4	+2

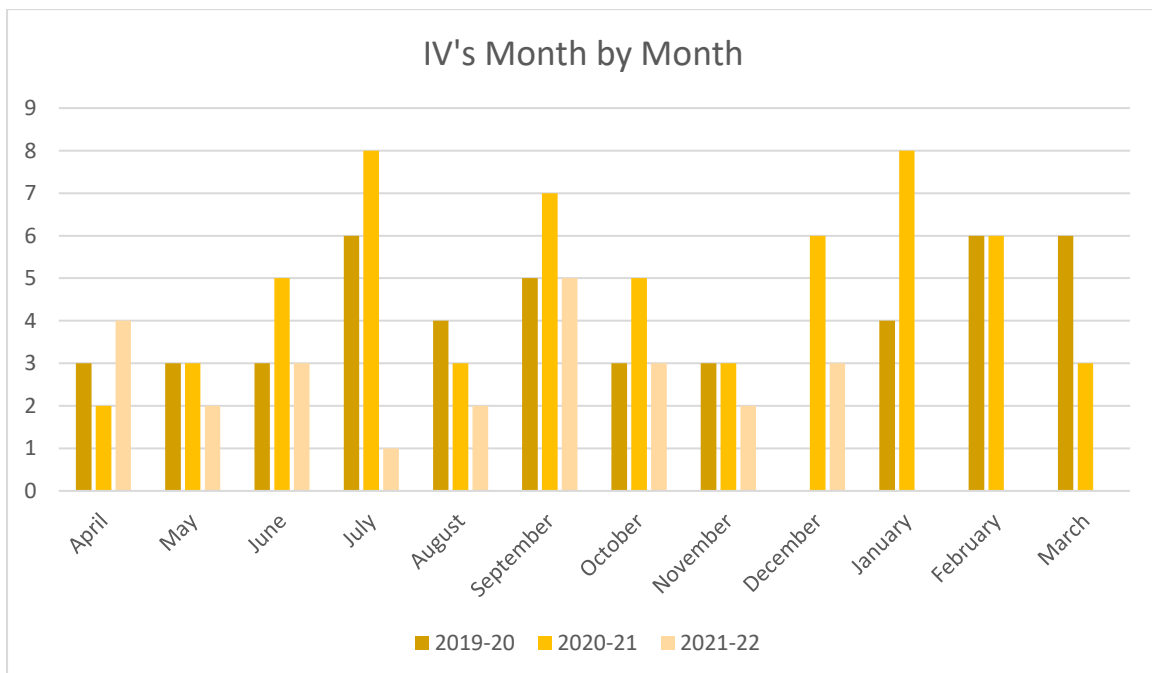


Whilst enquiries are down marginally on last year, we saw an increase on last year during September and October when the Foster Wales national campaign was live, including TV, Radio and more localised digital content.

July saw the biggest dramatic drop in enquiries, which coincided with the launch of new website, which meant people took time to find us in our new digital space.



Over half our enquiries have come from people who have interacted with our social media pages and website or searched directly for information on google.



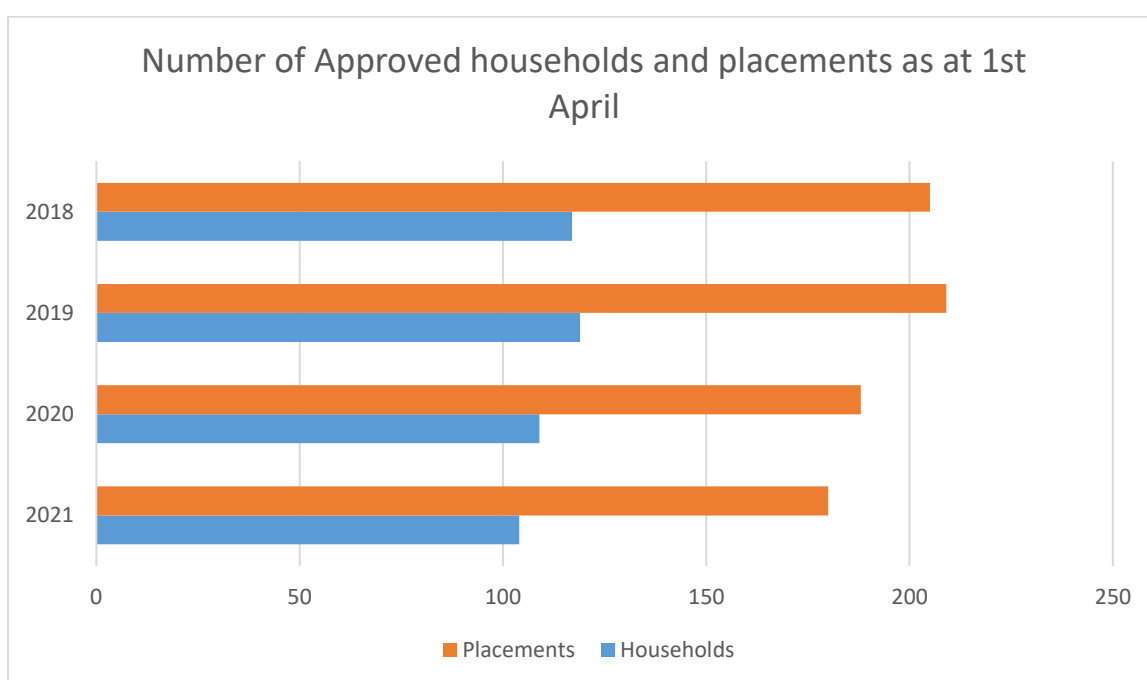
IV's have been down in every month since April 2022 in comparison to last year, the number IV's has seen similar trends to that of 2018/19, with the exception of July, which saw a dramatic decrease.

Fostering approvals made

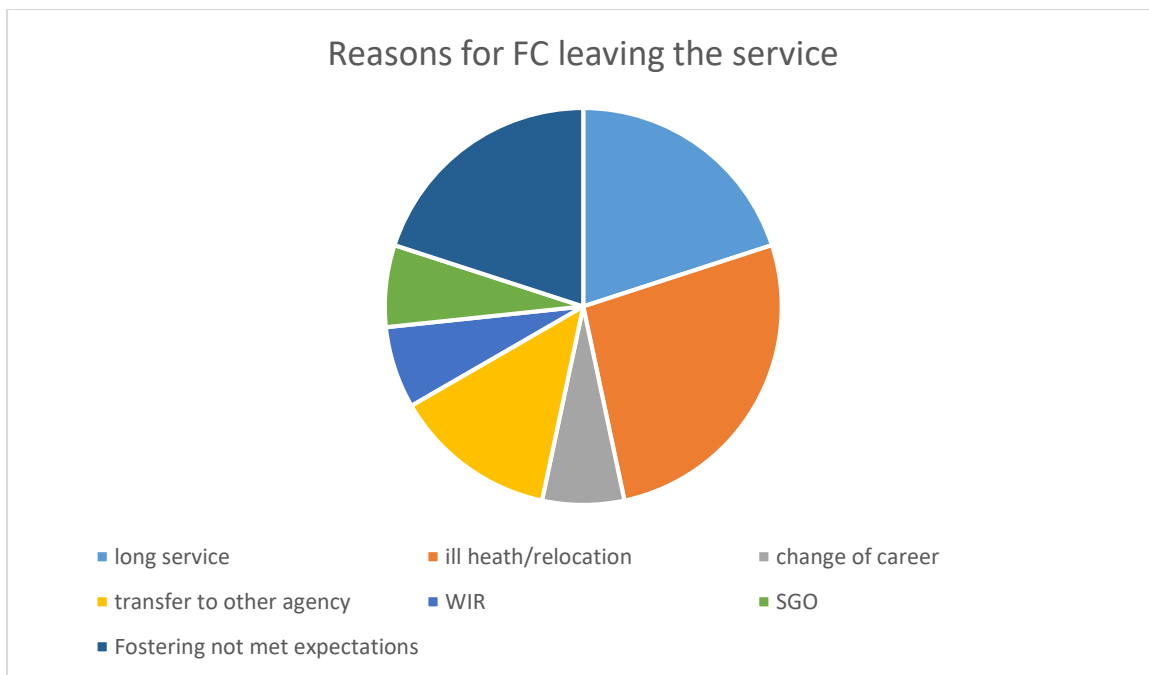
2021/22 (only up until 31.12.21)	8
2020/21	9
2019/20	4
2018/19	13

It is expected that approvals will increase based on the previous 2 years during this financial year. Largely due to in house capacity to respond to enquiries and progress through the assessment.

Part 7 - Approvals and De-registrations	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
	House holds	Places	House holds	Places	House holds	Places	House holds	Places
Number as at 1st April	117	209	117	205	119	209	109	188
Number of approvals	14	24	13	18	4	7	9	15
Number that left the service	14	20	11	14	14	28	14	23
Number at 31st March	117	205	119	209	109	188	104	180



Our foster carer population has remained fairly consistent but with a slight decrease in the number of households and the number of placements those households offer over the last 3 years.



Retirement remains the biggest cause of foster carers terminating their approval, with nearly half of those leaving the service doing so due to giving up the role due to long service, ill health, relocation or changes within their own family. 20% of carers left because fostering did not meet their expectations. Only 2 carers terminated their approval with Foster Wales RCT due to transferring to another agency.

Analysis

Although enquiries have dropped by 9.7% and Initial Visits have dropped 31.6% in the first three quarters compared with the previous year, this is consistent with the national picture in term of foster carer recruitment, with some Local Authorities reporting a 50% reduction in the number of enquiries received and initial visits taking place.

The positives are that this has not affected our numbers proceeding into assessment and being approved, both of which have increased on the same total in the previous financial year. The overall conversion rate from initial enquiry to assessments being allocated has increased from 17.2% to 23.8% and the overall conversion rate from enquiry to approval has increased from 6.5% to 9.5%.

The timescales for proceeding into IV continue to reduce, befitting from the positive impact of having a dedicated recruitment service in place. In addition, timescales for allocation of assessments and length of assessments also reducing due to Foster Wales RCT adopting the Foster Wales recruitment best practice guide.

The national Foster Wales campaign launch saw a positive impact on our enquiries throughout the months the campaign was live, during September (+2) and October (+1)

Our focus on digital marketing continues to have a positive impact with over half of enquiries (51.2%) coming from people who have interacted with our social media pages and website or searched directly for information on google.

The population of registered Foster Wales RCT Foster Carers continues to reduce and has decreased by 11.1% over the last 4 years. Work has been completed around retention including the introduction of a retention bonus, alongside other benefits such as free Leisure for Life membership and appreciation events and the majority of deregistration's were due to long service, ill health or a change in career as well as transferring to SGO/WIR. Only 2 foster carers left to transfer to other agencies during the last financial year.

Future Developments

We hope to see an upturn in enquiries during quarter 4, as we launch a large regional attraction campaign. This campaign has been planned in collaboration with MTCBC and BCBC and will involve various marketing methods including press articles, radio, podcasts, buses, Social Media advertising as well as paid social media advertising and promotion of the website through google. We envisage this will build on the success of the national Foster Wales campaign in September 2021 and attract new people from relevant profession and backgrounds to consider fostering with a message of "Have you thought about changing career this new year?"

We continue to look to adapt our services in order to follow the best practice guide for recruitment and promote the Foster Wales National Commitment. This will involve introducing some new initiatives to recruit and retain our foster carer population.

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

31st JANUARY 2022

TROS GYNNAL PLANT (TGP) CYMRU UPDATE

1. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Board with an update of progress made by Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board:

- 2.1 Acknowledge the work undertaken by TGP Cymru, the content of which is attached at Appendix 1.

3. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is important for Members to note the progress, themes and issues highlighted by the TGP Cymru, in order to work in partnership to ensure the best possible outcomes are reached for those in our care system.

4. **BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 As part of the Board's Terms of reference, TGP Cymru are invited to attend meetings to enable both the 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.

5. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

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

6. **CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 There is no consultation required for this report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

7.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

8.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

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

9.1 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...'

9.2 The work of TGP Cymru links to the Future Generations Well-Being Goal of a more equal Wales, by ensuring that children and young people are supported when decisions are being made about them. This ensures that young people have access to a range of information in order to fulfil their potential.

9.3 In addition to the duty to listen to young people and involve them in decisions, the Part 10 Code of Practice (Advocacy) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 sets out the duties to consider the provision of independent professional advocacy in certain circumstances for:

- Children who are looked after (who should benefit from an active offer of professional independent advocacy) or have previously been looked after
- Children who are subject to an assessment of need or a care and support plan or child protection enquiries

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 TGP Cymru are invited to attend meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board, to provide a broader understanding and contribution into the services available to young people and vulnerable adults.

National Approach to Statutory Advocacy

Local Authority Report - RCT 2021 - 2022

Collated Quarterly Report

Quarter 3: Oct - Dec 2021

Headline Report

During quarter three, 32 young people accessed the Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with 38 issues. 12 young people were referred for Active Offer (AO). Of those young people accessing the issue based service, 47 percent were accessing advocacy for the first time. Both IBA and AO referrals have decreased when compared to the previous quarter, but remain higher than in quarter one. Despite the decrease, more than twice as many young people accepted the Active Offer in quarter three than in quarter one.

Active Offer

According to information received from RCT, 86 children and young people became eligible for the Active Offer during the quarter:

CP: 4 yrs x1 5-9 yrs x 38 10 - 15 yrs x 23 16+ yrs x 6

CLA: 5-9 yrs x 7 10 - 15 yrs x 9 16+ yrs x 2

However two young people were counted twice as they met the criteria for AO via both the CPR and CLA pathways, making the actual number of eligible young people 84.

A total of 50 children and young people rejected the offer of an Active Offer meeting when it was suggested by their social worker, and 11 accepted.

20 young people were recorded as rejecting the AO without a reason. Either there was no information recorded in the reason column, or the reason recorded was 'child refused' or something similar.

30 young people rejected the offer to meet with an advocate with a recorded reason. The most common reasons were:

12 said they would prefer to speak to a family member, social worker or other professional

Four young people's parents were not in agreement with the referral

Four young people felt they could express themselves or don't have a need for advocacy

Other reasons included not wanting any other professionals involved, preferring to access alternative support such as ELSA or the social worker feeling the child or young person didn't understand the concept of advocacy.

It is unclear how the remaining 23 young people responded to the discussion with their social worker, although 18 of these young people are included in the December report, indicating information about how most of the 23 young people responded to the discussion with their social worker will be available at a later date.

Of the 11 young people who accepted the AO on the spreadsheet, seven were referred. Two young people became eligible at the end of the previous quarter and were referred in October. Two young people were referred but not recorded as accepting the AO on the spreadsheet. One young person was referred for AO but isn't on the spreadsheet sent by RCT in Q2 or Q3. This makes 12 AO referrals received altogether. Four young people were recorded as accepting the offer of an AO meeting in quarter three but were not referred to the advocacy service.

The 12 young people referred for Active Offer were split evenly between those in the child protection (CP) area and those who were children looked after (CLA). This is a significant increase in CLA and the first time those in the CP arena have not made up the majority of AO referrals. The majority of young people were again aged between six and eleven, with only three young people over the age of 11 referred for AO. Males and females were referred in equal numbers.

Of the 12 young people referred for Active Offer, 42% had contact with their advocate within five working days. Five young people requested school visits which were delayed by school holidays. Two visits were delayed due to waiting for Covid-19 isolation to end. All 12 young people had contact with an advocate within ten working days of referral.

Headline Report Cont'd

Issue Based Advocacy

Advocates worked with six young people living outside of RCT in areas including Caerphilly, Cardiff, Swansea and Newport. Of the 32 referred, 11 young people were CLA, 20 young people were CP, and one was open to Care and Support. This represents a continuation of most young people receiving issue based advocacy being in the CP arena. The gender split saw 18 girls and 13 boys accessing the issue based service, again continuing the theme of more girls accessing the issue-based service observed in previous quarters.

The age category with the highest referral rate continues to be the 06-11 group with 18, followed by the 12-16 age group with 9. Five young people aged five or under also received issue-based advocacy.

Social services made issue-based advocacy referrals for 11 young people during this quarter, six less than in the previous quarter. Most issue-based referrals (20) were made by young people directly. This is usually a result of young people accepting the Active Offer, or young people who have previously used the service to contact their advocate directly to access the advocacy service for a new issue. One young person was referred by their Independent Reviewing Officer.

Meetings continue to be the largest issue advocates support young people with, with support at Core Group meetings making up over half of the 33 issues referred. Young people were also referred for support with CLA reviews, case conferences and legal meetings.

Of the 34 young people accessing Issue Based Advocacy, 94% had contact with their advocate within five working days. Two visits were cancelled just before Christmas following the decision to temporarily suspend face to face visits due to the Covid-19 situation.

Visiting Advocacy

Visiting Advocacy continues in four Local Authority community homes across RCT. Face-to-face visits have resumed at two community homes (Bryndar and Beddau) with visits taking place in December and planned for January. The remaining two homes have asked for a less structured approach although the visiting advocate will continue to offer monthly face-to-face visits as well as telephone contact.

Service Information

Two new recruits joined the CTM advocacy team in November. One part time independent advocate and one casual advocate. This recruitment is helping to cover the absence of another team member who is currently on long-term sick leave. We have produced and provided up to date information on the AO referral process for front line practitioners.

We have continued to implement and adapt a new consultation process. Although the new system allows more young people to express their views independently, we are looking at expanding the system with a view to increasing the number of young people evaluating the service each quarter. CTM is currently piloting a system in which young people receive a link and are able to fill in a feedback form online and as face-to-face visits increase we will offer the young people opportunities to express views about the advocacy service with the support of their advocate. Four young people independently completed feedback forms during quarter three:

Four stated they found the service helpful, two felt the service made a difference to their situation, four felt they now know more about their rights, four felt more confident since receiving support and four felt their views were considered. All four young people providing feedback stated they would use the service again.

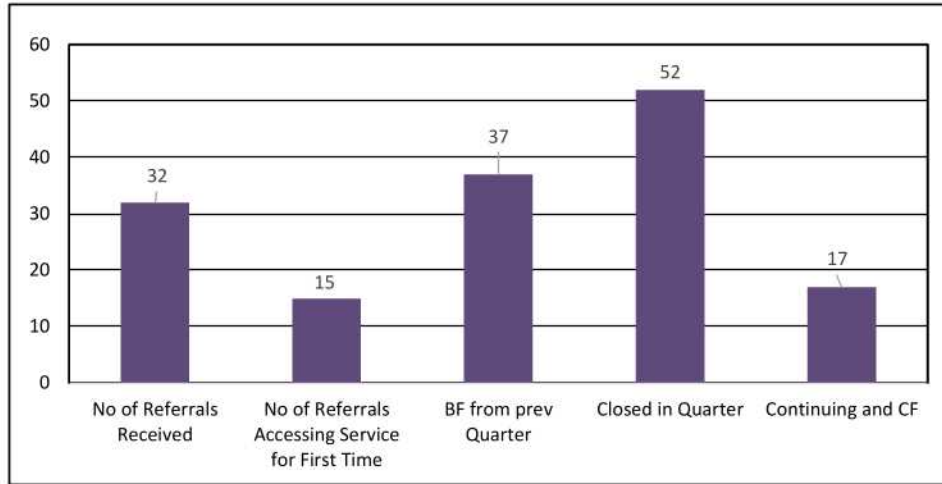
Please find below an example of advocacy work undertaken during the quarter from within RCT. The name has been changed to protect the young person's identity.

Situation: Lexi is an 11 year old girl who has lived with her foster family for over seven years. Lexi has been asking for some time to be known as the same surname as her foster family. The issue had been brought up by social workers in previous CLA reviews but Lexi's mum was not in agreement to this, partly because she wasn't sure if this was really what Lexi wanted.

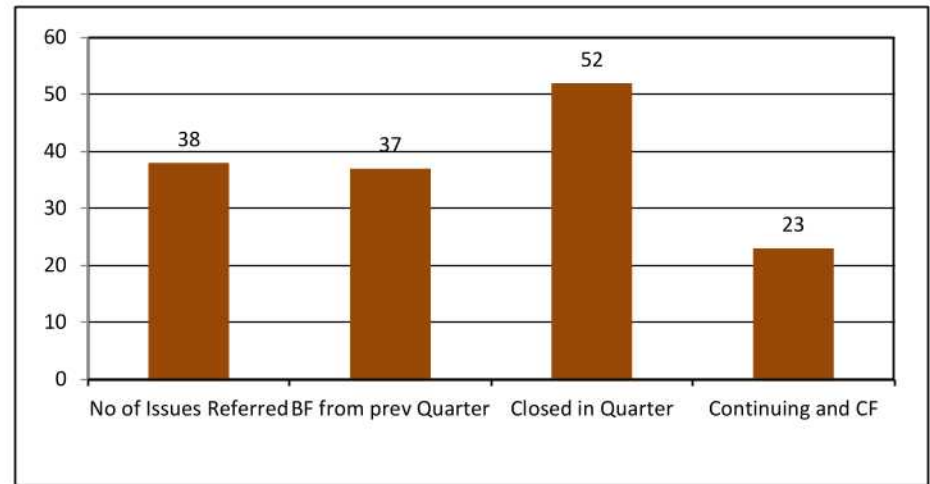
Action: The advocate spoke to Lexi who said she didn't feel the need to meet with the advocate in person, and was happy to talk about her wishes and feelings over the phone. Lexi was very articulate and explained to the advocate she had been asking to be known by her foster family's surname for as long as she could remember, and felt that if she could get her mum to really understand how strongly she felt about it, her mum might agree. The advocate went over Lexi's wishes and feelings and agreed to share them at her upcoming CLA Review.

Outcome: Lexi's wishes and feelings were shared at her CLA Review. Lexi's mum agreed to the name change, in part because she trusted that Lexi's wishes and feelings had been gained independently. Lexi was very happy with the outcome.

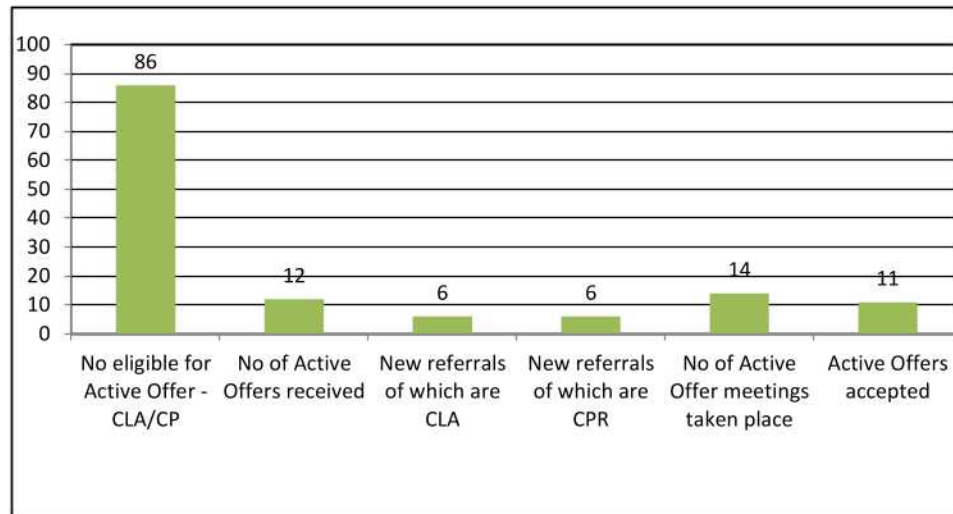
1a. Advocacy Cases - Young People - Issue Based Advocacy



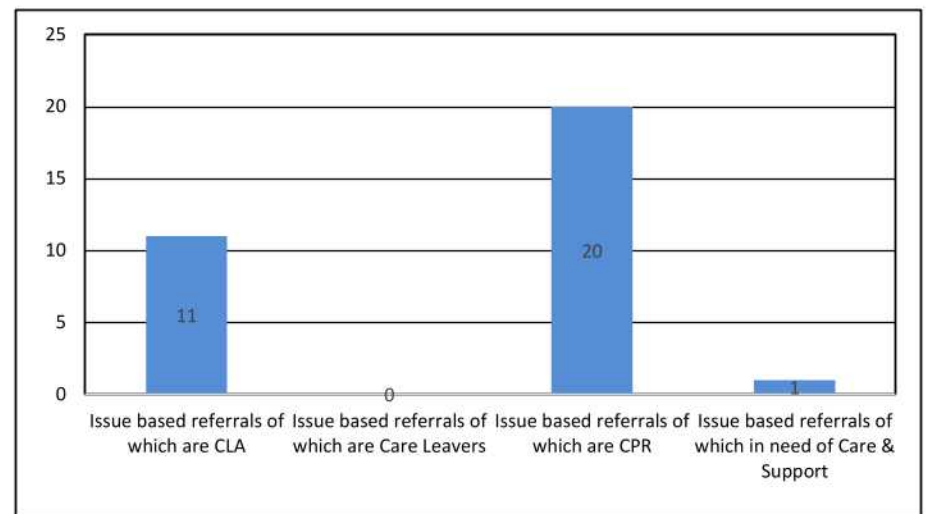
1b. Advocacy Cases - Interventions - Issue Based Advocacy



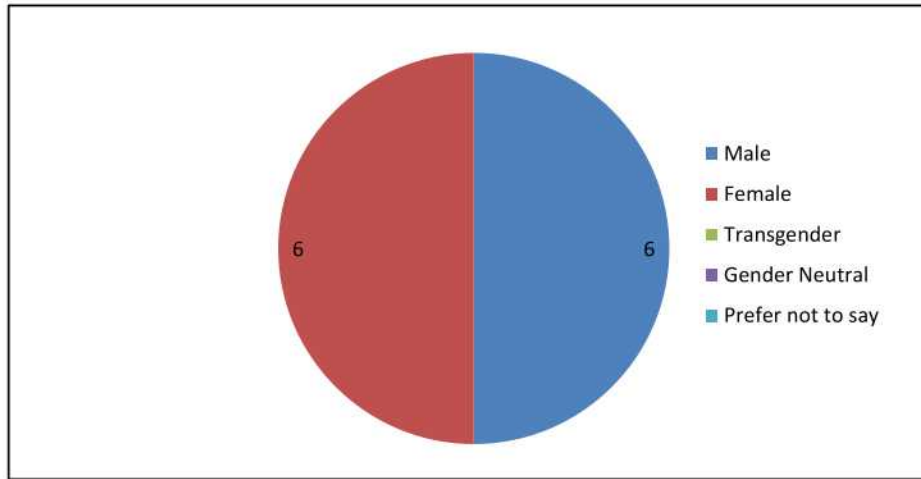
2a. Eligibility Criteria: Active Offer



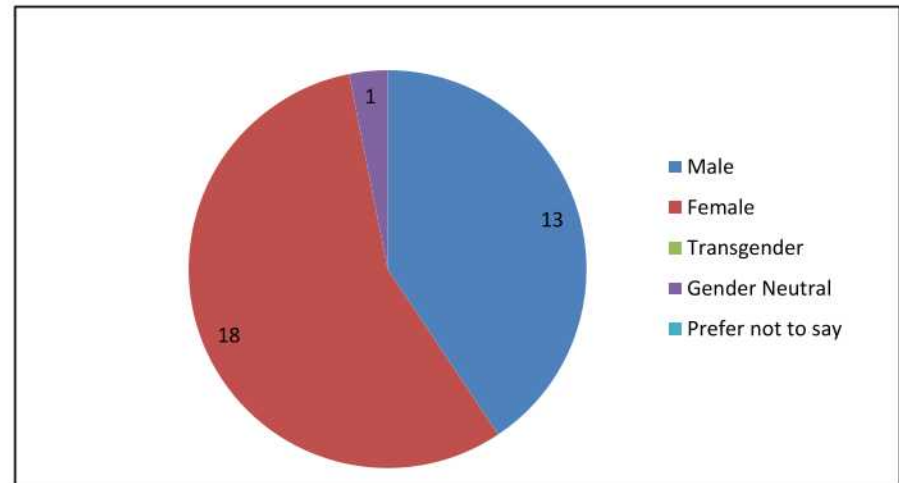
2b. Eligibility Criteria: Issue Based



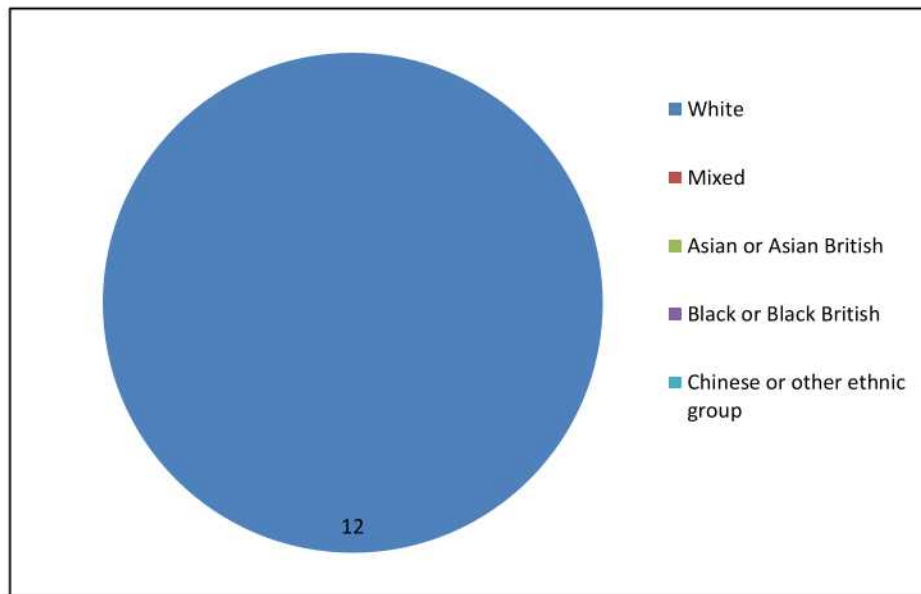
3a. Demographics: Gender - Active Offer



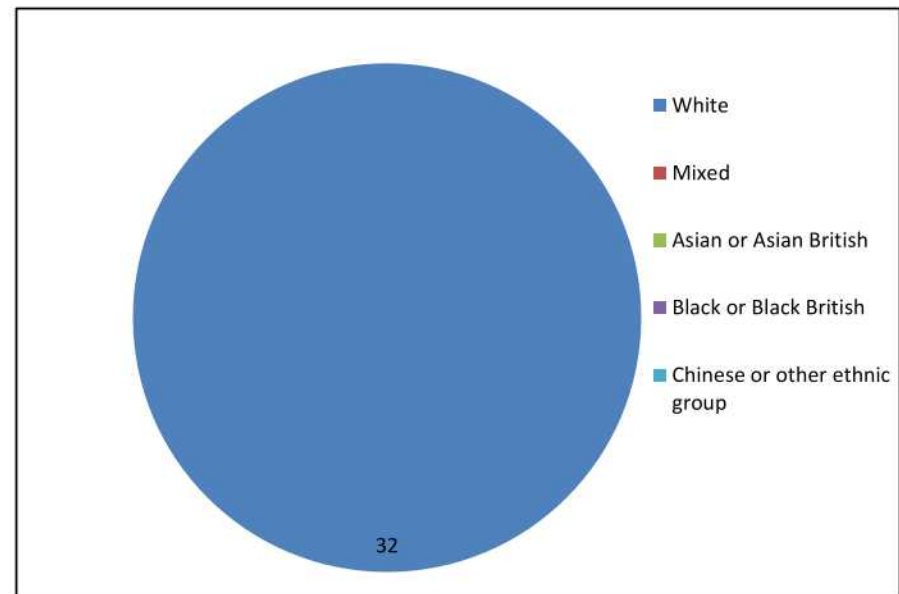
3b. Demographics: Gender - Issue Based



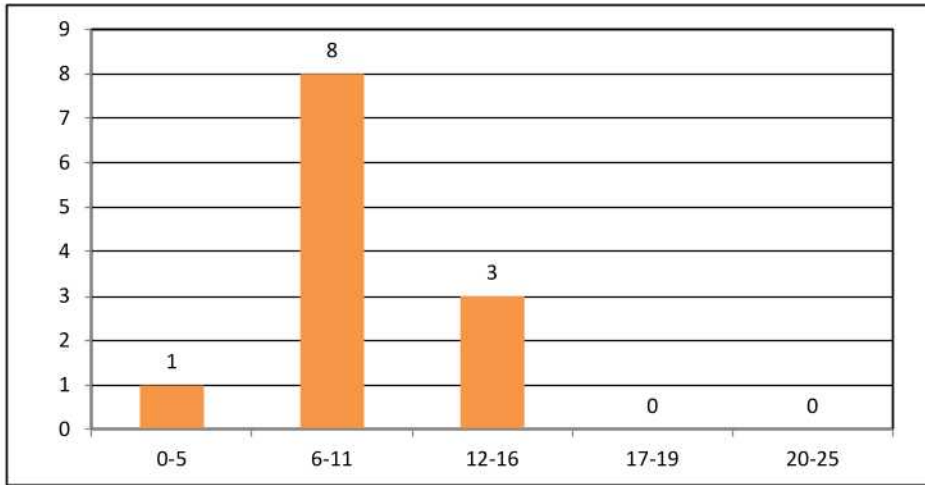
3c. Demographics: Ethnicity - Active Offer



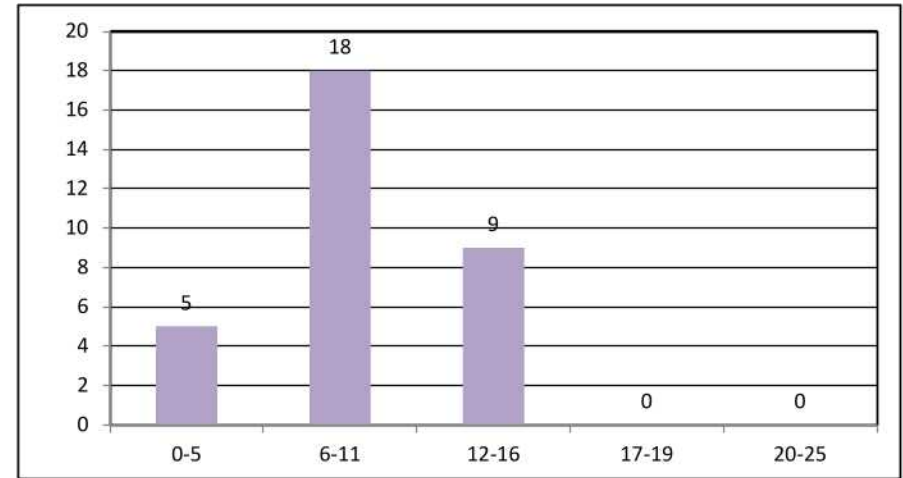
3d. Demographics: Ethnicity - Issue Based



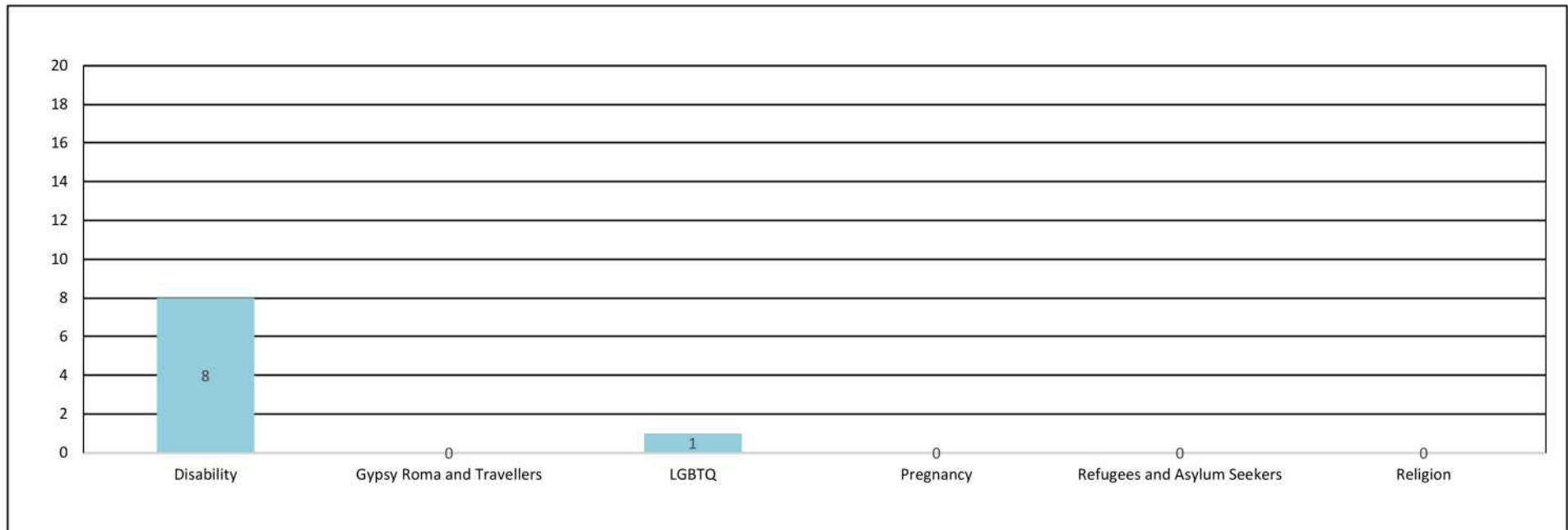
3e. Demographics: Age - Active Offer



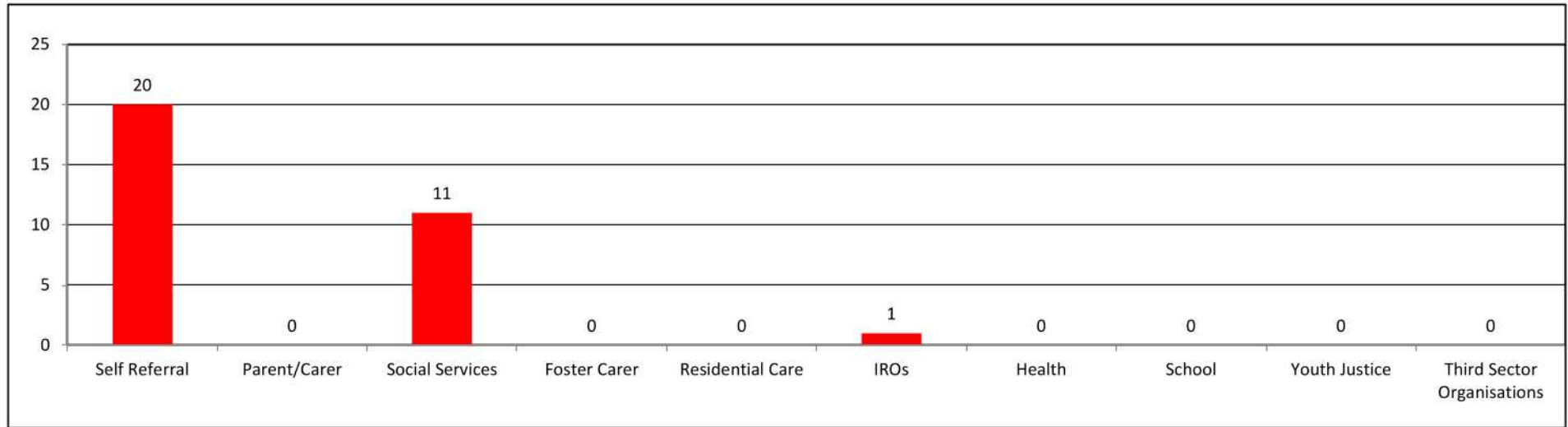
3f. Demographics: Age - Issue Based



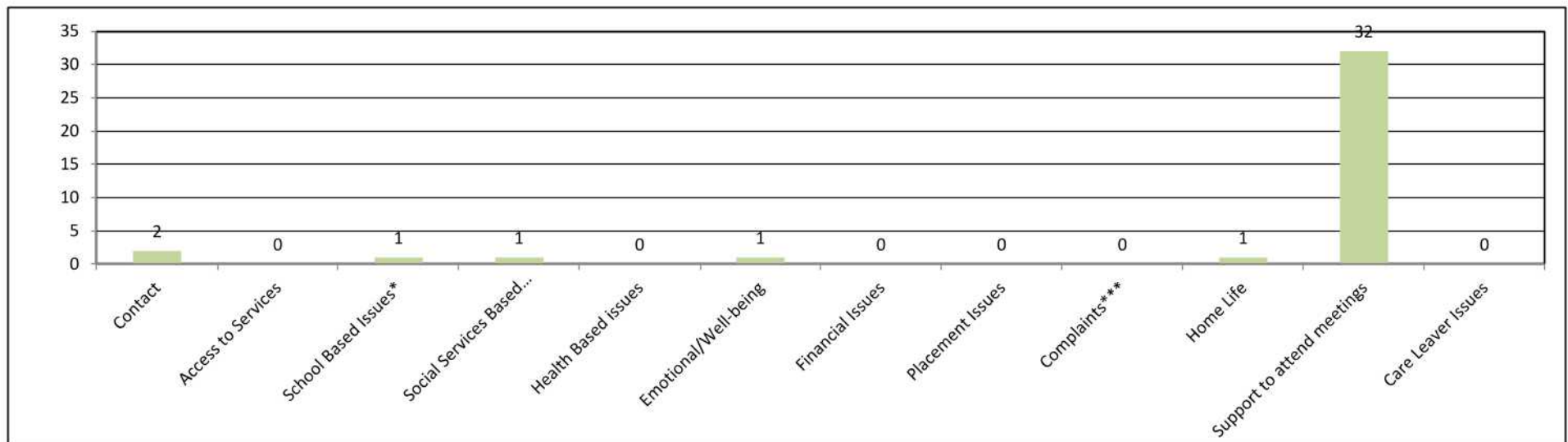
4. Protected Characteristics



5. Referral Source per young person - Issue Based only



6. Issues Presented

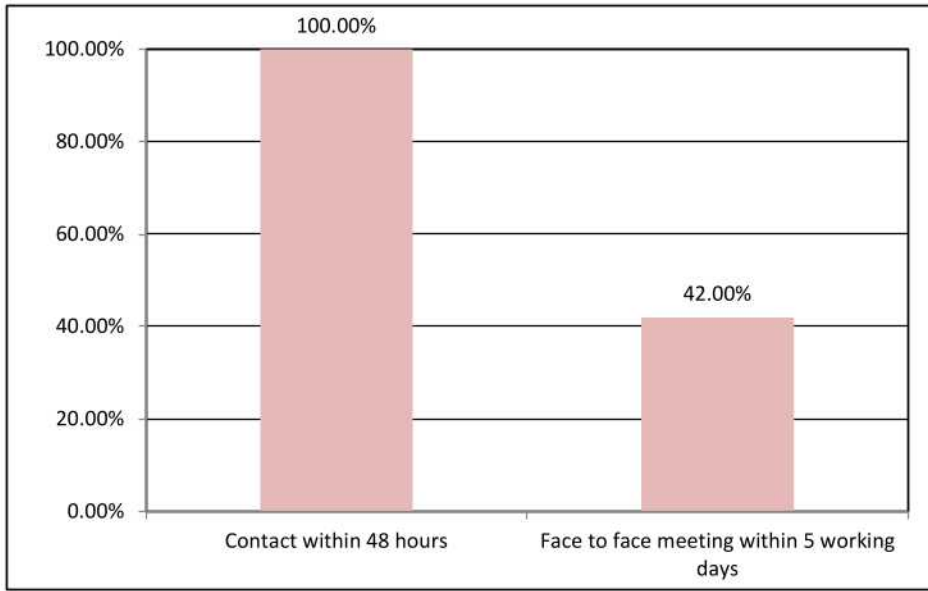


* School based issues including: SEN/ALN, exclusions, bullying, transport.

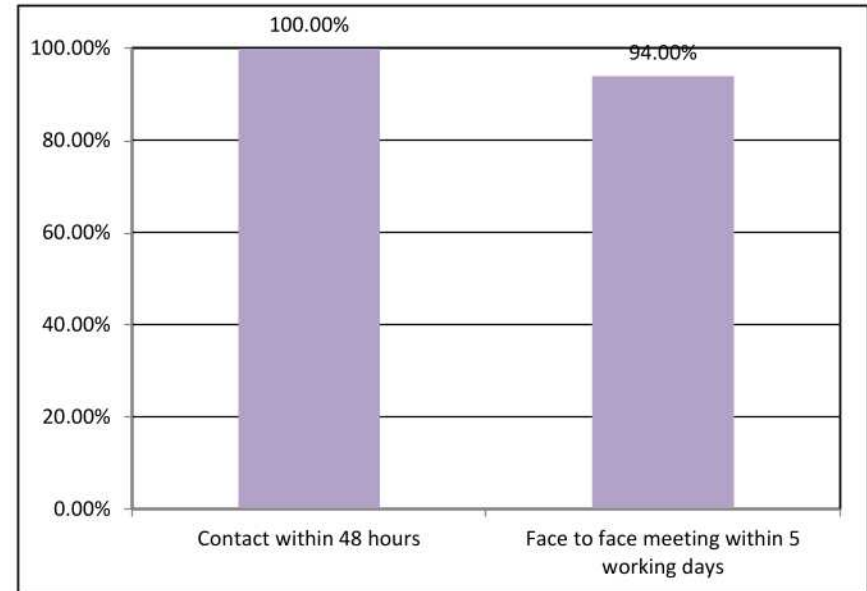
** Social Services based issues including: relationship with worker, care plan, service provided.

*** Complaints refer to any complaints made against statutory services, including Social Service, Police, Health, YJS

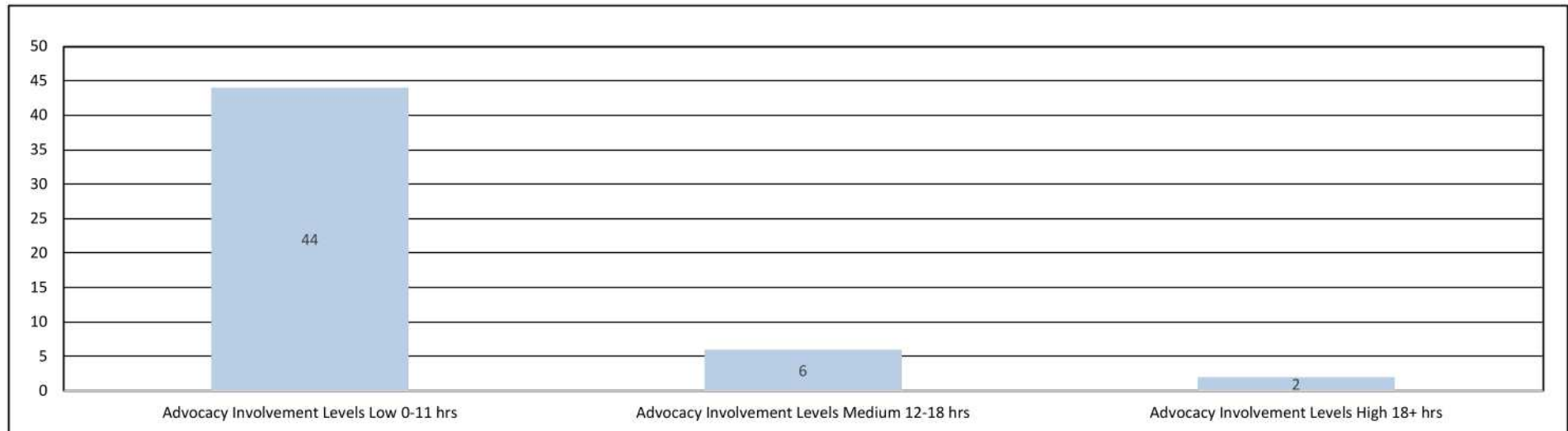
7. Service Performance - Active Offer



Service Performance - Issue Based



8. Level of Advocacy Intervention at point of Issue Closure



9.Outcomes: linked to The National Advocacy Standards & Outcomes Framework

		Comments
Outcome 1	Children and young people find good quality independent advocacy easily available and accessible.	<p>The service aims to be as responsive as possible, although external risk assessments continue to affect how quickly the advocate is able to visit the young person. The increase in Covid-19 cases and new restrictions did also affect the ability of the advocates to visit some young people referred for AO at the end of December. Across the two service areas 68% of young people had contact with their advocate within five working days of referral.</p> <p>Advocates continue to support young people placed out of county, both virtually and in person if requested.</p> <p>The AO service was promoted via a new information poster, sent to commissioners to be shared with social work teams in October.</p>
Outcome 2	Children and young people have their privacy and confidences respected and their wellbeing safeguarded and protected.	<p>In quarter three, the majority of direct work with young people took place during face-to-face visits, mostly in school following a robust risk assessment. Face-to-face visits were suspended during the week before Christmas due to the Covid-19 situation but reinstated during the first week of January for those young people unable or unwilling to engage virtually. This is often the best way to ensure the young person is able to engage confidentially, and without the concern of someone listening in or influencing what they say.</p> <p>All advocates, including new team members have up to date Child Protection Training.</p>
Outcome 3	Children and young people are valued for their diversity, treated with respect and all forms of discrimination against them are challenged.	<p>During this quarter, eight disabled young people received issue-based advocacy. Four young people are diagnosed with ASD, two have additional learning needs, one had ADHD and another was diagnosed with Global Developmental Delay.</p> <p>One young person defining as LGBTQ was referred for issue-based advocacy in this quarter.</p> <p>Advocates always endeavour to allow young people to lead in terms of how they engage with the advocacy service.</p>
Outcome 4	Children and young people are empowered to take the lead in relation to advocacy services and their rights, wishes and feelings and championed.	<p>Young people consistently tell us they feel empowered to speak up for themselves following advocacy intervention. One young person explained she usually talks for herself at meetings, and felt confident about doing so, but needed support to prepare. The advocate helped her to prepare a list of questions, and contacted her after the meeting to discuss the outcome. Advocates always encourage young people to speak for themselves when they feel able to do so.</p> <p>Following advocacy intervention, one young person wrote on her feedback form;</p> <p><i>"I feel more confident about me having my own decisions in life"</i></p>

<p>Outcome 5</p>	<p>Children and young people participate in the design, planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of advocacy services.</p>	<p>CTM Advocacy is in the process of identifying a 'participation lead' within the project who will be responsible for keeping up to date with participation and consultation opportunities and support young people to share views about how the service is delivered.</p> <p>All young people who have received advocacy support are offered the opportunity to share their views about TGP Cymru's website, with an aim to implementing proposed changes to make the website more accessible for children and young people.</p> <p>All young people who have received advocacy will continue to be asked for feedback in order for TGP Cymru to monitor the services provided and make improvements where needed.</p>
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By virtue of paragraph(s) 14 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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