

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 02 November 2020
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Healthy Living and Social Care
Report Title:	National Adoption Service Partnership Agreement
Purpose of Report:	To seek agreement for the Vale of Glamorgan Council to enter into a Partnership Agreement with the National Adoption Service
Report Owner:	Cabinet Member – Social Care and Health
Responsible Officer:	Director of Social Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	The Partnership Agreement has been circulated to relevant Officers and Elected Members
Policy Framework:	This report is for Executive decision by Cabinet
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This report seeks agreement for the Vale of Glamorgan Council to enter into a Partnership Agreement with the National Adoption Service (NAS). • The National Adoption Service was established in 2014. It is comprised of five Regional Adoption Collaboratives (covering the 22 local authorities) and two voluntary adoption agencies. • The original operating model of the NAS, based upon functional delivery, was agreed by ADSS Cymru, WLGA and approved by the Deputy Minister for Social Services in April 2013. This outlined how national and regional services were to be delivered and it has formed the basis of the service to date. • In 2015 the governance structure at a national and regional level was prescribed in regulation by implementation of The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 (hereon referred to as Directions). • The Partnership Agreement is a non-legal agreement which sets out the terms, roles, responsibilities and conditions of the relationship between partners. It determines the powers and duties of each partner, enabling compliance with the Directions. • The Partnership Agreement sets out the governance structure for each Regional Collaborative in terms of a Joint Committee, Regional Management Board and Operational Group. This mirrors the structure already in place in our regional Collaborative (Vale, Valleys and Cardiff (VVC)). 	

- The Partnership Agreement sets a basis for the NAS role in commissioning services to support adoption. This role has evolved as national priorities for service improvement have been developed. An example of this is that the NAS formulated the bid for the £2.3 million Adoption Support Grant for 2020-21 in conjunction with regional services and Welsh Government has agreed that the NAS will administer and monitor the grant against the national priorities.
- There is an expectation that each of the 22 local authorities in Wales will sign the Partnership Agreement which will initially be in place for five years. To this end, the Partnership Agreement has been disseminated to each of our partner authorities within Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Collaborative namely RCT, Merthyr Tydfil CBC and Cardiff Council. To date, Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff Council and RCT have agreed to sign the Agreement.
- The Partnership Agreement was approved by NAS Governance Board on 25th September 2020. ADSS Cymru and WLGA will manage the process for signing the Agreement.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet agree to the Vale of Glamorgan Council entering into the Partnership Agreement with the National Adoption Service.
2. That Cabinet delegate authority to the Director of Social Services to sign the agreement.
3. That update reports on the working of the Partnership to be presented to both Cabinet and the Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To approve the Agreement and governance structure for Vale, Valleys and Cardiff and provide greater consistency in working relationships with regional partners.
2. To ensure that the Vale of Glamorgan is part of the Partnership Agreement.
3. To provide Cabinet and the Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee with regular updates on the work of the Partnership.

1. Background

- 1.1 The National Adoption Service was established in 2014 following an identified need to improve adoption services in Wales. The original model of service delivery developed by ADSS Cymru and WLGA outlined those functions which could be delivered nationally, regionally and at a local authority level.
- 1.2 Since this time a range of services have been developed and the NAS has led in setting priorities for improvement and monitoring performance against these priorities.
- 1.3 In 2015, the Director's Powers provided a regulatory basis for the regional arrangements outlining governance and reporting requirements both nationally and regionally.
- 1.4 In 2018 ADSS Cymru and WLGA commissioned the Institute of Public Care (IPC) to undertake a review of the governance structure of the NAS at a national level. This resulted in a combined Governance Board being established comprised of lead Cabinet Members and senior officers from each of the host authorities of the Regional Collaboratives, the host authority for the NAS central team, the voluntary sector and other key stakeholders.
- 1.5 IPC were also asked to look at how the service should function in the future to ensure greater consistency across regional services maintaining a focus upon enhancing and improving service delivery. The Partnership Agreement is the culmination of this work.
- 1.6 The Partnership Agreement embodies this work and provides a non-legal agreement for how regional services should be structured and how the NAS will

function going forward. It builds upon the functional model and sets out the powers and duties of each partner as outlined in the Directions.

- 1.7** The recommended regional governance structure within the Agreement mirrors the structure already in place within VVC. Since its inception in 2015 VVC's governance structure has been by way of a Joint Committee comprised of Lead Members and Heads of Service from each of the partner authorities and a Management Board. The Management Board is chaired by a Director from one of the partner authorities on a rotational basis and is comprised of Heads of Service from each of the authorities, a Health, Education and voluntary sector representative. The Regional Adoption Manager reports to both these bodies.
- 1.8** VVC established an Operational Group in 2018. This is comprised of senior operational leads for adoption from within the partner authorities and VVC managers. This group reports to the Management Board. This structure is underpinned by VVC's Legal Agreement.
- 1.9** In 2019, Cabinet approved a Deed of Variation to the Legal Agreement to include the Operational Group. VVC's structure fully complies with the recommended structure in the Partnership Agreement.
- 1.10** In 2019, Welsh Government awarded £2.3 million to regions to improve adoption services. During the first year the grant was dispersed to regions via the host authority. This year NAS developed, in conjunction with regional services, a business case and bid to Welsh Government in respect of the grant allocation to enable this to be managed and monitored centrally. The Partnership Agreement provides an acknowledgement of the NAS role in this and in future commissioning arrangements to meet priorities.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** The Partnership Agreement sets out a non-legal agreement of expectations but does not pose significant challenges for the Vale of Glamorgan Council or VVC in meeting such expectations.
- 2.2** VVC already has in place the recommended governance structure and this is fully embedded in the region.
- 2.3** In order to promote effective regional working and liaison with the NAS, an agreed regional position in respect of the Partnership Agreement would be beneficial.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The legal framework for the establishment of the Regional Collaboratives is set in the Part 3 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 as amended by the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014.
- 3.2** The principles upon which the NAS and VVC are based are aligned closely with the Five Ways of Working and the Council's Well-being objectives. The provision

of an adoption service is a statutory function which serves to ensure that all children requiring adoptive placements are provided with this opportunity.

- 3.3** The ability to work together with partners in a collaborative way is fully embodied in NAS and in regional working. Collaborative working has enabled resources to be pooled creating efficiencies and providing a more efficient, standardised adoption service for children, prospective adopters and others affected by adoption.
- 3.4** The Partnership Agreement has been developed to clarify expectations, roles and responsibilities to enable service improvement and greater efficiency to benefit all requiring an adoption service.
- 3.5** IPC consulted with a range of stakeholders in preparing the Partnership Agreement to ensure that their views were taken into account.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** There are no financial considerations associated with the Partnership Agreement.

Employment

- 4.2** There are no employment considerations.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** The legal basis for the National Adoption Service and Regional Collaboratives is set out in Part 3 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and in the Directions.
- 4.4** There are no direct legal implications arising from this report as the proposed Partnership Agreement is not a legally binding Agreement.

5. Background Papers



Gwasanaeth
Mabwysiadu
Cenedlaethol

National
Adoption
Service

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

**NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE IN
WALES
PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT
FINAL**

(V1: September 2020; to be reviewed 2025)

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THIS AGREEMENT IS MADE ON [XXXX] 2020 hereon referred to as the 'commencement date'

BETWEEN:

- (1) Each of the 22 Local Authorities listed in Schedule 1 of this Agreement,
 - (2) Each of the 5 Regional Lead Local Authority Officers in representing the broader membership of the regional collaborative/s and in particular in relation to sections 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 as these apply to their roles,
 - (3) Director of Operations – National Adoption Service (NAS) in representing NAS as a whole and in particular sections 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 as these apply the role,
 - (4) Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
- each is a "Partner" and together, the "Partners".

1 Interpretation

- 1.1 In this Agreement unless the context otherwise requires:
 - 1.1.1 References to a statute or statutory provision shall be construed as a reference to the same as from time to time amended, consolidated, modified, extended, re-enacted or replaced. Any reference to a statutory provision shall include any subordinate legislation made from time to time under that provision;
 - 1.1.2 The headings are for convenience only and shall not affect the interpretation of any provision of this Agreement;
 - 1.1.3 Any phrase introduced by the words "including", "includes", "in particular" or "for example" or similar shall be construed as illustrative and shall not limit the generality of the related general words;
 - 1.1.4 "Writing" or "written" includes e-mail (provided that an error-free transmission report is received by the sender and no notification of malfunction or failure of transmission is received by the sender); and
 - 1.1.5 Definitions of all acronyms are contained within the Directions document referred to below and embedded in this Agreement and will therefore not be repeated here

2 Introduction

2.1 A Partnership Agreement (hereon referred to as the 'Agreement') is a non-legal contract between partners in a partnership which sets out the terms, roles, responsibilities and conditions of the relationships between the partners. It describes the powers and duties of each partner and how the parties will work together to exercise their powers and comply with the National Assembly Directions for the National Adoption Service for Wales (NAS), 'The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Arrangements) (Wales) Directions 2015 (hereon referred to as 'Directions').

<https://gov.wales/adoption-and-children-act-2002-joint-adoption-arrangements-wales-directions-2015-no12>

<https://llyw.cymru/cyfarwyddydau-deddf-mabwysiadu-phlant-2002-cyd-drefniadau-mabwysiadu-cymru-2015-rhif-12>

2.2 This Agreement is between the local government partners in the National Adoption Service (NAS). It builds on and updates the original work undertaken in setting up the NAS via a document entitled 'Proposals for Achieving a National Adoption in Wales and Development of the Functional Model', dated 15/04/13. It is important to recognise that this agreement sits within a wider collaborative service arrangement that includes others including, importantly, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies that operate in Wales, Health and Education.

2.3 NAS was created to improve adoption services in Wales by ensuring consistent, good quality services are available in all parts of the country. This is underpinned by National Assembly Directions as noted above.

2.4 This Agreement lays out how 'business gets done' in delivering the optimal model and vision for NAS in terms of what it was set up to do i.e. '*creating a modern, responsive and forward thinking adoption service for Wales*' which fulfils the Directions and in turn will deliver the following business priorities:

- Increasing the number and range of adoptive homes available so that all children with an adoption plan are placed in a timely way;
- Ensuring prospective and approved adopters receive good quality, timely assessment and support;
- Implementing the National Adoption Service Framework for Adoption Support to provide improved access to advice, information and services for those that need and want support;
- Achieving overall improvements in the performance of adoption services across Wales.

2.5 The Agreement seeks to reflect both the significant amount of work, commitment and progress NAS has made over the last few years, as well as

signifying a 'gear change' to support NAS achieving its optimal model by incorporating a commissioning approach.

3 Term

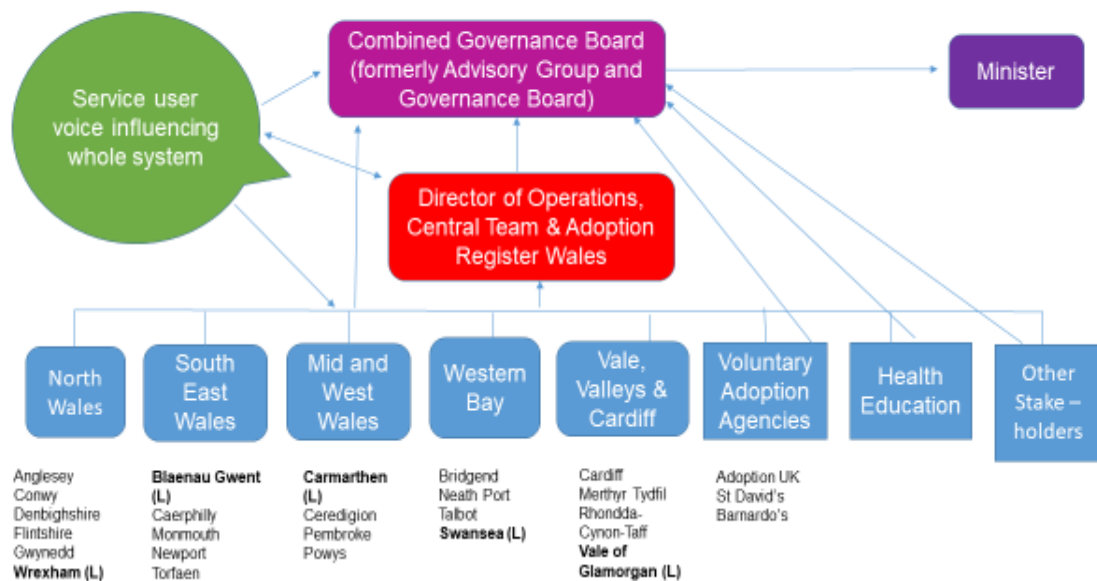
- 3.1 The Agreement shall commence on the Commencement Date and continue in full force and effect for the Initial Term unless otherwise agreed by the Partners.
- 3.2 All obligations arising from the 2015 Directions shall continue on the Commencement Date and the obligations of the Partners in respect of NAS shall be governed by this Agreement.
- 3.3 At the end of the Initial Term, this Agreement may be extended by the Parties for further five year periods (each, a Renewal Term) subject to the 'Directions' remaining in force. The Directions require local authorities in Wales to remain part of this arrangement; change to this will be subject to further Welsh Government legislation. Proposals to change the regional collaborations must be actioned in accordance with section 7 (p) of the Directions i.e. by notifying in writing the Chair of the regional management committee and the Chair of the NAS Governance Board. The NAS Director of Operations should be included in that correspondence.

4 The Partnership Context

- 4.1 NAS operates in a complex multi-agency partnership context with a range of different interfaces between the national/regional and local, political and professional, statutory and voluntary and the voices/experiences of people accessing and using adoption services in Wales.
- 4.2 The work to create and develop NAS to its current better understood and more confident position, has been achieved through collective endeavour involving local government through the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSS-C), local councils in Wales, the Welsh Government, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) in Wales and other stakeholders and partners. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) provides the funding and contracts with the host local authority for NAS national functions on behalf of all local authorities. Together with ADSS-C, they are the lead bodies for NAS because of their respective representative and leadership roles for local government and social care in Wales respectively.
- 4.3 Fundamentally, NAS is a local government led collaborative which works closely and in collaboration within a wider partnership of a range of key stakeholders. This includes the Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA's) that operate in Wales and importantly the voice of service users, who have a significant role in influencing the governance arrangements – see structure chart below. The intention of this Agreement is to provide further clarity and understanding of the local government elements of these arrangements

within the wider partnership and in moving NAS to its next phase of development.

The diagram below shows NAS in a format that resembles a traditional organisation. This reflects how it would wish to operate whilst acknowledging that it is in fact a collaborative which comprises of a number of sub-collaboratives at regional level.



5 Working Styles and Behaviours

5.1 In continuing to build a single culture across adoption services which provides 'the glue' for the complex multiple range of stakeholders that make up NAS, it's important to agree working styles and behaviours which all partners sign up to and adopt. The following styles and behaviours have been agreed by the Combined Governance Board (GB) which includes all partners and it is anticipated that Regional Management Boards (RMB's), managers / staff working in the adoption functions that remain at Local Authority level, staff in VAA's and other partners agencies do likewise. All have agreed to adopt the following styles and behaviours in delivering a high quality national adoption service and will underpin how all stakeholders undertake their role:

- **Leadership** – within the organisation represented and in NAS meetings
- **Partnership** – evidencing a commitment to collaborative working in recognition that this delivers improved outcomes for children and families
- **Compliance** – with the systems and processes in place which are there to ensure consistency and safety of approach
- **Accountability** – so that everyone understands the location of their role and its unique contribution to the wider system of adoption services

- **Intelligent data use** – maximum benefit is drawn from the data collected to both highlight and share good practice but also to surface areas for service and practice improvement
- **Engagement with all stakeholders** – a commitment to the fundamental principle that NAS is built on the basis of high levels of engagement and co-operation between all stakeholders as well as with adopters, adoptees and others that receive services
- **Performance and service improvement** – through commitment to continuous performance monitoring, areas for service improvement which is quickly identified and acted upon
- **Best practice and continuous improvement** – identification and sharing of best practice is the best route to continuous service improvement
- **Professional advice to Ministers, Welsh Government and key partners** – identification and formulation of sound advice.

5.2 In order to achieve these behaviours the following working styles are necessary:

- Partners are required to work in a **collaborative way**, with strong support, constructive challenge, shared learning and accountability.
- All communications and meetings are arranged as **constructive spaces** to tackle issues collectively.
- Accountability is tested against **commitments by each partner** in the delivery against strategic commitments set out in the Annual Plan.
- Business meetings aim for **consensus agreements** based on collective responsibility, but revert to majority view if necessary.
- Agenda and **communications** between members of meetings will be **conducted in a professional but cordial manner** with minimal formality.
- Meetings will endeavour to ensure that the sometimes **complex stakeholder relationships**, which members need to refer to, **will be recognised**.

6 The role of commissioning in the NAS context

6.1 Central to NAS's ongoing maturity as an organisation is the development of its commissioning skills and capacity specifically in relation to the business priorities identified in 2.4. All partners and stakeholders have a role to play.

6.2 NAS Central Team will increasingly lead this through its work, initially by linking new funding or investment e.g. Welsh Government investment or grants as appropriate, through the creation of a commissioning fund to progress the aims and priorities of NAS. This is based on data and the quantitative / qualitative intelligence collected and analysed through the central team of NAS to enable NAS to commission directly, or influence

commissioning decisions more strategically both within NAS and with partners such as the Welsh VAA's, to deliver its priorities.

- 6.3 **NAS Central Team:** based on the best available intelligence around needs and resources will recommend to the Governance Board commissioning priority areas to be included in the NAS business plan/s which aims to achieve agreed optimal adoption service models. On agreement, they will lead a commissioning project through to delivery, including allocating resources, purchasing services and monitoring impact alongside its substantive role in scrutinising delivery and development. This will include agreeing specific responsibilities with each region and VAA.
- 6.4 **Governance Board:** will scrutinise and challenge the intelligence put before them before signing off commissioning priorities. The Board will then oversee the implementation of the priorities ensuring they are delivering improved outcomes for children, young people and their families accessing adoption services directly or indirectly.
- 6.5 **Regional Management Boards:** will agree as part of their regional plan their business priorities, drawing on the nationally agreed priorities, as well as how the resources needed will be provided. This is likely to include accessing the national commissioning resources as well as requiring a financial commitment of each local authority and / or the regional budget. RMB's will oversee planning by the regional service, in partnership with the central team, to undertake pan Wales or regional projects ensuring they can provide the agreed level of input, including regional finance, to projects / service development. RMB's will report on delivery / outcomes to the NAS Governance Board, through central team, as well as influence the content and priorities of the national plan / commissioning fund.
- 6.6 The strategic commissioning function of the central team of NAS in respect of adoption services will support regions and partners to:
- Identify service gaps and development needs through analysis of information and feedback;
 - Assist with strategic outcomes focussed planning and decommissioning;
 - Support consistency of practice and ensure service user voices and experiences shape commissioning decisions.
 - Develop bespoke contract service specifications for tender;
 - Manage and monitoring of framework performance to assess impact of commissioning decisions

6.7 These functions may be amended by the Governance Board, following consultation with partners, during the term of the Agreement in order to meet the changing needs and requirements of the service needs and its Partners.

7 Roles and Responsibilities of Partners

7.1 Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSS-C)

7.1.1 The WLGA, alongside the ADSS-C, are the lead body for NAS and provides the funding for its national functions. On behalf of all 22 LA's, WLGA will hold a contract with Cardiff Council for the hosting of the central team and the provision of the support services that enables it to operate. This is likely to be through a Joint Committee within its own governance arrangements.

7.1.2 ADSS-C provides professional and strategic leadership of social care services in Wales, representing the collective view of all twenty-two local authorities' social services departments across Wales. ADSS-C led the creation of the original functional model for NAS and shares leadership for NAS. The ADSS-C Lead Director for Children has an active role in supporting the co-ordination of the social care leadership across regions and local authorities.

7.2 Host Authority

7.2.1 In line with the requirement in the 'Directions' for there to be a 'Host' local authority for the national level functions of the NAS, Cardiff Council was chosen, through a competitive process, to be the Host Authority. The Host Authority is represented on the NAS Governance Board politically through the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and by the lead senior officer, the Director of Social Services.

7.2.2 The role of the Host Authority includes appointing the Director and central team staff as well as supporting and enabling the national level functions of NAS many of which are outlined in the 'Directions' including receiving the NAS core budget, which is a 'top slice' from the Revenue Support Grant, and any other finance such as grant aid for NAS. Since 2015 the NAS, through the central team and supported by Cardiff Council, have managed the Adoption Register for Wales under contract from the Welsh Government.

7.2.3 Cardiff Council's hosting of the central team includes the following:

- Office space
- Use of its IT systems and databases, including provision of a separate email domain and support to commission a stand-alone website
- Finance / accounting services
- Information security, ensuring it's compliance with changing legislation
- Advising on workforce planning and supporting human resource issues
- Support with legal/procurement services as and when required

- 7.2.4 Cardiff Council agrees to use all reasonable endeavours to maintain the availability of the Host Services that it provides to NAS within the contract with WLGA referred to in paragraph 7.1.1.
- 7.2.5 Any significant changes to the provision of the Host Services shall be agreed between the Host Authority, WLGA and ultimately the NAS Governance Board.

7.3 **Combined Governance Board (GB)**

- 7.3.1 The former Advisory Group and Governance Board are now combined to create a single Governance Board, hereon referred to as the 'Board'. The GB is the decision making body for NAS as outlined in the 'Directions'. The overall role of the Board is to provide strategic direction and decisions to facilitate the delivery and improvement of adoption services across Wales through the National Adoption Service arrangements. The full range of the Boards responsibilities are laid out in the Terms of Reference and the 'Directions'.



FINAL V3 NAS
Combined Governanc

Its primary strategic responsibilities are:

- To provide political and professional leadership and advice to inform the overall strategic direction of the NAS and adoption services in Wales
- To hold the Regional Collaborative/s (and their services), the Director of Operations and central team, the VAA's and other services accountable for the delivery and performance of their services within the NAS arrangements.
- To approve, as prepared by the Director of Operations / Central Team:
 - ✓ An annual programme of work for the NAS.
 - ✓ A half year and full year progress report for the Minister for Health and Social Services and the Welsh Government.
 - ✓ The budget and financial management arrangements of services and the office of the Director of Operations.
- To support the delivery of adoption services through the NAS arrangements to ensure it reflects the best possible practice and is based on a culture of continuous improvement.
- To notify Welsh Ministers of any issues regarding the National Adoption Service which it considers need to be drawn to their attention

7.4 **Regional Management Boards (RMB's)**

- 7.4.1 Each region is made up of a number of specified local authority areas which form the 'regional collaborative' overseen by Regional Management Boards (RMB's). Their primary role is to coordinate adoption activities best delivered at the regional level and to implement decisions and strategies from the GB; they may also have other roles determined by the legal agreement for their

collaborative. RMB's oversee service performance, delivery and development across the regional collaborative. There should be robust links between RMB's, the NAS Governance Board and the Central Team.



Sample RMC ToR for
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- 7.4.2 Under the Directions RMB's are required to produce an annual report to be submitted to the Director of Operations by 31st May each year, to include:
- The performance of the regional collaborative against the performance measures in the National Performance Management Framework
 - An analysis of the implementation of the annual work programme and plans to address any under-performance
 - Plans to develop the adoption service within the region in accordance with the national business priorities
 - Information regarding the resolution of complaints and determination of disputes at local and regional level and any impact on the provision of adoption services
- 7.4.3 Members of RMB's are drawn from across the adoption sector and bring a range of different qualities and experiences to regional strategy and delivery. They have specific roles and responsibilities including:
- To take forward, from their representatives on the GB, decisions requiring implementation at regional level
 - To feedback up to the GB any issues requiring consideration at a national level
 - To formally agree (or otherwise) to decisions by the RMB on behalf of a specific organisation or a body of membership and take decisions back to their organisations and services, management / trustee boards (or equivalent) for implementation.
 - To advise the RMB about the implications of a decision or a course of action on behalf of their organisation or body of membership.
 - To advise the RMB on the basis of their relevant professional role or responsibility, personal knowledge and experience.
- 7.4.4 The work of each collaborative and RMB has developed in different ways to suit local arrangements. However, at minimum to strengthen governance from political and professional perspectives, the following should also be in place consistently across Wales:
- 7.4.4.1. **Regional Joint Committees** made up of cabinet leads across a region who meet twice a year to agree plans and resource recommendations via the RMB's. This should include the member that sits on the NAS Governance Board. They support Members being kept fully informed and involved in the strategy, delivery and resourcing of NAS both at regional and national levels. In the event of a situation where a regional Joint Committee cannot be established, an equally robust arrangement to bring the Cabinet Member's with portfolio responsibility for children's social care together across the region, should be put in place to focus on the regional adoption service. Any

such arrangement should be agreed with the Co-Chairs of the Combined Governance Board and the Director of NAS.

- 7.4.4.2. **Regional Operation Groups** which bring key managers from each local authority together to oversee processes, systems and practice issues across the Region to improve consistency and service delivery in their local authorities. The RMB may refer matters for consideration by the ROG and consider reports/ issues of concern highlighted by them.

7.5 **Regional Lead Authority**

- 7.5.1 Each region has a Lead Authority which co-ordinates the work of adoption within that region. Broadly, each host Authority will fulfil the following functions:

- Provide leadership in respect of adoption matters at regional and local authority levels to complement and support that provided nationally.
- Provide and develop the range of operational activities necessary for the adoption functions outlined in their partnership agreement e.g. assessment and approval of adopters, matching and placement of children, adoption support to a range of people and intermediary advice / services.
- Ensure appropriate staffing, equipment, services and accommodation etc. are available to carry out the range of agreed adoption functions
- Making appropriate arrangements to finance, audit and scrutinise the regional service.
- Establish the RMB in line with regulations including that the views and experience of service users are taken into account in carrying out the regional functions.
- Ensure appropriate and robust links to each Local Authority Children's Services Department within the Region are in place to support their delivery of the adoption functions they retain for children so that a seamless services in line with best practice for children and adoptive families is delivered.
- Ensure compliance with legislation, regulations and the performance management framework and strategy set by the Governance Board.
- Report on a regular basis to the Director of Operations and in turn to the Governance Board.
- Provide appropriate senior manager and political representation on the Governance Board.

7.6 Role of Directors of Social Services (DSS)

- 7.6.1 To provide strategic leadership to the implementation of the optimal model for adoption services in their Local Authority area including actively engaging with RMB's in overseeing this.
- 7.6.2 Advocating on behalf of NAS in different partnership decision making bodies which have a bearing and influence on adoption services
- 7.6.3 Ensuring the engagement and oversight of lead politicians in the work of the adoption collaborative including its inclusion in appropriate arrangements e.g. corporate parenting, strategic planning, scrutiny and reporting,

7.7 Role of Lead Local Authority Heads of Children Services

- 7.7.1 This role, usually undertaken by the Head of Service / Assistant Director, holds the following responsibilities and expectations:
 - Providing strategic and senior level operational leadership for the development and delivery of service in line with national plans including holding the local authorities of the collaborative to account
 - To represent the service and regional management board within the formal Governance arrangements including the lead Local Authority meeting and other ad hoc meetings as required
 - To contribute to and/or provide advice on national developments and work streams particularly on those areas which have a direct bearing on the wider elements of children's service business.
 - To champion the adoption agenda and the work of the regional adoption collaborative in any partnership decision making bodies and other relevant work linked to and having an influence on adoption services.

7.8 Role of Regional Managers (RAM's)

- 7.8.1 RAM's have a central role to play in overseeing the strategy and delivery of NAS at all levels i.e. national/regional and local. Their core responsibilities are to:
 - Act as operational lead for the regional service ensuring high quality adoption services are being delivered and the optimal model achieved.
 - Create a regional development plan that meets national and regional priorities that is updated and delivered as required.
 - Oversee regional performance analysis and reporting, linking it back into regional service delivery and national analysis.
 - Maintain strong links with the Director of Operations and central team, contributing to national work and working with other RAM's to shape and deliver national priorities across Wales.
 - Maintain relationships with LA's in the collaborative, the Heads of Service and all other stakeholders in support of regional service planning and delivery arrangements.

7.9 **Role of NAS Central Team**

7.9.1 The Director of Operations and central team are appointed by the host authority to fulfil a range of functions related to leadership, management and oversight of the National Adoption Service. Some of these are outlined in the 'Directions' and others have been added as NAS has developed. They include the following:

- Providing leadership to set the direction for NAS including strategic planning by agreeing priorities, targets and resourcing following engagement with partners and stakeholders as well as support to operational planning;
- Reviewing progress including analysis of performance data and service information from the regions and VAA's;
- Providing annual and mid-year reports each year for agreement by the Combined Governance Board and submission to Welsh Ministers as well as to WLGA and ADSS-C where required;
- Providing specific functions to support and enable NAS operations (currently as below)
 - ✓ Establishing and maintaining a website for the National Adoption Service for Wales
 - ✓ Management of the Adoption Register for Wales (under contract from Welsh Government)
 - ✓ Commissioning and contracting national contracts to support service delivery functions and support
 - ✓ Maintaining arrangements for service user engagement across Wales
 - ✓ Leadership, matrix management oversight, advice and support to regions and VAA's
- Promotion of best practice and a culture of continuous improvement throughout the NAS;
- Securing appropriate resourcing through new / additional finance or re-profiling of existing as well as managing the central team allocation, grants and investment;
- Strategic commissioning as outlines in section 6 above
- Maintaining arrangements for national governance and allied sub / task & finish groups to engage stakeholders in carrying out the actions / work agreed by the Combined Governance Board
- Promotion of adoption, including national PR and marketing and the provision of the 'face and voice' of adoption in Wales.
- Stakeholder and relationship management including with allied services and organisations in Wales and UK, Ministers and Welsh Government.

7.10 **Meeting structures and arrangements**

7.10.1 In addition to the Combined Governance Board there are a small number of Working groups and Task and Finish groups that partners to this agreement, and representatives of the wider partnership of NAS, deploy time and

commitment to in order to carry out NAS business. These will vary over time but include:

- Recruitment and marketing
- Performance
- Adoption Support
- Policy and practice
- Adoption Register for Wales
- Life Journey Work Framework

7.10.2 In addition to this the co-ordination of the social care leadership across regions and local authorities is managed through the arrangements below. From time to time either meeting may be attended by other stakeholders from within the wider NAS partnership e.g. VAA's.

7.10.2.1 The **Local Authority Business Meeting** which is chaired by the ASDSS-C Lead Director and attended by lead authority Heads of Children Services /Assistant Directors, Central Team and Regional Adoption Managers. This meeting facilitates the strategic, developmental and resource planning of the NAS, with a particular focus on the local government elements including encouraging best practice and learning, analysis of performance, supporting the involvement of the VAA sector and local authority specific issues.

7.10.2.2 The **Regional Adoption Managers Meeting** attended by the Central Team and Regional Adoption Managers. This meeting supports consistent operational delivery by a focus on implementation of agreed NAS work programmes, tasks allocated by the Local Authority Business Meeting, shared learning and cross regional co-operation.

8 Information sharing, confidentiality and implementing agreed actions

8.1 Partners acknowledge and agree that the effective operation of NAS will require the sharing of information, including on occasions confidential and information of commercial sensitivity.

8.2 Each Partner will work within the policies of its organisation in respect of this, for regional services as set out in their partnership agreement and for the central team those of the Host local authority. Each partner undertakes that it shall not at any time disclose confidential information, both service and individual, to any person concerning any other Partner, except as permitted. Each Partner may disclose any other Partners confidential information to its employees, officers, representatives or advisers who need to know such information for the purposes of exercising that Partners rights or carrying out its obligations under or in connection with this Agreement. Each Partner shall ensure that its employees, officers, representatives or advisers to whom

it discloses any other Partners confidential information comply their respective confidentiality requirements.

- 8.3 In addition to contributing to NAS work partners will have specific responsibilities for communicating key decisions and the views of the Combined Governance Board and RMB's / Trustees to ensure implementation through regions, services and local areas where required as well as inform NAS decisions and strategy.
- 8.4 All partners have a responsibility to share the agreed minutes and public statements of the Combined Governance Board and RMB's / Trustees where appropriate to support implementation and service provision as well as to ensure that views are not misrepresented or taken out of context by others.
- 8.5 In addition, partners should have an understood approach to sharing information and implementing actions from the Board with their respective agencies included in their partnership agreement.

9 Disputes and Complaint Resolution

- 9.1 In the spirit of both the Directions and this Partnership Agreement it's intended that any disputes/complaints within NAS should be communicated and resolved at the earliest possible stage. Adhering to the 'Working Styles and Behaviours', as laid out in section three of this Agreement, will support such an approach.
- 9.2 Oversight of any service related disputes/complaints is the responsibility of the regional collaborative. Regulation 7 of the Directions requires that regional collaboratives must include in their partnership agreement:
- Arrangements for resolving complaints arising out of the exercise of partnership functions, including how to complain and to whom any complaint should be addressed;
 - Arrangements for determining disputes between local authorities arising out of the exercise of partnership functions
- 9.3 Under the 'Directions' RMB's are required within their annual report to the Director of Operations to provide information regarding the resolution of complaints and determination of disputes at local and regional level and any impact on the provision of adoption services.
- 9.4 Complaints and representations in respect of the Central Team will be managed within the processes of the host local authority.

10 Length of Partnership Agreement

- 10.1 This Partnership Agreement will be reviewed within 5 years of its implementation i.e. 2025 which provides sufficient time for the new arrangements to become fully functional and identify any longer term

changes that may then be required. An earlier review may be agreed by the WLGA and ADSS-C, in consultation with the Co-chairs of the Combined Governance Board and the NAS Director, should a compelling need arise.

11 Signatories to the Partnership Agreement

Signed on behalf of **Welsh Local Government Association** (WLGA) by:

Authorised Signatory

Signed by the **NAS Director of Operations**:

Authorised Signatory

North Wales Regional Collaborative:

Signed on behalf of the **Conwy County Borough Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Denbighshire County Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Flintshire County Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Gwynedd Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Isle of Anglesey County Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Wrexham County Borough Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

South East Wales Regional Collaborative:

Signed on behalf of the **Blaenau Gwent Borough Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Caerphilly County Borough Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Monmouthshire County Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Newport City Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Torfaen County Borough Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Mid and West Wales Regional Collaborative:

Signed on behalf of the **Carmarthenshire County Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Ceredigion County Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Powys County Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Pembrokeshire County Borough Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Western Bay Regional Collaborative:

Signed on behalf of the **Bridgend County Borough Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **City and County of Swansea** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional Collaborative:

Signed on behalf of the **Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council** by:

Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **The City of Cardiff Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council** by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory

Signed on behalf of the **Vale of Glamorgan**
Council by:

} _____
Authorised Signatory