



# VALE, VALLEYS, AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE

## REVIEW OF SERVICE AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

For Period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

### NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE



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

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## VALE, VALLEYS, AND CARDIFF ADOPTION COLLABORATIVE (VVC) ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1<sup>st</sup> APRIL 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025

### 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** Vale, Valleys, and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative (VVC) as part of the National Adoption Service in Wales (NAS), provides a regional adoption service to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Cardiff Council and Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council.
- 1.2** This report covers the period **1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025**. The requirement to review the service under Regulation 39 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019 on a six-monthly basis is incorporated into this report. It also includes the reporting requirements set out in the governance arrangements for the region. The report provides a record of the performance, activity and the quality of the service provided during the reporting period.
- 1.3** The report has the following Appendices:

**Appendix 1** sets out key performance data in respect of family finding activity.

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

**Appendix 3** provides key information in respect of Adoption Support.

**Appendix 4** provides information in respect of Adoption Panel activity.

**Appendix 5** provides information in respect of Quality Assurance.

## 2. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

- 2.1** A hybrid model of service delivery is now embedded with a mixture of remote and face to face working. Members of the Business Support Team continue to provide office cover and all staff cover the telephone rota to ensure calls are responded to promptly. Individual team meetings have continued to be held on a regular basis alongside office days. The monthly Placement meetings have been held involving the Recruitment and Assessment Team and Family Finding Teams. Whole service Team Meetings have taken place bi-monthly. A whole service Team Development Meeting took place in November 2024. This provided an opportunity for teams to consider priorities and Team Plans. The day also featured presentations on Life Journey Work and Access to Birth Records work. At the December Team Meeting a review of the service took place involving all team members. VVC Team Managers have continued to meet on a regular basis.
- 2.2** There have been no changes to the membership of the Joint Committee during the period. Meetings of the Joint Committee were held in May 2024 and December 2024. Meetings of the Management Board were held in April and July 2024 . A joint meeting of the Joint Committee and Management Board was held in January 2025. The agendas for Joint Committee and Management Board meetings have continued to focus upon monitoring the impact of the cost savings agreed on service delivery. In January 2025, the budget for the new financial year was agreed without the need to find further savings. However, it was also agreed that planning for the 2026-27 budget would need to take place earlier in the forthcoming year to continue to ensure any constraints on the budget could be managed.
- 2.3** The performance of the region has continued to be monitored closely by the Management Board, Operational Group and Joint Committee in line with national performance indicators and local priorities. A range of issues and topics have been referred for regional consideration from the National Adoption Service (NAS). The Regulation 39 Report (requirement to maintain monitoring, reviewing and improving

the quality of the service from the Local Authority Adoption Services (Wales) Regulations 2019) for the period have been completed in line with requirements.

- 2.4** The annual financial and governance audit of the service undertaken by the Regional Audit Department took place in May 2025. The finding of the final audit report finalised in July 2025 was Substantial Assurance.
- 2.5** In addition to the core budget, Joint Committee and Management Board have continued to monitor the spend against the grant funded posts which has exceeded the level of the grant funding, and discussions have begun as to how best to manage the grant allowance during the coming year.
- 2.6** The Operational Group met in May and November 2024 but unfortunately the meetings scheduled for September 2024 and February 2025 did not take place as they were not quorate. This matter was highlighted in the audit report.
- 2.7** The revised WASPI agreed by all partner authorities was formally signed in July 2024.
- 2.8** The Collaborative has continued to comply with all required performance monitoring and reporting to the National Adoption Service (NAS) as part of the National Performance Framework. The Business Support Manager role became vacant in June 2024 so the Family Finding Manager took responsibility for collating data and meeting the reporting deadlines. Quarterly performance reports and the end of year performance reports have been provided to Management Board, Joint Committee and Operational Group.
- 2.9** The Regional Manager and individual Managers remain actively involved in a range of national meetings and groups including policy and practice development. The Regional Adoption Manager has continued to chair quarterly meetings of the national Performance Management Subgroup, the Access to Birth Records and Intermediary Services Subgroup.

### **3. Staffing**

- 3.1** The vacancy position at the beginning of the reporting period equated to 2 FTE posts within the Recruitment and Assessment Team and a part time Social Worker vacancy responsible for Post Adoption Contact within the Adoption Support Team. Discussions took place in April 2024 as to how these vacancies could contribute to the cost savings with the least impact upon service delivery. As a result of these discussions, 1.5 posts within Recruitment and Assessment were deleted. The Post Adoption Contact Social Worker post was filled internally creating a part time vacancy. This position was combined with the remaining part time post in the Recruitment and Assessment Team to create a post covering both service areas. This post has been filled externally with the new postholder taking up post in December 2024.
- 3.2** The other staff changes which have occurred relate to the Business Support Manager role which was filled in November 2024 and a Social Worker within the Recruitment and Assessment Team who went on maternity leave in September. This post is currently being filled on a temporary fixed term basis following an external recruitment process.
- 3.3** The Welsh Government Grant for Adoption Support Services currently funds five posts within the Collaborative and 10.5 posts within the local authorities. The posts within VVC have remained stable. The turnover of posts within the local authorities has been monitored and any vacancies and cover arrangements have been reported to the National Adoption Service (NAS).

#### **4. SERVICE FUNCTIONS**

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

#### **FAMILY FINDING (APPENDIX 1)**

- 4.1** Family Finding remains a core area of activity for the region as the requirement to place children securely and without unnecessary delay underpins all other functions.
- 4.2** **154** children have been referred to the service in 2024-25 . Referrals to VVC have been steadily rising in recent years which is later reflected in the Should Be Adopted (SBA) decision and Placement Order (PO) activity. The withdrawal rate of referrals continues to be between 40-50%. Withdrawn referrals are expected but still result in considerable usage of staff time in both administration, arranging adoption medicals and offering birth parent counselling.
- 4.3** **81** 'should be adopted' decisions were made during the year which is on par with the previous year (82 in 2023-24). This will be reflected in the number of children where adoptive families are being sought due to consistent high numbers of children requiring a plan of adoption.
- 4.4** **83** Placement Orders (A placement order is an order made by the court authorising a local authority to place a child for adoption with any prospective adopters who may be chosen by the authority) have been granted in 2024-25. This has been a marked increase from the previous years and is in line with the rise in referrals observed last year. The number of Placement Orders increased by almost a third this year which has had a marked impact on the family finding activity and demand for adoptive placements. The national (UK-wide) picture of available adopters is concerning and has been declining in recent years. This poses a significant challenge in continuing to identify placements for children alongside a steady rate of Placement Orders.
- 4.5** **50** children were placed for adoption during the year, which is a decline in recent years, especially compared to the number of children with a plan of adoption. With the rise in Placement Orders, we are becoming increasingly reliant upon external placements for our children which come at a significant cost to the placing local authority as well as increased workload in terms of supporting placements at a distance.

- 4.6** All but **3** children placed have both indirect and direct contact arrangements in place, however for the majority, these relate only to those with their foster carers (reflected in national performance figures as ‘significant others’). The **3** children with no direct contact were adopted by their former foster carers/WEP carers and so there are no previous carers to retain contact with. In terms of other direct contact arrangements, around 1/3 of children placed in 2024-25 have a plan for direct contact with a birth relative, almost all of which are with birth siblings. One child is to have ongoing direct contact with a birth parent and one with another birth relative. Contact remains a live discussion at all SBA decisions and is reviewed again at matching for children and the reasons for not being able to consider this are recorded. Currently, the nationally devised contact assessment tool is either not being routinely used within the local authorities or not being provided at the point of the SBA decision/matching. This may be beneficial for local authorities to consider in enhancing the evidence of the extent of their considerations and decision-making.
- 4.7** A total of **13** children’s prospective adopters had initial meetings with birth parents during the year to date which represents around **25%** of children placed.
- 4.8** **38** children waited longer than six months from their SBA decision to Matching (around **75%** of all children) This performance measure doesn’t account for the time elapsing between SBA decision and Placement Order. This reflects the difficulty in being able to identify adopters from a reduced pool of available adopters and the need to search more extensively outside of the region. Positively, **62%** of children have been placed with VVC adopters although this is a reduction from previous years.
- 4.9** There were **58** Adoption Orders granted during the year so far which maintains a slightly reduced rate from previous years in line with the reduced number of children placed in recent years.
- 4.10** Performance in relation to the provision of Life Journey Material for children being placed for adoption has been maintained at a similar level having significantly

improved over recent years. It is now consistently **100%** at Matching Panel. There remain some challenges in the capacity of Social Workers within the local authorities to finalise the later life letters for children which affects the second adoption review performance being in the region of **65%**. The specialist funded life journey workers in local authorities are consistently meeting the second review target for the finalised life journey book, but the performance figures are affected by the later life letter delays as both are required in order to meet the performance indicator. A pilot is being undertaken within the region for the Life Journey Workers to undertake the preparation of these letters with the aim to improve the completion of these and to ensure consistency in quality.

- 4.11** The new measures in terms of the completion of a Life Journey Work QA checklist at the SBA stage and a further one by the time of the second adoption review has been discussed at different levels within the region. The checklist at the SBA is currently being completed by the Family Finding Manager and all but one of the local authorities began collating these figures during the year.
- 4.12** The Life Journey Work Co-ordinators have developed resources to address the quality of work being produced as this is part of the new performance framework and guidance to assist in the completion of later life letters. The Co-ordinators continue to offer regular support, advice, and guidance to the Life Journey Work Practitioners within our partner authorities and in addition offer workshops/briefings to local authority teams where required and are delivering training to adopters. The Life Journey Work Co-ordinators support the allocation process within each local authority and monitor performance across the region. A strategy has been developed for 2025 which focusses upon this role assisting with the development of other expectations from the Good Practice Guide such as Trauma Nurture Timelines and Understanding the Child Days. Currently, these are only possible to be achieved for children aged 3+ and are led by the Family Finding Manager but if capacity can be created within other specialist roles this may mean this can be extended to all children placed.

- 4.13** The Transitions Social Worker has supported **27** children during the reporting period through direct work sessions, support and consultation for adopters and guidance and support for professional colleagues. Our Transitions Worker has undertaken some additional specialist pieces of work above and beyond their usual role including providing post-placement and life journey support for a child previously affected by adoption disruption and successfully placed again.
- 4.14** VVC has continued to engage with various family finding methods. The team liaises with the Adoption Register Wales (ARW)/LinkMaker team to ensure information is updated and monitored in a timely manner. When considering external links adopters resident in Wales will be considered preferentially but we ensure searching is extended UK-wide as early as possible in order to maximise the opportunity to identify adopters for our children. Performance data produced by ARW continues to be scrutinised by managers within the service. Several children and adopters were referred to an ARW Profiling event held in October 2024 and an in-person profiling event in March 2025. These events have generated links for VVC children.
- 4.15** Referrals to the Adopting Together Service continue to be explored for children waiting the longest although no placements have been made via this service in the year to date. VVC continues to participate in an Early Alert system with St David's and Barnardo's, which enables early consideration of adopters approved by these agencies.
- 4.16** Three children were placed under a Welsh Early Permanence arrangement (The Welsh Early Permanence Framework (WEP) aims to provide stability for children in care by allowing them to be placed with foster carers who are also approved prospective adoptive parents from the outset of care proceedings), both as siblings of adopted children. VVC continues to be at the forefront of advocating for Welsh Early Permanence and are working with local authority partners to identify children where this might be a suitable option.

## **5. Disruptions and Placement Breakdown**

- 5.1** There were two disruptions in adoptive placements and one breakdown of introductions prior to placement during the whole reporting year. All were for young children aged around 18 months old and both placements broke down within the first few weeks. Learning events have been held for each child and this will form part of a wider piece of research undertaken by the Family Finding Manager.

## **6. RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT (APPENDIX 2)**

### **Marketing**

- 6.1** The region continues to benefit from having a permanent Recruitment and Marketing Officer. This role ensures that VVC maintains a consistent response to enquiries and that they are tracked and responded to within timescales, usually within 24 working hours.
- 6.2** In terms of general recruitment activities, the Marketing Officer has continued to ensure information available through VVC's website is regularly updated and there is an exhaustive bank of resources people can access when they wish to explore adoption. The website has also been updated to provide information in respect of non-agency applications. We are currently in the process of updating our website as we recognise its' interface has not changed in several years. The Recruitment and Marketing Officer working alongside the ICT Development Team on a project to refresh the Collaboratives' website and it is hoped this will be completed by the end of 2025, although this is broadly dependent on the capacity within the Development Team. In July 2024, VVC's Marketing Officer led a national piece of work regarding conversion rates from enquiry to application with contributions from counterparts in other regions.
- 6.3** VVC has continued to maintain a social media presence on Facebook and Instagram. These platforms are useful in raising public awareness of the service and we also make use of pay-per-click advertising to specifically target people who live in the region. The analytical data pay-per-click advertising provides in useful to help us

understand what themes or information generates the most interest. It appears first-hand accounts and narratives received the most online engagement this past year.

- 6.4** VVC utilised Council tax inserts for residents of the Vale of Glamorgan, RCT and Merthyr Tydfil CBC. This allowed us to target those areas with a lower number of enquirers. This approach came at a considerable cost but guarantees reaching every relevant household in three of the four Local Authority areas we are responsible for supporting. However, from the Recruitment and Marketing Officer analysis, it would appear very few direct enquiries were made from members of the public who received information about us in this way. Therefore, VVC will reflect on the merits of using this approach for the coming year.
- 6.5** VVC attended a number of in-person community engagement events including Barry Pride, Pride Cymru, and the Vale of Glamorgan's Agricultural Show. We had also booked to attend Merthyr Tydfil Pride and Vegan Fest but sadly both events were cancelled by the organisers at short notice. Nonetheless, the events attended have aimed to raise awareness of the work of the service with the public and to engage in as many discussions as possible. Generally, we continue to receive a warm reception from the public and it is rare for us to receive negative feedback or engagement from such events. In addition to attending these well-established community events, we have also trialled having a presence at high footfall public shopping centres. This has included Trago Mills in Merthyr Tydfil and we plan to do the same at St Davids 2 shopping centre in the coming year. This is again with the goal as acting as a touch point for people who either could be directly considering adopting or know someone who is open to this.
- 6.6** VVC has continued to embrace Welsh Early Permanence as a permanency option where appropriate. During 2024/25 a total of **44** new households were approved as prospective adopters and **9** of those were dually approved as WEP carers and **3** children were placed. One of the remaining six families subsequently withdrew due to a change in their personal circumstances, **3** were matched with traditional adoption links leaving **2** available families remaining to consider links.

## 7 Recruitment & Assessment

- 7.1** The Collaborative has continued to receive a significant number of enquiries, although, in keeping with the national trend, the numbers of enquiries have decreased overall.
- 7.2** We have continued to focus on enhancing the support we provide prospective adopters through our provision of training. Our post approval training day is now well established and its content regularly reviewed and updated. Service user feedback is positive and it is clear the training is found to be useful in preparing applicants for the next stages of their journey. In addition to this well received training, we have also introduced an additional Life Journey Workshop, which has again been well received by participants. During the year, acting on the feedback from applicants, a 2-day virtual therapeutic parenting course has been implemented. This is very much in its infancy and so far, uptake has been low. It is our intention to continue the two remaining courses proposed for 2025 before reflecting and acting upon why take up has not been higher. The working theory is that applicants are finding the additional 2 days of training too much of a time commitment when factoring in the other combined 4.5 days of other training we encourage. Despite this, we are committed to developing this training offer to ensure as many people as possible feel they can access the information needed to help them thrive as adoptive parents.
- 7.3** In 2024/25, VVC received a total of **202** enquiries . This is compared to the **221** enquires we received during 2023/24 .The numbers of enquiries we received during this period are similar to our pre-pandemic performance and indicates our enquiry numbers have remained broadly stable for the past three years.
- 7.4** The Collaborative continues to facilitate information evenings which offer participants an opportunity to learn more about the adoption process and about the backgrounds of the children who are in need of adoptive families. These events are typically held every six weeks and are co-facilitated by the Recruitment and Assessment Manager and VVC's Marketing and Recruitment Officer.

- 7.5** The information shared with participants has continued to be reviewed and updated to reflect the modern adoption agenda, specifically the importance of embracing child centred post adoption contact arrangements i.e. more direct contact and also the promotion of Welsh Early Permanence. Participants have reported they found these events informative, interesting, and thought provoking, which is reflected in the service user feedback captured in the Quality Assurance Annual Report 2024/25.
- 7.6** Initial visits have been undertaken at enquirers' homes predominantly by the Marketing and Recruitment Officer, or on occasion by Social Workers within the team when there are known complexities.
- 7.7** A total of **56** initial visits were completed during 2024/25. This represents a small increase when compared to the same period of 2023/24 as a total of **54** were completed during that reporting year.
- 7.8** Preparation to Adopt training has continued to be delivered jointly with Western Bay. This 3-day training course is delivered in-person by an experienced VVC Social Worker and a Western Bay Adoption Support Therapist. Participants have been asked to complete an evaluation at the end of each course and VVC has continued to receive positive feedback as captured within the Quality Assurance 3 day Training Annual Report 2024/25.
- 7.9** During the reporting period, **9** courses were delivered with **29** households attending (applicants who are part of a couple or solo applicants). Our attendance numbers at training have been on a downward trend and this is again in line with the national picture of fewer households applying to adopt.
- 7.10** Prospective adoptive parents are also required to attend an additional half-day workshop aimed at deepening their understanding and increasing confidence in the area of life journey work with children. This workshop is held every 2-3 months and so far, participants have given broadly positive feedback.

- 7.11** With regards to approved households, a total **44** new households were approved during 2024/25. This represents a small increase when compared with the previous year. but overall represents a downward trend when compared with previous years. This remains a concern when we know the need for adoptive placements is at the highest it has been for several years.
- 7.12** Of the **44** approved households, **59%** were of first-time applicants (26 of 44), **34%** were of second time applicants (15 of 44), **6.8%** were of foster carers applying to adopt specific children already in their care (3 of 44). Out of the number approved **25%** of applicants identified as being LGBTQIA+ (11 of 44) and **6.8%** of those approved were solo applicants (3 of 44).

## **8. ADOPTION SUPPORT (APPENDIX 3)**

- 8.1** A total of **94** referrals were received during the reporting year. This represents a significant increase when compared to previous years. This is placing pressure upon the current resources to meet these needs.
- 8.2** Access to records is another area where the workload is rising significantly. We have received a total of **85** referrals for the reporting year. There has been a sustained increase year on year. During 2022/23, a total of 49 referrals were received and 60 for 2023/24. Each referral represents a considerable amount of administration and specialist social work time.
- 8.3** Due to the increasing demands upon the service, there remains an unallocated waiting list. At the end of the reporting year, the service had **20** unallocated children awaiting for an assessment of their support needs, **10** of which had been waiting longer than the prescribed benchmark of four months.
- 8.4** The shared post between the Recruitment and Assessment Team and the Adoption Support Team has been in place since December 2024 which has assisted in the allocation of families awaiting an assessment of their support needs.

- 8.5** The weekly family hub has continued to operate during term time with several families attending regularly. This affords prospective and approved adopters an opportunity to form connections and provides peer support, whilst also having trained staff on hand to provide advice and guidance.
- 8.6** The sports group, which also runs during term time, has a core group of attendees which has continued to be an invaluable source of support for young people and parents.
- 8.7** The service has continued to work closely with the therapeutic support services available across the region; the ENFYS service covering Cardiff and the Vale and also the Children Looked After Specialist Support (CLASS) service, which was formally known as MAPSS which covers Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. Referrals in respect of post adoption support has continued to be screened by both these services with a view to therapeutic interventions being directly provided or recommended to the responsible Local Authority.
- 8.8** The region also facilitated a Winter Fun Day for adoptive families in November 2024 attended by over 80 families.
- 8.9** During the reporting period, **79** referrals for Birth Parent Support were received. This work covers direct support to birth parents, birth relatives and siblings. This growing area of support continues to place pressure on the Birth Parent Adviser and the Post Adoption Contact Officer, which are both part time positions.
- 8.10** A group for birth parents was established during Q1 of the reporting year and this has been maintained. This is facilitated by the Birth Parent Adviser and the Post Adoption Contact Officer. The birth parents who attend were polled and chose to name the group 'Bloom'. This group consistently supports **5** birth parents who meet on a quarterly basis.
- 8.11** VVC's PATHways Co-ordinator has continued to have a positive impact in assessing and supporting lower priority needs. VVC continues to be one of the

highest referring regions to this national service provided by Adoption UK and **37** referrals were made during the period.

- 8.12** The Children and Young People Co-ordinator (CYPC) supports the Connected groups facilitated by Adoption UK on a weekend monthly basis. The CYPC also maintained an active caseload of providing support and mentoring on an individual and group basis.
- 8.13** The provision of a check-in service post Adoption Order at the annual and 3-year anniversary point is now in place. The Vale of Glamorgan Quality Assurance Department now coordinates the return of the service user surveys. Whilst uptake of this service is small at present, this is a growing area and is likely to provide useful insights, which will inform future practice. It also provides a mechanism for identifying families who may require additional support.
- 8.14** As part of the regular reporting procedure, VVC has continued to collate the expenditure in respect of adoption support packages funded by partners and this is reported on a quarterly basis to VVC Management Board.
- 8.15** The service has signed up for the St David's and Adoption UK Pilot Service for adoptees and birth parents pre 1975. **2** referrals have been made during the reporting year. Review meetings are held with representatives from the pilot and VVC staff. It is anticipated an increase in usage is envisaged during the coming year.
- 8.16** VVC is continuing to be part of a national trial regarding the effectiveness of DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy) alongside SEWAS. The trial is led by Glasgow University and supported by NHS. The trial team facilitate meetings of all participants to discuss referral rates and how many have been accepted. It has been agreed a total of 20 referrals between VVC and SEWAS will be made by the time the referral period concludes in July 2025.

## **9. Policies and Procedures**

- 9.1** The NAS All Wales Policies and Procedures which were formally launched by NAS in October 2023 were approved for usage by VVC's Management Board in April 2024.
- 9.2** The Recruitment and Assessment Manager was part of an All Wales working group, led by AFKA Cymru to develop and Qualities and Skills Framework for adopter assessments. The focus of the framework is to improve social work analysis. This project culminated in a national launch which was held in November 2024 and in which VVC participated.
- 9.3** The Action Plan developed by NAS in response to four Safeguarding Reviews undertaken in respect of adopted children along with a piece of national guidance concerned with the monitoring of adoption placements has been presented to the policy arm of our two regional Safeguarding Boards by the Regional Adoption Manager. The Regional Adoption Manager and two of VVC's Team Managers are now involved in a Task and Finish group concerned with developing a plan to implement the guidance across the region facilitated by Cardiff and Vale Safeguarding Board.

## **10. Consultation, Engagement and Quality Assurance**

- 10.1** The partnership working with the Vale of Glamorgan's Quality Assurance Team has increased during this reporting year and systems for analysing feedback were put in place from August 2024 following the appointment of staff to the Quality Assurance Team. This has contributed to a greater focus on establishing a robust system of gaining service user feedback. An annual report of the consultation undertaken with adoptive families at key stages is contained under **Appendix 5**. This covers the period from August 2024 to March 2025
- 10.2** The systems which have been developed enable service user feedback to be obtained at specific points. For prospective adopters, views are gained after attendance on the Preparation to Adopt training course and shortly after they have been presented to Adoption Panel. A separate survey is completed for those

specifically attending Second Time Adopter training. A further survey has been created to seek feedback following the placement of a child.

- 10.3** Our check in system at one year and three years post Adoption Order is also providing a useful source of feedback on our service. Although the % return is quite low, the feedback received from this process has enabled families to seek further advice and support and to access the services we provide.
- 10.4** A sample of files were audited by VVC Managers which included cross Team auditing. Findings were fed back to the allocated Social Workers to support and effective feedback loop.

## **11. Complaints and Compliments.**

- 11.1** 4 complaints were received during the year. Of these, one complaint related to the poor quality of a life journey book received prior to the child's adoption. One matter related to the quality of service provided relating to a child protection enquiry. One complaint came from a birth parent regarding a letter from the service which had been opened by occupant in the premises in which he lived. All these were dealt with at Stage 1 of the Complaints Procedure, although the complaint in respect of the opened correspondence proceeded to a claim for compensation. One complaint was received from a birth parent seeking contact with their adult adopted daughter. This complaint was not resolved due to the expressed wishes of the individual for no contact.
- 11.2** VVC staff have continued to receive a variety of compliments in respect of the service they provide. These are collated regionally and fed into a central recording system. A total of 13 compliments were formally recorded in respect of the provision of post adoption support services and a further 1 compliment was formally recorded for the family finding service.

## **12 ADOPTION PANEL (APPENDIX 4)**

- 12.1** VVC has continued to maintain a joint Adoption Panel which covers the four partner areas. Panel sittings are typically scheduled four times per month and are held virtually, using Microsoft Teams.
- 12.2** The workload of the Panel is outlined in **Appendix 4** and has reflected the level of regional performance during the year.
- 12.3** There have been several changes to the membership of the Panel with the recruitment of seven new independent members from a variety of backgrounds and the resignation of three members. There continues to be an ongoing need to increase Social Worker membership from partner authorities to support the Social Worker membership from within VVC.
- 12.4** Reviews of Adoption Panel Chairs have been undertaken and all eligible members of Panel have completed a self-declaration. These self-declarations have been followed up with review meetings and plans are underway to complete the remaining reviews. DBS checks for Panel members have continued to be updated every three years. An in person training day was held for all Panel members in June 2025. This was facilitated by staff from within the Collaborative and led by the Recruitment and Assessment Manager and Family Finding Manager.

## **13 CONCLUSION, FUTURE PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES**

- 13.1** Performance in respect of the placement of children has seen a slight downturn during the year, although the referral rate has levelled to the rate experienced in previous years. The number of Placement Orders has increased during the period which has had a marked impact upon family finding activity and which is likely to continue into next year. The number of children placed within the region continues to be a positive feature of the service, but this is likely to pose ongoing challenges if the regional pool of adopters cannot be maintained.
- 13.2** The number of adopters approved has increased slightly on the previous year but the number of enquiries which convert to a Registration of Interest in adopting is

decreasing. This is part of a national trend which has been a focus of national concern. It is likely this will impact upon the range placements available and result in more reliance upon external placements.

- 13.3** Ongoing priorities for VVC are to continue to explore all placement options for children waiting, to secure suitable matches for adopters and to embrace the modern adoption agenda which promotes direct contact arrangements for all children where appropriate. VVC has continued to take the lead in promoting Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) as a placement opportunity and this will continue to be developed and embedded within the region.
- 13.4** The volume of work in respect of Adoption Support services continues to pose significant challenges for the region in terms of resources to meet the level of demand. The Team is continuing to promote alternative ways of working and universal services. Positive working links have been established with Enfys and CLASS and the Third Sector, but capacity within the service to provide timely assessments of Post Adoption Support Needs remains a concern. The complexities of the Access to Birth Records service in respect of requests under the Post Commencement Regulations are being realised at a regional and national level and will likely require additional resource.
- 13.5** The cost savings agreed for the budget and the implications for service delivery have continued to be monitored by the Management Board and Joint Committee. The measures put in place to address the reduction in posts within the Recruitment and Assessment Team have minimised the impact, but this will need to be reviewed going forward if the number of children requiring placements continues to increase. The budget planned for the coming year is being maintained but this will need to be continually monitored in the context of challenges in meeting cost savings targets. A series of meetings of the Heads of Service and Operational Group have been put in place to identify future savings for 2026-27.

**Angela Harris**  
**Regional Adoption Manager**