

Children and Young People Committee

Inquiry into Adoption

Pre-consultation response
from North Wales Adoption Service

Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu

Gogledd Cymru



North Wales
Adoption
Service

Adeiladau'r Goron, 31 Stryt Caer, Wrecsam, LL20 8CC
Crown Buildings, 31 Chester Street, Wrexham, LL11 1AB
www.northwalesadoption.gov.uk

Y Cwmni/Enn Cyf

Our Ref/Ein Cyf

Date/Dyddiad

Ask for/Gofynner
am

Direct Dial/Rhif
Union

E-mail/E-bost

18 November 2011

Audrey Somerton-Edwards

01978 295360

**Audrey.somerton-
edwards@wrexham.gov.uk**

For the attention of the Clerk of the Inquiry into Adoption:

North Wales Adoption Service is the collaborative adoption agency covering the North Wales area. The amalgamation of adoption services from Ynys Mon, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham, Gwynedd and Conwy became operational on 1 April 2010.

Wrexham are hosting the service with staff located in each of the counties. Staff are seconded to the service by their appointing local authority, who remain the employer. There are twenty two staff including social workers, Training Officer, Recruitment Officer, administrative staff, Team Manager and two Deputy Team Managers.

Wrexham and Flintshire Adoption Panels have now merged, with Conwy and Denbighshire currently making the transition to a joint arrangement.

What is the main issue of concern in relation to adoption in Wales?

Whilst we uphold the principal of seeking adoptive placements that can facilitate direct contact between children and their birth families where appropriate, this requirement can cause unacceptable delay in placing children. Many adopters are unwilling to accept and or facilitate direct contact as evidenced in a recent case where 37 families were visited without success as none were prepared to agree to direct contact with birth family following placement. This matter will now be going back to court causing further delay for the children involved.

It is our experience that delay in placing some children is not caused by the shortage of adopters but rather their unwillingness to facilitate and manage direct contact with birth parents. However, adopters are more

willing to support direct contact with siblings who are also adopted. They are less amenable to the idea of supporting arrangements to maintain complicated contact arrangements which involve children who remain at home or in foster care and still have contact with their parents.

Delays in matching children may result in legal challenge for revocation of the Placement Order.

Once an Adoption Order is made, some adopters choose not to continue with direct contact. This can be distressing to birth parents whose expectations have been raised often following very lengthy care proceedings.

When there are contested hearings, standard practice appears to be to instruct Expert Witnesses to undertake further assessments. This is often unnecessary and causes considerable delay and extra expense. The courts and their officers need to give more weight to the assessments undertaken within adoption agencies to address this problem.

If you had to choose one objective for the committee to focus on, what would it be? How would this benefit adopted children and adoptive parents?

The issue of adoption is far too complex to reduce to a single issue.

The funding of adoption services and the support required post adoption needs a radical review. In the current economic climate local authorities are struggling to attract the right adoptive parents to match the children with the most complex needs and provide an appropriate level of financial support. In these cases tend to be those in most need of financial and therapeutic support, all of which are very costly to provide. It is a concern that the health input to meet therapeutic needs is very limited and where there is a lack of provision the costs of providing this specialist service reverts to the local authority. One proposal to resolve this issue is for central government to provide financial support to adoptive families on placement to enable them to purchase the support they need and ensure stability of the placement. An All Wales Adoption Service, centrally financed may alleviate the conflict that often occurs between local authorities, health and education for meeting the costs of children with complex needs who are placed for adoption in their area.

Furthermore, the children who currently wait longest such as older children, children with disabilities and large sibling groups, may become a more viable option for adoptive parents if they were to receive sufficient financial support to allow one parent to stay at home to care for them.

Children and Young People Committee

Inquiry into Adoption

Pre-consultation response from North Wales Adoption Service

For children who cannot be placed within local resources the costs of other agency fees is far too costly and places extra burden on local authorities at a time when budgets are under pressure.

Do you agree with the priorities for the committee to focus on/y is there anything you think is missing that should be included in the inquiry?

The priorities for the committee are in line with the issues encountered by North Wales Adoption Service.

Partner of Parent adoptions are an issue that absorb time and resources and are often dealt with as a lower priority. If legislation enabled local authorities to charge for this service the costs could be recovered to ensure spending is focused on the children who are in the looked after system.

The strict, inflexible regulatory requirements for Adoption Panels to be quorate can mean that full agenda's have to be abandoned on the day when one member is ill. The volume of information for Panel has increased significantly, post Re:B, and places a heavy demand on Adoption Panel Members.

If the number of children currently being placed for adoption continues to increase, it is likely that Adoption Panels will need to meet more frequently to combat the risk of delay.

The documentation used in the adoption process, most notably the Childs Assessment Report for Adoption, is repetitive and not easy to read. In general the ICS documentation is problematic and a source of frustration to child care social workers. A revised uniform format would be beneficial should an All Wales Adoption Service be developed.

Prepared by Audrey Somerton-Edwards, Head of Service, Corporate Parenting, Wrexham County Borough Council

