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**Barnardo's
Cymru**

**SUPPLEMENTARY EVIDENCE TO THE CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE'S INQUIRY
INTO ADOPTION IN WALES**

**THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A
NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE**

SUBMITTED BY:

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Introduction

Barnardo's Cymru broadly welcomes the Welsh Government's proposal to establish a National Adoption Service for Wales. We recognise that there are clearly elements of the current adoption system which need substantial improvement and that, when these are considered alongside the findings of the Family Justice Review, there is now a compelling case for change. We, therefore, support the Welsh Government's view that the proposed changes and the introduction of a Welsh Adoption Service would lead to improved outcomes for adopted children and young people.

However, whilst supporting much of the Government's proposal, as a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) we are concerned about the lack of recognition and value given in the Social Services Bill to the voluntary sector's long-standing experience and expertise in providing and supporting successful adoptions in Wales. Barnardo's Cymru has been providing adoptions in Wales for over thirty years and, as outlined in the body of our main submission to the Committee, we have expertise which brings clear added value to such areas as adoption placements for children with complex needs, for children from specific religious and ethnic backgrounds and post adoption support.

Although we acknowledge that the great bulk of adoption work in Wales is undertaken by local authorities, we believe that VAAs, such as Barnardo's, offer a range of additional services which contribute important components to the overall adoption picture in Wales and we would, therefore, hope to see a much greater acknowledgement of the role and value of agencies, such as ours, incorporated into the more detailed drafting of the Bill in the autumn and via any subsequent regulations.

Responses to specific points in Section 6.1 of the Bill

- **6.1.2:** We would see VAAs, such as Barnardo's Cymru Adoption Service, as being very much a part of the proposed arrangement for a collaboration of services in a wider 'National Adoption body'.
- **6.1.3:** Like the Welsh Government, we are also looking to 'act sooner, more efficiently and effectively to find permanency' and, to this end, we have established a 'family finding' service that covers the whole of Wales and which has resulted in improved target times for linking and matching placements. We would be keen to further develop these links with local authorities to support this process in any new Wales-wide adoption arrangements.

- **6.1.4:** We would be fully supportive of the 'legislative changes arising from the Family Justice Review' which will seek to introduce 'specific timetables for cases and the removal of some panels'.
- **6.1.5:** Bucking the trend alluded to in this section, we have seen an actual increase in the number of enquiries we have had from prospective adopters over the last six months. This may be a reflection of some applicants preferring to work with a voluntary as opposed to a statutory adoption agency. We often have our history and reputation quoted to us as a factor in prospective adopters choosing to come to us.
- We agree with the Government's view that post adoption services 'are patchy throughout Wales' and we are pleased that this area of service deficit has been acknowledged. This has been a concern of ours for some time as, for a number of years, we have found it extremely difficult to access local authority funding for post adoption support – despite the obvious correlation between such support and placement stability. Barnardo's Cymru would be keen, therefore, to work in partnership with other agencies to pool resources so as to improve the post adoption support made available to families. The recently BAAF formed Wales Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership (of which we are a member VAA) will be a vehicle for promoting the profile of VAAs in Wales and should also provide opportunities for cross agency working in the future.
- **6.1.6:** The Strategic Voluntary Adoption Partnership will be well placed to offer a wide range of adoption services in a coordinated way to contribute to the meeting of the responsibilities of the National Adoption Service proposed in this section.
- **6.1.7:** We agree with the Welsh Government's proposal that each local authority would continue to be an adoption agency etc, in the new arrangements.
- **6.1.8:** We would hope to see greater recognition of VAAs in the detail of regulations and a clear role we can play in contributing to the new arrangements.
- **6.1.9:** Again, we would wish to see explicit reference to the role and function of VAAs under the National Adoption Service.
- **6.1.10:** We have very experienced adoption staff within the Barnardo's Cymru Adoption Service and we welcome the view that experienced practitioners 'will be the backbone of the new service', as this applies equally to our staff as it does to those of local authorities.

- **6.1.12:** We very much welcome the reference in this section to 'third sector agencies' having a 'key role in supporting the national aim through improved partnership with local government in the delivery of adoption and adoption support services'. We would also hope that what we can offer as a collective of VAAs would merit us having a strategic position within the National Adoption Service and not just be kept on the periphery waiting for our services to be commissioned. We believe our experience and expertise warrants this.
- **6.1.13:** Our view is that the voluntary sector brings particular experience in areas such as marketing, family finding, lifelong support, etc, which will only serve to increase the overall robustness of placements and subsequently positive outcomes for children. These are examples of the added value VAAs bring to adoption.

Responses to consultation questions

88. Do you agree the functions that a National Adoption Service will be responsible for, as set out in paragraph bb?

Yes, we agree with these functions but, again, we would like to see much greater recognition of the role played and the expertise provided by the voluntary sector via the Voluntary Adoption Agencies in Wales. In our view, the VAAs can make a significant contribution to ensuring the new arrangements are a success but we need to be involved throughout in the more detailed planning for the National Adoption Service.

In addition to bringing considerable experience in the field of adoption, the Barnardo's Cymru Adoption Service is also independent of placing authorities and this is often seen as a positive by potential adopters. We are told by adoptive parents that they find it easy to engage with us and that our services are accessible and welcoming. Because of the extensive range and number of Barnardo's Cymru services operating in many communities across Wales (currently 90+ services in total), we are very well placed to provide an easy-to-find 'front door' for both recruitment and adoption support. We are also very experienced at working across geographical and professional boundaries – and our expertise in family support is both respected and well regarded.

Therefore, given the contribution Barnardo's Cymru (and other VAAs) currently make to the adoption system in Wales, we would hope to be involved and included in any future strategic planning for the National Adoption Service so that we can play our part in delivering better outcomes for the children and young people who need to be placed with adoptive families.

89. Do you suggest any additional functions that should be included?

If the new arrangements lead to the development of a National Adoption Register for Wales, consideration would then need to be given to what would be the most appropriate and effective mechanisms to make it work. A number of areas would need to be addressed, for example:

- How would such a register operate across the current consortia arrangements we have in Wales?
- What systems would need to be developed to ensure the best matching and linking of children and young people to adoptive families?
- How would we ensure that adoption agencies (both local authority and VAA) do not just place with their own carers but, instead, ensure that the best possible match is pursued?
- How will adoption fees be set and paid?

Whilst we do not see these as insurmountable problems, we do believe careful thought and consideration needs to be given to them if we are to make sure that the changes we make, to what is a complex system, will result in the improvements we all seek.

90. Are there any other barriers to the current arrangements that should be considered in the development of the Social Services (Wales) Bill?

Again, as alluded to earlier in this response, we would like to see a much greater recognition of the role, strength and range of functions already provided by current VAAs in Wales and a clear acknowledgement of the role organisations, such as Barnardo's Cymru, can play in the developments and delivery of a National Adoption Agency.

91. Do you have any other comments that you wish to make about our proposals for a National Adoption Service?

In addition to our comments above, we would also propose that consideration is given to the provision of support to birth relatives and adopted adults, along with reunion and intermediary work.

Conclusion

- Barnardo's Cymru acknowledges the need and momentum for change in the delivery of adoption and supports the Welsh Government's proposal for a National Adoption Service. As outlined in our evidence to the Children and Young People Committee, we believe this has the potential to lead to:

- a harmonisation of adoption practice across Wales
 - an improved process which will enable children and young people to be matched with the best possible adoptive families
 - an improved and coordinated approach to the provision of post adoptive support (both in range and availability)
 - an increased level of resourcing to provide the necessary support and status to this vital area of social work
 - more consistent processes and improved standards of practice across Wales.
- We believe adoption reform should progress in tandem with the implementation of the Family Justice Review's recommendations.
 - Reform of the adoption process in Wales should take into account the role currently played by VAAs and the 'additionality' voluntary organisations, such as Barnardo's Cymru, bring to the delivery of adoption services. To ensure our adoption expertise is acknowledged and built upon, we believe VAAs should be offered a strategic position within any reform planning processes.

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