

# Children and Young People Committee

AD10

## Inquiry into Adoption

RHONDDA CYNON TAF CBC

### RESPONSE TO INQUIRY INTO ADOPTION BY NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES' CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE

#### Prospective parents:

#### **- How effectively are prospective parents supported throughout the adoption process, particularly through the assessment and approval process?**

The majority of adoptive parents who responded to the consultation reported that the support was good through the assessment process and the supportive relationship developed with the assessing Social Worker was considered to be a key component of this. Some adopters who had experience of adopting from more than one authority reported that support varied between agencies but overall the response to this question was positive. The ability to offer a timely response at initial enquiry were seen as crucial plus having clear information about the process and likely timescales from the outset. Adopters reported that the training offered prior to assessment was regarded as invaluable.

Adoption Panel members & professionals felt that support had improved and the reduction in the time that applicants wait to attend preparation and training were seen as clear factors to support this.

Generally it was felt that there is however a need to build better consultation mechanisms into practice to ensure that prospective adopters' views are fed back into service improvement. There is also a need to embed quality assurance mechanisms into the approval process e.g mid point assessment reviews.

#### **- What action is needed to encourage prospective parents to pursue adoption as a route?**

All respondees argued strongly that that the whole process should be speeded up and that duplication of paperwork should be reduced. It was also felt that more staff to undertake assessments and staff being provided with equipment such as laptops to use during assessments would be of benefit to speed up the process. Also those who had adopted for a second time felt that the process for assessing second time adopters should be reduced. There was general consensus that clear information on process and timescales involved and more information on the types of people who can adopt to would assist in encouraging more adopters and would remove some of the myths surrounding adoption. It was felt that continually raising the profile of adoption via the media & press etc is required so that it is not seen as a second best option but a definite first choice for families. One respondee felt that utilising experienced adopters in recruitment and assessment could ensure that the emotional and practical aspects of adoption are addressed as part of the process. There was also a view expressed by one of the respondees that foster carers should to be encouraged more to consider adoption and that possibly some prospective adopters would benefit from fostering first.

Panel and professional feedback acknowledge that this is a difficult task because people often come to adoption to meet their own individual needs and at particular points in their lives. Generally it is felt that continuing to raise the profile through marketing campaigns and

provision of good information on the needs of children requiring adoption are of benefit in raising awareness and in encouraging more applicants and to ensure that it is a service to meet the needs of children .

### **Adoptive parents and families:**

#### **- In terms of the support provided for adoptive families, what has been most important in helping to secure the permanence of adoptions and to help ensure the success of the placement?**

Professionals consulted felt that good resources to support placements are essential to ensure that support is built in from outset and not just at crisis point. It is acknowledged that this responsibility largely rests with Assessment & Care Management Social Workers working alongside the Adoption Social Workers until the adoption order is made. Following the making of the order the support provided largely falls to the Adoption team and where specialist support is required post adoption this is often commissioned externally because services cannot be accessed easily in the local authority. It is felt that adoption support should become the responsibility of the wider local authority to ensure that the support needs of adopted children are fully met e.g in terms of accessing CAMHS services, speech & language support, educational support services etc. Professionals also reported that attitudes & support of wider family and friends to the adoption are key success factors along with good preparation of adopters and children prior to placement and support for foster carers in moving children on. It was also felt that utilising the support of other adopters, providing ongoing opportunities for adoptive families to be involved in training and support groups are essential to the success of placements but often not well developed.

#### **- What improvements could be made to the support given to adoptive parents?**

Responses received from adopters cited ongoing training opportunities and opportunities to meet with other adopters as important areas .One respondee argued strongly that involvement of adopters in service design, planning, delivery and review would improve the service and ensure that it was more in line with the needs of adoptive families and that the body of knowledge and experience held by adopters is underused. This adoptive parent also felt that involving adopters in the training and continuing professional development of Social Workers would be of benefit to increase understanding and knowledge of adoption and that a standardised CPD programmed for Social Workers across Wales would reduce inequalities in the preparation and support of adopters.

### **Adopted children:**

#### **- Do the current arrangements for adoption adequately reflect the rights of the child?**

Professionals & Panel acknowledged this is a difficult area to assess because the current arrangements have to balance the rights of all those involved in the process from child, adoptive parents and birth family. It was also felt by those consulted that contact arrangements post adoption do not always support children's rights, particularly if arrangements for contact breakdown. Also it is recognised that sometimes there is a conflict between balancing sensitive birth family information with preparing a child to move on.

Panel members expressed concern that court proceedings appear to focus upon the rights of parents over those of children and that cases become protracted creating unacceptable delays for children. Panel cited various examples where cases have had to be reconsidered several times due to new assessments being undertaken on the birth family members. Panel

and professionals supported any proposed change to reduce delays for children but some concern was expressed that removing SBA decisions from Panel would remove an important independent safeguard for children. There was also some concern expressed that this would not necessarily reduce delay for children unless courts also worked to strict timescales and the adversarial nature of the process was tightly controlled.

**- How effective is the support given to adopted children post adoption, particularly for children who have complex needs?**

Panel felt that adoptive parents meeting with the Agency Medical Adviser & Specialists involved with the child prior to matching/placement were positive in identifying support needs and putting mechanisms in place but that needs which develop post adoption are often not as well supported. Professionals and adoptive parents expressed concern that post placement support, particularly for children with complex needs, is often not well co-ordinated and not individualised. It is felt by those working in the field that there is a need to raise awareness in Education Departments and school settings of the needs of adopted children. An example cited was where it is necessary for a child to spend time out of school initially developing their attachments to their family this is sometimes problematic because schools are measured on attendance. There was an overall consensus that adopted children should be given where necessary the same access to support services as they would have had as LAC children and that the fact they are adopted does not necessarily mean that their needs change. As outlined above there was strong support for developing a multi agency approach to post adoption support services and a central point of contact for adopters to access services would be beneficial.

**Professionals working with adopted children/ families:**

**- What action is needed to ensure that delays in the adoption process can be kept to a minimum?**

Panel & professionals identified key actions to reduce delay as:

Reducing court delays and number of assessments and expert reports.

Removing specific details of care planning from court arena and place the responsibilities back with the local authority.

Reducing court requests for placement “dry runs” for children, particularly those with relatively straightforward needs.

Development of National Adoption Register for Wales and/or closer working between consortia to ensure resources are shared and needs identified.

National targeted recruitment campaigns.

Development of specialist Assessment & Care Management Workers to focus on completion of the adoption work for the child including life story work and Child Assessment Reports for Adoption.

**- What action is needed to increase the number of successful outcomes once children are considered for adoption?**

Panel and professionals felt that the development of Post Adoption Support Teams & services across all agencies was vital and that these services are much more developed in England. It was also felt that the mechanisms to reduce disruption, such as the development of Life Appreciation days should be embedded into practice.

**- How effective has the Welsh Government been at monitoring adoptions and tracking the progress for the child and parents?**

Professionals working in the field were not clear as to the measures which had been put in place to monitor adoptions and track progress except via the triennial inspection regime. The end of year statistical return figures capture some data but they do not give a clear profile of need or the reasons for delay in children being adopted.

**- Do you have any specific examples of good practice in the delivery of adoption services, and/or examples of where action is needed to remove barriers to adoption?**

Currently RCT is providing training for prospective adopters in collaboration with two other authorities to ensure that it can be offered every two months thus reducing the waiting time for applicants significantly. It is also felt that a review of the financial support available to adopters would reduce inequalities between agencies and encourage applicants from a wider range of backgrounds.

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